

**Training Workshop on Labour Flexibility Measures
Beijing, People's Republic of China
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Opening remarks

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Distinguished participants, colleagues from Geneva and Bangkok. I am also pleased to welcome a representative of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment in the Netherlands.

Good morning. It is a pleasure to open and welcome you to this training workshop on a subject that is important to the future orientation and operation of the labour market and to the lives of an increasing number of workers and jobseekers here in China.

China's remarkable economic growth has been accompanied by a transformation in the organization of production and nature of employment during the transition to a socialist market economy. Structural change, economic reforms and WTO accession have shifted millions of workers into the non-state sector – into “new forms” of employment with labour shedding by state-owned enterprises and labour migration from rural areas and increasing number of university graduates seeking employment

The transition has opened new opportunities but also raised a number of challenges including that of placing laid-off workers, unemployed workers, rural migrants and new entrants to the labour force in employment and providing employment protection and social security to all workers.

We recognize and commend the Government's development and continued refinement of active labour market policies and initiatives to support job creation. Despite these efforts we can anticipate in the coming years a greater demand for jobs than can be supplied. This places a great challenge on ILO constituents and a pressure to open up new areas of work and new ways in which to organize work to enhance employment creation, productivity, efficiency and harmonious labour management relations. Workers and job seekers are being urged to change their attitudes to meet the new labour market realities.

While some workers are finding jobs in factories producing for export markets and domestic consumption, others are turning to small and medium

sized businesses and the emerging service sector, and still others are finding work in the burgeoning construction and transportation sectors. We know that in all these areas, the number women and men employed in part-time work, seasonal employment and temporary jobs has increased with a corresponding decline in lifetime employment.

“Flexible forms” of employment were outlined in the Tenth Five Year Plan for Economic and Social Development and were part of the active employment policies adopted by a national employment conference in 2002. But we should not only speak of flexibility in employment without also addressing the corresponding issues of how best to protect the interests and rights of workers in these new forms of employment. A worker on a short term or temporary job also should be entitled to have his or her wages paid on time, and to have basic occupational safety and health measures applied and to have some limitations on the duration of working hours. We know these specific issues are paramount in the Chinese context today.

To respond to the emerging needs of the opening up of the economy and labour market changes there have been and there continue to be changes undertaken in law, institutions and policies.

For instance the Ministry of Labour and Social Security has established guidelines and developed policies for: providing income protection, facilitating employment promotion, assisting laid-off workers, supporting migrant workers, improving information systems, strengthening training programmes and encouraging community initiatives.

Flexible employment issues were discussed in the ILO China Employment Forum held in Beijing during 28-30 April 2004 and this was one area singled out for specific follow up to the Forum. The Institute for Labour Studies has been implementing a project on labour flexibility in which the ILO has collaborated.

We are pleased this cooperation has resulted in the three research studies by the Institute that will be discussed today and tomorrow. This research lays a solid foundation for future collaboration on the issues and recommendations outlined in the papers.

From the ILO side, over the years we have developed a wealth of experience in the area of flexible forms of employment. We have studied and discussed its introduction and impact on employment in a number of countries. As a result of our examination of the subject and the needs identified by member states, the ILO has adopted a number of international labour standards

relevant to this subject such as the convention and recommendation on part time work, to name one. We hope that bringing this analysis and international comparative experience in this workshop is useful.

I do anticipate this to be a very interesting and high level discussion. We have with us in this workshop some of the best experts on this subject from our offices in Geneva and Bangkok. We also have the appropriate national partners in government officials of MOLSS and several other ministries at various levels together with the social partners who are represented here today by the China Enterprise Confederation and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and women's groups represented by the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF). Also with us are members of academic institutions who have been working on various aspects of flexible employment such as working time.

While we cannot resolve all of the challenges in the next two days, we hope to further our understanding of the complex issues related to flexible employment in the People's Republic of China. I would ask as you explore the various approaches to enhance flexibility in employment in China that you keep in mind not only the types and quantity of jobs that can be created but also how to ensure the best possible quality of work under the national circumstances for men and women in these forms of employment.

I look forward to hearing the outcome of your discussions. We know more needs to be done in this area we pledge our continued cooperation in future.