



INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE

Meeting of Experts on the Revision of the List of Occupational Diseases (Recommendation No. 194)
Geneva, 27-30 October 2009

Opening Statement by Mr. G. Dragnich, Executive Director,
Social Dialogue Sector of the ILO,

Good morning, Distinguished Participants,

On behalf of Director-General Juan Somavia, I am pleased to welcome to the ILO for this Meeting of Experts on the Revision of the List of Occupational Diseases (Recommendation No 194). Unfortunately, Mr. Assane Diop, Executive Director of the Social Protection Sector, is unable to be with us today, but he asked me to convey his greetings and keen interest in your proceedings.

As the ILO's Executive Director for Social Dialogue, I am convinced that your work, which addresses a specific technical issue, will once more illustrate that social dialogue is an invaluable mechanism for the design of policies and guidance to fit national priorities. Moreover, social dialogue provides a strong basis for building the commitment of employers and workers to joint action with their governments.

The ILO was founded on the premise that there can be no universal peace without social justice. Ninety years later, it still strives to ensure recognition of the right of everyone to earn a living in freedom, equity, security and dignity: in short, the right to decent work. The ILO Decent Work Agenda focuses on four strategic objectives: the promotion of rights at work; employment; social protection; and social dialogue. It is through tripartism and social dialogue that we seek to achieve these objectives, as well as ensuring such participation through a democratic process.

The Global Jobs Pact, adopted by the International Labour Conference last June, calls for greater respect for international labour standards. Likewise, the G20 Summit, held in Pittsburgh last month, acknowledged the importance of ILO values by "Putting Quality Jobs at the Heart of the Recovery."

In that spirit, your work is at the heart of current ILO action: on employment, social dialogue, social protection, and labour standards. It will contribute directly to the improvement of the conditions of working men and women everywhere by addressing the hazard of occupational diseases in the workplace. To accomplish this vital mission, I believe that you will deliberate together, in a spirit of constructive engagement, to produce a revised list of occupational diseases.

The ILO is grateful to all of you for having agreed to serve in this meeting. I am especially appreciative because, in doing so, you have also agreed to seek consensus. While I understand you all have legitimate expectations and ambitions for continuing improvements, I urge you to consider reasonable compromises when needed to fulfil the mandate given by the ILO Governing Body for this Meeting. The world's working population and their families as well as the Members and constituents of the International Labour Organization will benefit immensely from your valuable expertise and the result of your work during this Meeting – a revised list of occupational diseases which will replace the one currently annexed to Recommendation No. 194.

Special thanks are due to those who took part in the tripartite consultations carried out by the Office at the request of the ILO Governing Body for the purpose of preparing common ground for you, the experts of this Meeting, to complete the work accomplished by the Meeting of Experts already held in 2005. Successful tripartite consultations were made possible because of the dedication, responsible commitment and skilful expertise of those who took an active part in the process. Their role of liaison with the experts who took part in the 2005 Meeting, with

constituents as well as with scientific, professionals and academic circles, is equally commendable.

I am also pleased to welcome representatives of the European Commission, the World Health Organization, the International Organisation of Employers, the International Trade Union Confederation, the International Council of Nurses, the International Commission on Occupational Health and the International Social Security Association. I thank all of you for your interest and participation in this Meeting of Experts.

At the ILO Summit on the Global Jobs Crisis in June this year, the Employer Vice-chairperson of the Committee of the Whole on Crisis Responses listed ten key concerns and priorities for employers, two of which are of special interest to you. Point seven is to “give special attention to social protection and support employability” and point ten is “social dialogue and cooperative work between trade unions and employers”. Similarly, the Worker Vice-chairperson of the Committee pointed out in his conclusion that “history will judge us harshly if we do not act decisively and fairly. Working women and working men who are losing their job or falling into extreme poverty will judge us to be irrelevant if we do not embrace policies that improve their livelihoods.”

You have been invited to fulfil a mandate clearly decided by the ILO Governing Body which is to complete the work accomplished by the 2005 Meeting of Experts on Updating the List of Occupational Diseases. I wish to remind you that, as indicated in the letter of invitation, you have been appointed as individual experts, serving in your own personal capacity, and do not represent any government, group or interests. With this freedom of action, I am confident that you will work as a skilled team, putting together your knowledge and experience in order to

produce a single revised list of occupational diseases based on consensus. We are counting on you.

Your meeting lasts for four days. Because of the time pressure, and of the need for you to agree on a revised list of occupational diseases as mandated by the Governing Body of the ILO, I encourage you to start from the common ground agreed by consensus through the tripartite consultations and to focus your work on the items identified during the consultations for further elaborations and examinations. If you accept the two-step approach of the Proposed Programme of Work, I believe that this will be conducive to a transparent, less stressful and more efficient meeting towards the adoption of a new list of occupational diseases.

To facilitate the smooth running of the Meeting, it is important that we should get to know one another as soon as possible. Thus, I am pleased to invite you and your guests to a cocktail reception this evening at the ILO area “Les Gobelins” on R2 South, which will begin immediately after the end of today’s discussion.

On behalf of the Director-General, I wish you every success in your deliberations.

Now, in conformity with the normal procedure, you will wish, first of all, to elect a chairperson to steer your deliberation.

May I ask for nominations?.....

Thank you for your nomination. May I have the opinion of other participants?

.....

As I see a general agreement with the nomination, I congratulate Mr./Ms. On his/her election and conclude by wishing him/her and you all every success in your work. Mr./Ms. is invited to take the chair.