



**ANNUAL COMMEMORATION OF THE WORLD DAY
FOR**

SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK
Tzaneen, South Africa, 4th May 2006

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ILO STATEMENT
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DIRECTOR
ILO PRETORIA

International Labour Organization
Commemoration of the World Day for Safety and Health at work,

Tzaneen, South Africa, 4th May 2006

The Director of Programme
Minister of Labour, Honourable Membatise Mdlalana
DG Department of Labour –Dr Vanguard Mkosana
Distinguished leaders and representatives of BUSA;
Distinguished leaders and representatives of NACTU, FEDUSA and COSATU;
Senior officials from government,
ILO Colleagues
Distinguished guests
Members of the press
Ladies and gentlemen

It is my pleasure to join you in commemorating the world day for safety and health at work in Tzaneen.

It is gratifying to note that the government, workers, employers and civil society are fully represented to mark this day. This bears testimony to our collective concern with the need to improve and maintain the highest levels of safety and health standards at work. The theme of the OSH Day this year is Decent Work, Safe Work, HIV/AIDS.

As you are aware Hon. Minister and social partners, the ILO's decent work mandate sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. People want to be safe at work in the same way that they want work that is productive and delivers a fair income. They want security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration. Working people want freedom to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

Occupational safety and health is indeed an integral part of the decent work agenda. OSH transcends the four major pillars of Decent Work –it is an employment issue; it is a right; a social dialogue issue and constitutes social protection. Hon. Minister, if a job is well paid but unsafe, it is not decent work; if a job is freely chosen but exposes the worker to health hazards; it is not decent; if the contract of employment is fair but the work impairs the worker's health and wellbeing, it is not decent work.

In this regard, the ILO's main goals in contributing to the decent work agenda by ensuring a safe working environment evolve around three main interventions:

- development of preventative policies and programmes;
- extension of effective protection of vulnerable groups of workers; and
- documentation of the social and economic impact of improving workers protection for policy-and decision-makers.

You can deduce therefore, that decent work must constitute safe work. If it is not safe, it is not decent.

The global HIV/AIDS epidemic threatens every aspect of the decent work agenda and its capacity to achieve sustainable development and poverty reduction. It reduces the supply of labour and undermines the livelihood of millions of workers and those who depend on them. Nine out of ten people living with HIV and aids are of working age. The loss of skills and experience in the workforce threatens productivity. Many such workers, on reaching the state that they can no longer work, have to depend on their young children to support them. It is fortuitous therefore that we celebrate the World Day on Safety and Health at Work today, the same day that the Director-General of the ILO is launching the Global Report on child labour.

The report titled *the end of child labour: within reach*, states that child labour, especially in its worst forms, is in decline for the first time across the globe. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa we face a challenge of increased numbers of children involved in child labour. This is so especially because of high population growth and the effects of HIV and AIDS.

The ILO Programme Towards the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (TECL) is working with the government of South Africa, as well as organized business and labour, on a whole range of projects in support of the South African Child Labour Programme of Action. One of these is to draft regulations to protect children from hazardous work, further demonstrating the link between health and safety at work and steps to eradicate harmful or exploitative work by children.

The decent work agenda provides an ethical and legal framework to guide workplace policies and programmes and protect the rights of workers. Using the decent work agenda, the ILO addresses both the formal and informal employment sectors. In both these sectors, while there are jobs which constitute direct risks of HIV infection, in most cases it is conditions around jobs that can lead to behaviour that puts the worker at risk of acquiring HIV positive status.

The ILO's code of practice on HIV/AIDS contains key principles for policy development and practical guidelines which include:

- prevention of HIV infection;
- management and mitigation of the impact of aids on the world of work;
- care and support of workers infected and affected by HIV/AIDS; and
- elimination of stigma and discrimination on the basis of real or perceived HIV status.

Your gathering here today shows your commitment to promoting decent work, the importance you attach to a safe working environment, and your collective effort to combat HIV/AIDS. This day draws our attention to work related accidents and illnesses that annually result in the loss of about 2 million lives and which cost the global economy

more than USD 1.25 trillion. Statisticians also inform us that almost 160 million new cases of work-related illnesses are registered every year.

The ILO is convinced that such a large number of accidental death, disease and human suffering can be minimized or stopped if workers, employers and governments alike, respect, adopt and adhere to internationally endorsed safety standards.

Allow me to express our appreciation of the ILO's partnership with our South African constituents which has yielded a measurable outcome in the form of a two year project on Occupational Safety and Health. Although the project focuses on VW suppliers, and contributes to the response to the challenge of effectively addressing a segment of the Second Economy (Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises), we hope it will lead to similar programmes for other sectors.

We do hope that in introducing effective management systems and approaches to proactive occupational safety and health operational programmes at SMME level, we are able to make a modest contribution to decent work in South Africa.

Finally, I would like to commend ILO Constituents in South Africa, who under the able leadership of your Ministry, Hon Minister, have not only come up with a brilliant tool in the form of the OSH Accord that embraces a declaration and commitment to high standards of working environment and upholding international Conventions on OSH, but have during each commemoration of OSH Day, upheld and renewed the pledge and commitment of the social partners to the Accord. The South African OSH Accord is considered a best practice by the ILO. It is my pleasure to assure you that the ILO would support efforts towards continued and improved work in making the workplace a safe place in South Africa.

Thank you very much for the continued cooperation and particularly for inviting the ILO to participate at the preparatory level as well as at the commemoration itself.

I wish you well for the commemoration and deliberations on this very important day in our calendar.

I thank you