

Thirty-ninth Meeting of the CIS National and Collaborating Centres

Geneva, 31 May - 1 June 2001

1. Introduction.

The 39th annual meeting of CIS National and Collaborating Centres took place at ILO Headquarters, in Geneva, Switzerland, on Thursday, 31 May and Friday, 1 June 2001.

The Meeting was attended by representatives of 26 National centres and 9 Collaborating Centres of the CIS worldwide network of occupational safety and health information centres. In addition, 5 staff members of CIS, 2 representatives of the SafeWork In-Focus programme of the ILO and 4 observers also attended the Meeting. The List of Participants may be found in *Annex I*.

2. Opening Address.

Dr Emmert Clevenstine, Head of CIS, opened the Meeting by welcoming the participants. He then introduced Mr Asane Diop, Executive Director of the ILO's Social Protection Sector, who gave his opening address.

Mr Diop, addressing a meeting of CIS National and Collaborating Centres for the first time in his capacity as Executive Director, expressed his pleasure at seeing the large turnout for the meeting. He thanked donors (particularly, DANIDA and FINNIDA) for facilitating the attendance of those participants whose organizations had not been able to pay for their travelling expenses. He reiterated the full commitment of the ILO to the struggle for a safe and healthy workplace, an essential component of the concept of **Decent Work**. Mr Diop outlined the main objectives of the SafeWork In-Focus programme, within which the need for reliable information, the principal theme of CIS's work, was essential. He also enumerated some of the key tasks of the Social Protection Sector, among which he mentioned the fight against HIV/AIDS. Finally, he committed the Social Protection Sector, and CIS in particular, to the further development of the network of CIS Centres.

The full text of this address, which was delivered in French, can be found in *Annex II*.

3. Presentation of the SafeWork Programme.

Dr Jukka Takala, Director of the SafeWork In-Focus Programme, made a presentation of the programme. He outlined the activities of the ILO in the fields of occupational safety and health and the working environment, intimately tied to the newly defined central priority of the organization, namely *Decent Work*. He stressed the importance of action in the safety and health arena, given the enormous human and economic costs of accidents and diseases that occur in the workplace or because of workplace exposure.

Within the context of the SafeWork Programme, he explained the position of the CIS, one of the five components of the programme, charged with responsibility for knowledge and information networking.

He welcomed the presence of delegates from many parts of the world. He was particularly happy to greet the representative of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, CIS's counterpart in the European Union.

Dr Takala continued by explaining the role of the standard-making process for the overall effectiveness of the ILO. Conventions, recommendations and other normative documents were essential for the improvement of the various aspects of the world of labour. The new trend was for the ILO to establish a set of core standards - those that all Member States were asked to ratify, so that certain minimum standards may apply to the whole world. From the point of view of occupational safety and health, he was hoping that either Conventions 155 and 161 may be included in these Core Conventions, or that a new, consolidated convention on occupational safety and health could be developed for inclusion.

As for currently discussed standards, the proposed Convention and Recommendation on Safety in Agriculture were ready for a final discussion at the upcoming International Labour Conference, and

were likely to be adopted. The next OSH instrument to be proposed was probably going to be on the notification of occupational accidents and diseases.

Dr Takala reminded delegates that the ILO was paying a very close attention to the number of ratifications it has received of ILO Conventions.

On other standards, Dr Takala listed the latest Codes of Practice his department had published, such as the ones on insulation wools, ambient factors at work, radiation protection safety standards and OSH management systems.

Reporting on the latest activities of CIS, he welcomed one new National Centre: the one for Belarus. He said that another former Republic of the Soviet Union, namely Kazakhstan, would soon also have its own National Centre.

The Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety continued to be one of the best-sellers of the ILO. Chinese, Russian and Spanish versions had been published, and the first two volumes were also available in French, with the rest to follow soon. The problem of updating the Encyclopaedia continued to be an issue, as it was likely to be an expensive proposition.

4. Election of a Chairperson.

Dr Clevenstine asked for nominations for the position of Chairperson for the Meeting. Dr Abeytunga (representing the Canadian National Centre) proposed Ms Rachida Souissi (representing the Tunisian National Centre) for the position. This proposal was duly seconded. There being no other proposals, Ms Souissi was elected by acclamation.

5. Adoption of the Agenda.

Dr Clevenstine suggested that the Report of the Workshops, which had preceded the meeting of the National Centres, should be included with the eventual Report of this year's Meeting. With this proviso, the Agenda for the Meeting was adopted (see Annex III).

6. Adoption of the Report of the 2000 Meeting of National Centres.

The Report of the 2000 Meeting of National Centres was adopted without discussion.

7. Overview of CIS Activities.

Dr Clevenstine made a short presentation about CIS activities during the preceding 12 months.

Although there had been no staff cuts, 22 work months had been lost from CIS's budget, making it even more difficult to carry out CIS's regular and non-regular work.

In technical cooperation, Finnida had stopped further funding of the CIS-managed activities it had financed in Asia and Africa. Just as in previous years, there had been no funding at all for OSH information activities in Latin America.

The CIS Bulletin (English title: *Safety and Health at Work*; French title: *Sécurité et santé au travail*) had basically maintained its readership: there were 931 subscribers to the English edition and 251 to the French. CIS extrabudgetary income today totalled USD 257,000, of which approx. 45% came from Bulletin subscriptions, 30% from other sales of publications and 12% from contributions.

Among positive trends and developments, Dr Clevenstine mentioned the following:

- fast progress in the translation into French of the Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety
- steady increase in the number of hits the CIS Internet site was getting (now averaging 100,000 hits / month)
- steady progress on the development of portals for Internet-based OSH information

- creation of a pilot web site on OSH legislation worldwide, with links to full-text versions of laws where available
- development of a new CD-ROM based presentation on the CIS Thesaurus
- progress in the plans to transfer the CISDOC database from MINISIS into a modern database environment (probably ORACLE)

On the less encouraging side, Dr Clevenstine reported on further reductions in the CIS operating budget for the biennium 2002/2003, leading inevitably to additional staff reductions. Although technological improvements, as well as changing work procedures and increasing efficiency by CIS staff, would to a certain extent offset the results of the reduction in personnel, there were obvious limits on what CIS could accomplish with ever-diminishing budgets.

8. Discussion.

Ms Sheila Pantry (Observer, CIS Newsletter Editor, United Kingdom) had two questions: (1) Will full-text versions of ILO Conventions and Recommendations be made available on the Internet? (2) Would chapters of the Encyclopaedia reproduced in the Bulletin be also made available on the CIS Website?

On (1), Dr Clevenstine said that ILO Conventions and Recommendations were already available on the ILO Website. He said that it would be a good idea to provide appropriate links from the CIS site - as it is, they were presently hosted on SafeWork's pages. On (2), he said that there was an ongoing debate within CIS concerning free access to full-text versions of its various products (the CISDOC database, extracts of the Encyclopaedia), as well as to other ILO publications on OSH (e.g. codes of practice). There was certainly no technical reason not to do any of this, but the policy and financial implications of providing something for free that has been sold for money needed careful scrutiny. In addition, many users still preferred to consult extensive reference works in print, rather than on the Internet.

9. Presentation of the Evaluation of CIS and SafeWork.

Dr K.A. Abeytunga of the *Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety* (CCOHS, the Canadian National Centre) made a presentation on the evaluation of the SafeWork programme, that had been mandated by ILO management. He emphasized that the purpose of this evaluation, part of an overall evaluation of ILO activities, was not to engage in criticism, but rather to see what could be done in the future, and how the world occupational safety and health community could benefit more from the products and publications of SafeWork and CIS. Dr Abeytunga said that he had originally been asked to review the activities of the CIS in connection with the establishment of a programme and budget for the CIS for 2002-03, but this process had been subsumed by the larger evaluation.

He saw the main strength of CIS to be its network of National and Collaborating Centres. These Centres engaged in a constant exchange of information and experience, providing a useful way for the world OSH community to learn from each other.

Of CIS's ongoing information activities, Dr Abeytunga said that these were quite useful, and that the concept on which they were based retained its validity. However, he warned against CIS engaging in activity duplicated elsewhere in the world. He also drew attention to the fact that CIS had several current tasks, which it may be difficult to sustain with a relatively small staff. In addition to the **Database** and **Bulletin**, CIS was involved in the creation and distribution of the International Chemical Safety Cards (ICSCs), the coordination of the Hazard Datasheets on Occupations, and the publication of the 4th edition of the **ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety** (in particular its French translation). CIS also maintained an important gateway (portal) into the world of OSH on the Internet, including a directory of links to OSH institutions around the world.

Dr Abeytunga warned against some of the dangers of relying too much on Internet-based information. Although there was an enormous amount of information available on the Internet on all subjects, including OSH, it was not always possible to evaluate the accuracy and reliability of web-based information, and the biases of the information producer were less obvious on the screen than they would normally be in printed sources.

He complimented CIS on its efforts to build a portal, or gateway, to OSH information on the Internet. He was particularly impressed by the recent development of a template through which National and Collaborating Centres would be able to update online the information pertaining to them and available with CIS. He urged all Centres to use this template as soon as possible, so that it would be possible to have a completely updated directory of CIS Centres within a few months.

10. Report on the Workshops.

Mrs Sheila Pantry, who had organized and chaired the workshops (held just before the Meeting of the CIS Centres), presented a report pertaining to them. She recalled that she had worked for the CIS Network for 22 years, and had excellent contacts with people from many of the Centres. She very much wished CIS to continue the excellent work it was doing, all the while realizing that changes were necessary in the way it did things. The globalization of the economy and rapid technological change made such change mandatory.

10.1 Workshop 1.

The theme of the first workshop had been the relationship between Centres and the commercial world. Key expressions in the discussion were: sponsorship, fund raising, costing of services, working with companies (unthinkable just a few years ago) and new ways of communication.

Despite the phenomenal growth of the Internet, there was still a strong “digital divide” in the world. Many countries still had no access to the Internet at all, so that for such countries the printed word, the fax and the telephone were the only way to access external information.

Another trend discussed in the workshop was the renewed interest by commercial enterprises in demonstrating social responsibility. According to a recent survey, 86% of consumers have a better image of a company if it is perceived to contribute to efforts making the world a better place. There was no doubt that managers were aware of such attitudes, and she urged OSH institutions to approach private companies with this in mind.

10.2 Workshop 2.

The theme of this Workshop was publicity and profiling of information centres. It was important to examine the particular status of each Centre, as there was a great deal of variation. Some Centres had comprehensive collections, others did not. It was important for Centres to learn the art of lobbying - this was particularly necessary in those countries that had switched to the market economy only recently. Reliable financial support was a problem for many information centres - even CIS suffered from this. Other skills necessary to survive in today's world were how to deal with the media, how to identify target audiences, how to have one's own work evaluated and how to use the Internet well, keeping in mind that not all key information was on the web (particularly the latest information).

10.3 Workshop 3.

The theme of this workshop was how to set up an enquiry centre. The skills necessary for this were the ability to use printed and electronic sources properly, publish a regular newsletter and organize a training course.

11. Reports by National and Collaborating Centres.

Representatives of eight Centres presented updates in their activities. Some of the Centres preferred to submit written reports only. A representation of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work spoke about recent developments at the Agency, particularly its Web site.

Annex IV contains the reports of National and Collaborating Centres submitted to CIS.

Pakistan

European Union

China

USA

Uganda

Japan

Philippines

Bulgaria

Canada

12. Presentation on IPEC.

Ms Susan Gunn of the ILO's InFocus Programme on Child Labour (IPEC) informed the meeting of the importance attached by IPEC to the protection of the health and safety of children who were still at work around the world, despite the efforts of the ILO to end the practice. She invited the representatives of the National and Collaborating Centres to contact her for more information.

13. Group Discussions.

13.1 Discussion of proposal 1 (Presented by Dr Clevenstine).

The key points of Dr Clevenstine's proposal (entitled "Beyond the Bulletin - An International Occupational Safety and Health Observatory") are as follows:

- End the publication of the bulletin "Safety and Health at Work". It may be replaced by a quarterly printed report, partially based on the latest additions to CISDOC, but not reproducing its contents.
- Change the scope of the CISDOC database - concentrate on gray literature, legislation, reports of practical experience and statistics.
- Possibly drop controlled-vocabulary indexing (i.e. reliance on the CIS Thesaurus).
- Continue to work on the Encyclopaedia.
- Discontinue answering individual questions, except for those coming from ILO staff and National and Collaborating Centres.

According to Dr Clevenstine, the advantages of this proposal are:

- CIS staff time could be spent on tasks there is no time for at present, such as the identification of current trends in OSH.
- The existing knowledge base, software expertise and staff skills available at CIS would be used more effectively.
- CIS Centres would participate more closely in the day-to-day activities of CIS; this may possibly lead to more donor interest.
- It will be easier to achieve CIS's work goals with the reduction in support staff that has been foreseen.
- Recycling Encyclopaedia income would lead to a welcome addition of funds to CIS's operating budget.
- SafeWork's Hazard Alert System could be integrated into CIS's activities.
- CIS would be able to keep the support of the European Union.

Dr Clevenstine foresaw two disadvantages that would arise if the proposal was accepted:

- CIS's new orientation would exclude work on International Chemical Safety Cards and HDOs, both of which are popular and enjoy the support of the European Union.

- The Thesaurus would lose some of its *raison d'être* - although it would still be of some use, supplying Web-page meta-data.

In the ensuing discussion, contributions by participants could be broadly classified according to three main ideas:

- Some approved the proposed changes, remarking that discontinuation of printed bibliographic publications had caused little outcry elsewhere, and suggesting that dropping one product may not necessarily lead to an overall degradation of service.
- Others, on the other hand, were against the discontinuation of the printed bulletin and the reduction in the scope of the database. These products were much appreciated in parts of the world - the Bulletin in particular fulfilled a useful service in areas where access to electronic information still presented a problem. Mr Anderson (NIOSH, USA) said that the elimination of government support for the NIOSHTIC and RTECS databases was perceived by many in the US as a mistake, due mostly to a lack of proper marketing.
- Lastly, without having strong support of or opposition to the suggested changes, some participants wondered whether CIS would be pursuing the right strategy with the proposed changes. It was pointed out that the cutting of services and/or products had justified further budget cuts elsewhere. On the whole, better public relations and more lobbying by CIS national centres would be the best overall strategy to follow.

13.2 Discussion of proposal 2 (Presented by Mr Sandi).

The key ideas associated with this proposal were:

- retention of the printed bulletin
- more comprehensive nature of the CIS database and bulletin
- stronger presence on the Internet

Points raised by the ensuing discussion included:

- CIS at present abstracts articles from many journals that are equally covered (often more thoroughly, and typically in a much more up-to-date way) by other bibliographic services. These include **HSELINE** and **MHIDAS** from the UK's *Health and Safety Executive* (the latter also from *AEA Technology*), **RILOSH** from *Ryerson Technical University* in Toronto (Canada), **NIOSHTIC** and **NIOSHTIC 2** formerly from *NIOSH* in the US (now taken over by *CCOHS* in Canada), and (partially) **MEDLINE** from the *US National Library of Medicine*. It is questionable whether CIS should try to compete with these databases, particularly in light of its limited financial and human resources.
- CIS may be able to establish a unified OSH source from the many now existing. However, **OSH-ROM**, the CD-ROM containing several OSH-related databases produced by *CCOHS* in Canada, already has 1.2 million records (with many duplicates, admittedly) and sold for USD 1200 per year. The question is, who would be prepared to pay for such a new service? Another issue is whether database producers who at present derive income from their product would be willing to let CIS incorporate their database for free? There are other matters as well: the purpose of some databases (**HSELINE**, for example) is primarily to serve the staff of the creating institution; many are in local languages (e.g. Finland, Germany, the Netherlands), making them useless for CIS; finally, the cost of merging a large number of databases may be prohibitively high.
- OSH-ROM is used as the base of an information service provided by many OSH centres around the world. It was suggested that CIS could do the same, preparing and disseminating to a worldwide audience newsletters, bibliographic reviews, subject profiles, subject-specific practical guides, reviews of new publications/AV materials and lists of relevant web sites. The needs of Centres with little or no access to electronic information had to be kept in mind.
- It was pointed out that the real costs of operating CIS were not known to the representatives of the Centres. It was difficult to make informed suggestions without this knowledge.
- Repeated calls were made for an evaluation of the real use of CIS publications. Some participants suggested that in fact the CIS Bulletin and Database were little used - others, however, argued otherwise.

- The idea of publishing bibliographic information without abstracts was raised, but it did not receive much enthusiasm.
- The current practice of publishing on a CD-ROM full-text versions of most items abstracted by CIS (a self-financing service purchased by 22 National Centres) was reviewed. It was suggested by some that it may be preferable to publish and re-publish quality training materials, as well as basic information (much in demand) on subjects such as risk assessment.
- The ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety was widely praised as a very useful source of OSH information. It was pointed out that the Encyclopaedia was not available in most CIS National Centres, in either print or CD-ROM format. Donation of copies by the ILO or the identification of donors willing to pay for copies to be given to such Centres were mentioned as possible solutions of the problem.
- The updating of the Encyclopaedia was another subject raised. It takes such a long time to publish a new edition of this multi-volume reference work that by the time it is finished it is practically time to start working on a new one. It was suggested that CIS start working on the updating of the Encyclopaedia, using some of the funds obtained from the sale of the book. It was also thought to be a good idea to do some of the updating by publishing new documents on specific subjects on the CIS web site, CD-ROMs carrying the CIS database or in print. The part of the Encyclopaedia most in need of updating was that devoted to specific industrial sectors.
- Another suggestion for CIS was to develop a Union Catalogue of OSH journals held by its National Centres. Ms Pantry and several Centres had partial listings of journals that could be used to start such a Catalogue.
- One of the greatest perceived needs was for training packages, containing a mixture of printed and audiovisual materials, on topics such as risk assessment, noise and occupational health in general. The very successful Swedish series “Your Body at Work” was suggested as a model.

14. Presentation of the CIS Internet Presence.

Mr András Szücs, who is the responsible CIS Officer for Internet-related activities, presented the template that CIS Centres would be asked to fill out in order that information about centres in their countries may be as up-to-date and accurate as possible. He explained that CIS relied for the most part on information contained in the 1993 paper edition of the Directory of OSH Institutions, so that there were bound to be many changes. He stressed the need for URLs to be included for all institutions with Internet home pages.

In the ensuing discussion, Mr Samaras (Greek Collaborating Centre) suggested that the CIS logo be used by all web editors from CIS Centres whenever they included a link to CIS or to its network on their home pages. Mr Szücs agreed with this suggestion. However, he said that all such links be made to the top page of the CIS home page¹.

15. General Discussion.

Mrs Pantry started the discussion by asking fellow participants as to what their main expectation was for CIS in the coming years, and how they thought they may help CIS to achieve these aims. For herself, she saw three principal themes to stress in coming years:

- current awareness
- legislative information
- new topics (violence, stress)

Mr Samaras asked how the existing CIS network could be better used to find information not easily found elsewhere. As an example, he said that recently there had been an interest in Greece in the safety of drivers and guards of money-carrying vehicles. He had not been able to locate any information on the topic.

¹ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/cis/index.htm>

On a different subject, Mr Samaras suggested that CIS Meetings be organized in a different location, at a lower cost, so that more participants may be able to afford to attend them. He raised the possibility of regional meetings, for example in the Balkans.

In his response, Dr Clevenstine explained that it was quite difficult already to coordinate official CIS meetings within the ILO, and that holding them outside Geneva generally imposed too great a workload on CIS staff. However, should one or several CIS Centres wish to organize a regional meeting, it (or they) could certainly receive CIS's support.

Mr Szücs (CIS) suggested that a web forum (discussion? newsgroup?), for registered users only, should be set up in order to enable wide-ranging online discussions of OSH-related matters. Dr Abeyunga said that the setting up of such a system of information sharing was not advisable, as it may lead to participants being inundated by e-mail. He advised instead the adoption of a simple system relying on the direct sending of e-mail requests, similar to what WHO has been doing in relation to their network of poison centres.

Mrs Pantry reported on a positive experience with a newsgroup. In the United Kingdom the IOSH has been maintaining a non-moderated newsgroup, open to all.

Mrs Laamanen (National Centre, Finland) asked CIS to provide more information on OSH resources on the Internet.

Mr Samaras talked about the heavy reliance his centre had on English-language materials. He said that most of these came from Australia, New Zealand and NIOSH in the US. He regretted that in recent years the United Kingdom had contributed relatively little.

16. Conclusions.

Dr Clevenstine wrapped up the discussions. He said that there was no clear mandate to discontinue the CIS bulletin, although there had been support expressed for a less costly way to distribute CIS information.

Dr Takala said that as Director of the SafeWork programme, he appreciated all the views expressed during the Meeting. He assured participants that CIS would not scale down its activities, and the only question was how to use its resources to best effect.

Participants were cordially invited to the next Meeting of CIS National and Collaborating Centres, to be held in Vienna (Austria) on Sunday, 26 May 2002, in conjunction with the XVI World Congress on Occupational Health and Safety.

The Meeting was adjourned.

ANNEX I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

(see WP document 39LUPLPA.wpd)

ANNEX II

(Discours de M. Dioppe, sur papier)

ANNEX III

AGENDA

1. Introduction.
2. Opening Address (by Mr. Asane Diop).
3. Presentation of the SafeWork Programme (by Dr. Jukka Takala).
4. Election of a Chairperson.
5. Adoption of the Agenda.
6. Adoption of the Report of the 2000 Meeting of National Centres.
7. Overview of CIS Activities (by Dr. Emmert Clevestine).
8. Discussion.
9. Presentation of the Evaluation of CIS and SafeWork (by Dr. K.A. Abeytunga).
10. Report on the Workshops (by Mrs. Sheila Pantry).
11. Reports by National and Collaborating Centres.
12. Presentation on IPEC (by Ms. Susan Gunn).
13. Group Discussions.
14. Presentation of the CIS Internet Presence (by Mr. András Szücs).
15. General Discussion.
16. Conclusions.

ANNEX IV

REPORTS OF CIS NATIONAL AND COLLABORATING CENTRES

NATIONAL CENTRES

Argentina	Centro Nacional de Información CIS-OIT - Argentina sobre Medio Ambiente, Salud y Seguridad Laboral
Bulgaria	Ministry of Health - National Centre of Hygiene, Medical Ecology and Nutrition
Canada	Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS)
Chile	Instituto de Salud Pública
Germany	Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin
Hungary	Munkavédelmi Kutatási Közalapítvány (Public Foundation for Research on Occupational Safety)
Israel	Israel Institute for Occupational Safety and Hygiene
Italy	Ministero della Sanità - Istituto Superiore per la Prevenzione e la Sicurezza del Lavoro
Japan	Japan Industrial Safety and Health Association (JISHA)
Korea, Rep. of	Korea Occupational Safety and Health Agency (KOSHA)
Malawi	Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training - Information and Documentation Unit
Netherlands	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment - Library and Documentation Centre
Philippines	Occupational Safety and Health Center
Portugal	Instituto de Desenvolvimento e Inspecção das Condições do Trabalho (IDICT)
Romania	National Institute for Research and Development on Occupational Safety (INCDPM)
Singapore	Ministry of Manpower - Occupational Health Department
Uganda	Occupational Safety and Health Department

COLLABORATING CENTRES

China	State Administration of Work Safety - State Administration of Coal Mine Safety Supervision
Hungary	National Institute of Occupational Health - “József Fodor” National Centre for Public Health
Italy	Istituto Italiano di Medicina Sociale (IIMS)
South Africa	Industrial Health Unit, University of Natal