

World Day for Safety and Health at Work

Geneva, 28 April 2003

Summary of the debate

Panelists:

Mr. Antonio Peñalosa, Secretary-General of the International Organization of Employers (IOE)

Mr. José Olivio Oliveira, Assistant General Secretary of the International Federation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)

Dr. Joachim Breuer, Managing Director of the German Federation of Institutions for Statutory Accident Insurance and Prevention - Hauptverband der Gewerblichen Berufsgenossenschaften (HVBG)

Dr. Janet Asherson, Head of Health and Safety at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI)

Ms. Silvana Capuccio, Safety and health expert from the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF)

Dr. Jukka Takala, Director of the ILO's SafeWork programme

Moderator:

Dr. Bernard E. Gbézo, social psychologist, journalist and author

Mr. Peñalosa, in his preliminary remarks, reiterated the commitment of the employers' community to safety and health at work as a major priority. He also stressed the joint responsibility of employers and workers in defining and implementing a safety culture and in promoting the work of the ILO. Mr. Oliveira pointed out that safety and health at work, from the point of view of the workers, is deteriorating; creating a safety culture through education, he said, is what is needed to improve the situation. He hailed the ILO for its tripartite approach to the issue.

In response to the mediator's question on what a safety culture is Dr. Breuer said that the label is not important; what matters is what is behind the label, what is inside the company. Dr. Asherson defined safety culture as shared values in an enterprise, and respect for standards. She pointed out that demonstrating care, respect for standards and corporate reputation is more important than immediate financial concerns. Mr. Peñalosa stated that safety culture should be about the empowerment of the employers to make the right decisions about safety without

the fear of sanctions; in other words, he said, standards, while the same for all, should be proactive and not reactive. Ms. Capuccio, on the other hand, defined safety and health at work as a basic human right that concerns every worker in rich and poor countries alike. She asked the governments, employers and workers organizations to work together to achieve full respect for the right to safety and health at work throughout the world.

Mr. Oliveira identified respect for ILO standards as a tool for creating a safety culture. He insisted that more standards are needed, rather than fewer and that they should be implemented through a tripartite structure. Dr. Asherson was of the opposite opinion; she pointed out that standards without a change in behavior will not be effective. A comprehensive educational system is needed to embed a change of behavior toward safety and health at the work place. Dr. Breuer agreed with her. He said that we have enough standards. What we need is fewer rules, and more comprehensive implementation of those rules.

Mr. Peñalosa counted good legislation, a constructive attitude, and opportunity for open dialogue among factors of success in building a safety culture. He also asked for labor inspection that helps the employer in building a safety culture, rather than punishing.

Next, the panelists were asked to identify the effects of globalization on safety culture at work. Dr. Asherson pointed to globalization's role in increasing the opportunities for sharing knowledge about safety culture at work. A global network aids the spread of information, and allows more people to share values and information. In return, Mr. Oliveira stressed that globalization creates more problems, at least for workers. Dr. Breuer agreed that globalization is a two edged sword. On the one hand we have emerging problems, while on the other globalization provides the opportunity to spread the culture of safety around the world. Ms. Capuccio acknowledged that globalization has created double standards by transferring occupational hazards from high income countries to the South, where labour is cheap and unprotected. Mr. Peñalosa, on the other hand, stated that multinational companies' values, principles and standards, in some cases, have been higher than the national standards of some Southern nations.

Mr. Oliveira stressed the importance of spreading the culture of safety and health in the informal economy by overcoming the lack of organized structure and achieving better communication. Dr. Breuer said that the key question surrounding the informal economy is regarding the provision of social protection. He believed that workers in the informal economy should be covered, but at the same time the factors that result in the creation of an informal economy are to be defeated. Ms. Capuccio shared the idea that social protection should be provided for all workers; she stressed that lack of safety reinforces poverty.

In demonstrating the role of international organizations in promoting safety culture, Dr. Asherson stressed the provision of cohesion of awareness, and

prevention of conflict by such organizations. Mr. Peñalosa identified the role of the ILO as providing the chance for seeking and discussing solutions. Mr. Oliveira praised the ILO, while asking for the utilization of all the available international instruments for raising global awareness about safety culture at work.

Dr. Asherson stated that safety and health at work is an ongoing issue that requires constant reinvention of the solutions. Mr. Oliveira agreed by stating that workers' organizations need to define the problem and find solutions to incorporate safety and health in the decent work agenda. Ms. Capuccio proposed a system of global monitoring, enforcement and effective labour inspection. Dr. Breuer stated that of all the organizations-- international, national, governments and enterprises-- that work in this field need to be involved in this process.