



Media Release

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28 April: World Day for Safety and Health at Work

Ensuring a decent, healthy, and safe workplace is the right of all workers and the responsibility of all stakeholders. However, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that around 2.78 million workers die each year from work-related injuries and illnesses and another 374 million suffer from non-fatal work-related injuries and diseases. Besides the human suffering, lost workdays represent almost 4% of the world's annual GDP.

28 April marks the World Day for Safety and Health at Work. It should be a day where each person takes stock of their personal take on occupational health and safety (OHS). Despite the major progress that has been achieved over the past few years, much more requires to be done, including genuine concerted action by all stakeholders.

This is more relevant given the fact that all types of work have diverse risks associated with them, irrespective of the work activity carried out. These risks can include safety risks, but also risks to the physical and psychological well-being of workers. Moreover, new and emerging challenges from a changing world of work, non-standard forms of employment and the increase in use of new technologies (also at a time when the world is dealing with a pandemic) far outweigh enforcement initiatives. However, all workplaces and employers have an affirmative duty to comply without being compelled by an enforcement action.

It is a known fact that accidents at work and occupational diseases are neither determined by fate nor unavoidable but always have causes. By building a strong prevention culture, these causes can be eliminated and work-related fatalities, accidents and occupational diseases be prevented. OHS carried out nearly 5,000 workplace inspections last year and nearly 1,800 in the first 3 months of this year. Nevertheless, OHS officers cannot be at all workplaces all the time. Even if this were plausible, it is unsustainable especially since there is the possibility that employers comply initially following an inspection and then revert to non-compliance or even persistently not comply despite repeated enforcement and punitive actions.

It has been proved in various countries that concrete social dialogue, collective bargaining between employers and unions, enterprise management and commitment coupled with effective legislation and a powerful enforcement authority all contribute towards high safety standards. Although statistics show a downward trend in the rate of occupational accidents, no employment contract should cost a person their health or life. The way forward is for all stakeholders to promote a preventive safety and health culture to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities for preventing deaths, injuries and diseases in the workplace.

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