

*Speech by Ms. Constance Thomas, Director of
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At the workshop on Safe and Healthy Workplaces-
Making Decent Work a Reality
To Observe 2007 World Day on Safety and Health at Work*

(27 April 2007, Beijing)

Respected Vice-Minister Wang Xianzhen,

Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning!

I would like to express my appreciation to the SAWS, and in particular, the Information Center for organizing this event. This is our fourth year in a row to observe World Day on Safety and Health at Work in China. By doing so, we are joining a global alliance and commitment to realise a goal of providing safe and healthy workplaces for all men and women workers.

I also would like to welcome the participation this year of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the Director of the WHO China Office in addition to the representatives of ACFTU, CEC, and SAWS.

Coordination and cooperation among government bodies, workers, employers and specialists are essential to the development and meaningful implementation of policies and programmes that serve to prevent and protect against occupational sickness, disease and injury.

This years World Day has the theme, " Safe and healthy workplaces - making decent work a reality". We welcome that China has also chosen to use today's event to focus on the mining industry.

The promotion of Decent work is not only the core

mandate of the ILO, it has become part of the Millennium Development Goals and thus part of the global development agenda. Decent work is where fundamental principles and rights at work are respected, where people can have productive employment, earn a living wage, and have social protection, including occupational safety and health and social security. Decent work means safe work.

It is estimated that about 2.2 million people worldwide die every year from work related accidents and diseases. Annually, 270 million others suffer serious injuries and 160 million endure short or long-term illness related to their work.

This year, worldwide the ILO has been able to note some tremendous progress by a few countries in improving OSH records. In China, we recognize that some progress has been made - but the figures on occupational fatalities, injuries and diseases are still too high in terms of human life, cost, and sacrifice. Last year, thousands of people died from occupational fatal accidents occurring in the industrial and mining enterprises, many of whom were from the coal mining industry. Still each year, thousands contract respiratory diseases associated with coal mining.

The benefits - economic, social, and personal - of safer and healthier working environments, are hopefully becoming more and more obvious to governments, employers and workers themselves. There is plenty of evidence that safer workplaces are more productive workplaces, with fewer accidents and injuries, lower production costs, less lost working time, lower medical expenses, and overall they are more harmonious working environments. We know this holds true in the mining industry as in other industries.

We also know that most accidents are preventable. Sound prevention, supported by appropriate safety systems, reporting and inspection practices in accordance with international conventions, recommendations and codes of practice on occupational safety and health do work if systematically implemented at national and enterprise level.

Toward this end, I would like to take the opportunity of this event to highlight and congratulate the Government of China on the ratification this year of the ILO Convention No. 155 on Occupational Safety and Health. This is one of the core safety and health conventions. In this regard, recognition needs to be given to SAWS, MOLSS, MOH, ACTFU and CEC for your efforts and commitments to this process.

This is the third OSH Convention that China has ratified - the other two are C.167 on construction safety in 2001, and C. 170 on chemical safety in 1995. Someday in the future I look forward to celebrating the ratification of the ILO convention on safety and health in mining.

Convention No.155 has general application and thus covers mining establishments. It places a general emphasises on adapting working environments to workers capabilities. I would like to stress 3 of the obligations for ratifying States (i)to formulate, implement and periodically review a coherent national policy in the field of occupational safety and health in consultation with the most representative organizations of employers and workers; (ii) to provide favorable conditions for a cooperation between employers and workers, for the solution of practical problems of safety and health; and (iii) to take measures for providing employers and workers with advice so as to help them conform to their obligations.

While addressing government's role in workplace safety and health, it should be pointed out that at the enterprise level, the Convention requires employers to take full responsibility to provide a safe and healthy working environment to all workers and to protect them from occupational hazards.

The protection of workers against the risks at work requires enterprises to take a prevention-oriented risk management approach. Prevention begins with a commitment to put worker safety and well-being at the heart of policies and safety systems. This is the point of departure for action to reduce the risk of work-related injury and ill health. In this regard, we just successfully concluded an intensive training with SAWS, CEC and ACTFU on risk management in coal mining. We hope to see that training followed up and practically applied on mining sites.

We know there are special hazards in the mining industry and that numerous challenges to achieving safe mining still exist in China. In this regard we hope to see efforts placed on officials, employers and workers having information and training focused on a better knowledge of the actual scope and level of risks and the way to prevent and avoid them, including necessary further training, and improving qualifications and motivation of persons involved. Provision of adequate protective equipment, safety devices and procedures must go hand in hand with the training.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Today, technological progress, intense competitive pressures, and rising consumption demands bring the need to respond rapidly through changes in management systems, human resource development, working conditions, work

processes and work organization. These pressures are perhaps the greatest for China in its mining industry.

We have over the years closely cooperated with the Chinese government, workers and employers' organizations in the field of occupational safety and health, and in particular on the mining industry. I personally have witnessed the national commitment, policy development, resource allocation and action in this area grow and can pledge ILO's continuing support to this effort. OSH will remain an important component in the ILO Decent Work Country Programme for China.

China's ratification of C.155 has once again demonstrated its commitment to improve workplace safety and health following international good practices.

The Chinese Government's recent adoption of the principle of safe development in the national Plan and the 11th five-year national work safety programme, is in line with the requirements of the newest ILO Convention 187 on Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health, adopted last year at the International labour conference. This convention emphasises the importance of developing a safety and health culture, among other things.

So this year, lets work towards creating a safety and health culture throughout the mining industry in China that lasts 365 days a year - its in all our interests.

Thank you.