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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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28 April 2008: Trade unions demand good occupational health for all workers

Brussels, 28 April 2008 (ITUC OnLine): Through some 13,000 activities organised for the annual "International Commemoration Day (ICD) for Dead and Injured Workers" that is organised every year on 28 April, over 14 million people throughout the world are this year taking part in actions to highlight the plight of over 2.2 million workers who die every year and 160 million more who become ill due to unsafe work and unsustainable forms production.

"The number and of scope of activities being reported will exceed all previous records and expectations", says Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). "Unfortunately, this unprecedented mobilisation reflects a wide-scale deterioration of the occupational health and safety realities for millions of the world's workers."

Trade union organisations, governments, employers, and many institutions such as the ILO and World Health Organisation (WHO) as well as a broad spectrum of professional and non-governmental organisations are mobilising large and small activities in 120 countries to deliver a simple message that they want "Good Occupational Health for All Workers".

Many of the activities have focuses on occupational accidents, cancers, chemicals and specific contaminants like asbestos and cadmium or diseases like HIV/AIDS, along with a wide-range of unhealthy working conditions, from damaging noise levels to musculoskeletal disorders and the effects of nanotechnology and stress.

This is evidence that the pace of globalisation is taking its toll, says Ryder, and with it governments and employers are failing to assume their responsibilities in adopting or implementing protective measures to protect workers and prevent injury.

The evidence has been documented for all to see; national death and injury statistics are public knowledge. Some answers are plain as well: asbestos should be banned, chemicals need to be better managed and employers must urgently engage in workplace actions to promote prevention and confront the realities of diseases such as AIDS and address their real costs. Governments must ratify and implement ILO Conventions and take part seriously in the Global Plan of Action for Workers' Health adopted by the WHO in 2007.

Equally pertinent messages have unfolded from many countries where 28 April activities did not place this year because basic worker and trade union rights are being violated. Without the protection of trade unions, workers are not in a position to engage in effective workplace action

with employers to help prevent illness or injury. Governments must recognize trade union rights as a precursor to occupational health and safety.

Ryder added that "Good Occupational Health for All Workers remains a barometer for the capacity of workers to engage with their employers for solutions to a wide range of current world problems that require production or workplace changes, from climate change and environmental protection to public health."

"The degree to which workers' health is protected in our society will always reflect the value we attribute to human existence itself," Ryder concluded.

English <outbind://15/lucien/Profiles-Efora/English> only: * Click here for 28 April summary of all activities, until now
http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewp28Ap08Summary.H_5Ce1.EN.pdf

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org>

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