

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

ITUC OnLine

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### **April 28: Anti-regulation agenda of business groups threatens health and safety at work**

Brussels, 27 April 2011 (ITUC OnLine): International trade unions are warning of the potentially devastating effect of business lobbying to weaken protection for worker's health and safety as workers across the world take part in the International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers today.

"Business groups and companies in a succession of countries, including some of the world's largest economies, are pushing to reduce protection from hazards at work. If they succeed, more lives will be lost and the toll of work-related injury and illness will increase. Trade unions are challenging the rigged statistics and bogus arguments that are being put forward by business interests that care more about profit than the lives of the people who work for them," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow.

"Consider the devastation wrought a year ago by the Deepwater Horizon disaster," added Burrow. "Eleven lives lost, environmental devastation and economic costs to the economy in the billions - all down to an appalling disregard for safety aided and abetted by an absence of effective regulation and official oversight. Lessons from this and other disasters like the Fukushima complex in Japan show how critically important regulation and enforcement is. Added to this, 'slow burn' disasters like asbestos mean today's failures to regulate can have a deadly legacy spanning two generations and killing millions."

While accidents at work kill hundreds of thousands each year, this total is dwarfed by the number of deaths from occupational diseases such as work-related cancers. The World Health Organisation estimates the annual toll from asbestos-related diseases alone at 107,000 deaths a year.

"There is plenty of evidence to show the importance and value of proper regulation and enforcement. Lives are saved, and the huge economic costs of occupational accidents and disease are reduced. Studies indicate that possibly more than 20 per cent of major killers worldwide, including cancers, heart and respiratory disease, are related to work. All these are preventable," said Burrow.

The ITUC focus for International Workers' Memorial Day is on the crucial role played by trade unions, strong regulation and effective enforcement in securing safer workplaces.

"Harnessing the on-the-ground knowledge of workers, backed by their unions, is crucial for preventing death and illness. Protection, including through respect for workers' rights to trade union representation, should be expanded and not curtailed in an outbreak of deregulatory fever. Removing or weakening regulations, and depriving workers of union protection costs lives. We need to focus on the burden that poor protection places on families and the public purse - not on some imaginary 'regulatory burden' on business," Burrow concluded.

To hear the April 28 RadioLabour interview with the ITUC's Anabella Rosemberg:  
<http://www.radiolabour.net/rosemberg-280411.html>

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 151 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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