

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

ICFTU OnLine...

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Dead and Injured workers remembered on 10th commemoration day

Brussels, 28th April 2005: The General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), Guy Ryder, says that At least 6 million people will participate today in activities throughout the world to commemorate workers who have died or been injured in the last 12 months by unsustainable forms of work and production.

28 April marks the International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers and figures from the UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO) show that more than 2 million workers die each year as a result of occupational accidents and work-related diseases, with some 160 million new cases of work-related illness annually

ICFTU General Secretary Ryder said governments and employers should observe the more than 10,000 28th April activities which are being organized by the ICFTU and Global Unions in nearly 110 countries or regions across the world. Ryder joined Belgian trade union leaders in one such activity, a massive leaflet campaign aimed at workers commuting to their workplaces this morning. The activities underline that authorities cannot afford to ignore the serious toll that globalization is taking on the worlds' workers.

The summary of activities can be reviewed at:

http://www.globalunions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_1a.EN.pdf

Several activities will focus on occupational health and safety problems and solutions with 'Prevention through Employer Accountability' appearing as a main theme. In many countries, governments and employers will participate in activities and will commit themselves to better addressing workplace problems.

The International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers will be an occasion for trade unions to examine the impacts of asbestos, ergonomics, HIV/AIDS, chemicals, psycho-social issues, violence at work and work in construction or by young workers, as issues that reflect poor workplace management and uncaring employers. It will also be an opportunity to evaluate the responses of governments, small business and multinational enterprises to these problems.

"It is clear that authorities and employers in several countries have adopted a passive, half-hearted attitude to the respect of workers' health", Ryder emphasised. "Workers continue to die by the millions as governments remain lax in adopting legislation or ratifying ILO instruments that could solve the problem".

Ryder said that the situation has now become so serious that the ILO and 12 countries had already recognized 28 April as their own formal occupational health and safety observance day. The international trade union movement is supporting moves which could result in the United Nations recognising 28 April as an international day.

"Every day, around 5,000 workers die because of poor health and safety at work. We cannot allow this situation to continue" said the ICFTU General Secretary, warning that the existing fatality and injury statistics are probably only one-half or even one-third of the real figures.

This year the ILO announced it would review the inadequacy of national reporting as underlined the extent of the suffering which lies hidden behind poor employer and government management of the facts.

Each year, 12,000 children are killed on the job and hazardous substances kill 340,000 workers annually, while asbestos alone claims about 100,000 lives.

Conservative estimates show that each year, US\$1.25 trillion, equivalent to four percent of the world's gross domestic product, is lost with the cost of injury, death and disease through absence from work, sickness treatment, disability and survivor benefits. According to the ILO, the loss in GDP resulting from the cost of death and illness in the work force is 20 times greater than the total of official development assistance to developing countries.

Ryder emphasised that a huge factor in workers' health and safety in the world is whether or not their basic core labour rights were recognised. In over 40 countries the plight of workers is uncertain because their rights to organise into trade unions and their access to simple workplace democratic processes either did not exist or were severely curtailed. Citing the recent collapse of a 9 story building in Bangladesh where over 30 workers were killed, Ryder stated that the sad fact is that workers were all too often not in a position to engage in prevention activities at their own workplace, let alone report on unsanitary, unsafe and indecent working conditions and accidents.

28 April became an 'International Day' when in 1996 at the United Nations in New York, a Global Union delegation lit a commemoration candle and incense to highlight the plight of workers who die, are injured or become ill due to unsustainable forms of work and production and to promote the concept of decent work.

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 233 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

For more information, please contact the ICFTU Press Department on +32 2 224 0210 or ICFTU/TUAC OHSE Director Lucien Royer on +33 1 5537 3737.

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