

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION
ITUC OnLine

April 28: Life and health at work is not an option, it's a right

Brussels, 25 April 2014 (ITUC OnLine): Despite the world's outcry which followed the death of 1,138 workers in the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory building in Bangladesh a year ago, or the silent death of more than 107,000 workers a year due to asbestos exposure, workers around the world continue to see employers and governments prioritising "competitiveness" or cutting vital inspection and enforcement services and removing regulatory protection over workers' lives and health.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary said "We receive reports of workers dead, injured or suffering from diseases contracted at their workplaces every day – and with chronic underreporting in official statistics, experts estimate that around a million workers are injured every day! There is a systemic failure when working people have to choose between their own lives and their family income on a daily basis."

These men and women are not just numbers. They are members of a community which will remember them on this 28th of April, where workers across the world will unite on the International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers to commemorate the victims of employers' reckless behaviour. Through this day, the ITUC aims to show the critical role played by rights, regulation and enforcement in saving lives.

"If workers are not given a voice and the information on the risks they incur, and the power to ensure those are reduced to a minimum, if regulation is not in place to protect the weakest in the value chain, if governments let companies act with no control, then we should not be surprised that the death toll increases every day," said Burrow.

"Proper union representation, training, respect and independence for occupational health and safety committees, on-the-ground knowledge of workers – these are all crucial to saving lives and health."

Yet, in the name of competitiveness and public deficit reduction, governments are implementing austerity measures that are eating away at vital regulatory functions that protect workers and their families, such as labour inspectorates.

28th of April this year will also see an important mobilisation to highlight the terrible conditions faced by migrant workers in Qatar, who have no labour rights, exploitative wages and face extreme occupational health and safety risks.

A Google map and details of International Workers' Memorial Day events worldwide can be found on the ITUC/Hazards 28 April webpage. www.hazards.org/wmd

Read also Anabella Rosemberg's blog in Equal Times: <http://www.equaltimes.org/this-is-how-we-will-win-the-fight#.U1qBRFe8z30>

Notes to editors

1. Early indications suggest the number of workers involved in 28th April events this year will outnumber previous years. Unions in all continents are already reporting actions. Activities include work stoppages, respecting a minute's silence, flash mobs, art fairs, holding

training sessions, undertaking workplace inspections and taking to the streets in demonstrations.

2. A Google map and details of International Workers' Memorial Day events worldwide can be found on the ITUC/Hazards 28 April webpages. <http://www.hazards.org/wmd/>

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 156 countries and territories and has 315 national affiliates.

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