

**International Conference on
Partnerships on Occupational Safety and Health Inspection**
(Beijing, 13-14 April 2006)

**Welcome Speech by Ms. Constance Thomas,
Director of ILO Office for China and Mongolia**

Honourable Vice-Minister Liang Jiakun,
Honourable President Michele Patterson,
Dear Ladies and gentlemen, Good morning!

I am honored to be here today to speak on behalf of the International Labour Office and bring regards to you of Mr. Juan Somavia, Director-General of the ILO.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the co-sponsors of this important Conference, namely State Administration of Work Safety of the People's Republic of China and International Association of Labour Inspection, for your commitment and effort to prepare for the Conference.

The holding of this Conference in Beijing at this time is very appropriate and I hope it will serve to reinforce government commitment and efforts to move forward in this area in a truly meaningful way. As you may know, the principle of safe development has been, for the first time, written into the 11th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China for 2006-2010. Premier Wen Jiabao has proposed seven concrete measures to improve work safety in his report to the National People's Congress in March 2006. In meeting on work safety of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee Political Bureau held on March 27, President Hu Jintao said that safe work is of great importance to realize, protect and develop the fundamental interests of the people, and to build a harmonious society.

These views coming from China's top leaders speak to the wisdom of the organisers in selecting occupational safety and health inspection for the topic of this year's meeting. They also show the importance of the discussions to be held in Geneva in June at the International Labour Conference, on the proposed ILO Convention and Recommendation on the "Promotional Framework for Safety and Health at Work". One of the main purposes of

these instruments is to promote the integration of national OSH programmes into the national social and economic development agendas.

In the past two years, the ILO has been promoting a partnership in developing national OSH programmes in China. The cooperation started with the establishment of a group of experts, consisting of representatives from State Administration of Work Safety, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Construction, and Ministry of Agriculture, All-China Federation of Trade Unions and China Enterprises Confederation to develop a National Profile Report on Occupational Safety and Health that has been published in both Chinese and English. We have organized workshops to discuss the development and improvement of the national five-year OSH programmes which will be officially issued soon. We have also brought relevant Ministries and partners together to share information and forge cooperation and coordination among the various inspection units. In fact, just last month we held a meeting with WHO, SAWS and MOH, CEC and ACFTU to enhance occupational health and safety inspection.

So you see we here in China, as elsewhere in the world, are placing an increasing emphasis on safety and health within our Decent Work Country Programmes.

Ladies and Gentlemen, 87 years ago the ILO was founded on the conviction that the lack of social justice threatens social peace and distorts economic exchanges. This is the rationale for the ILO establishing minimum international labour standards, to be applied in all countries and sectors. Today, the ILO believes that a fair and inclusive globalisation is an urgent worldwide priority and that decent work must be safe work. In other words, if a job is well-paid but unsafe, it is not decent work; if a job is done freely but exposes the worker to health hazards, it is not decent work; if the contract of employment is fair but the work impairs the workers' health and well-being, it is not decent work.

To respond to the emerging safety and health needs worldwide, the ILO adopted a Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health at the 91st Session of the International Labour Conference in 2003. The Conference concluded that building and maintaining a national preventative safety and health culture and introducing a systems approach to occupational safety and health management at the national level are the fundamental pillars of an effective global strategy.

A sound national OSH inspection system is an important part of a national OSH infrastructure that underpins the national OSH programmes. It has been proven that the national OSH inspection systems have played an important role in safeguarding workers' safety and health at work around the world. One of the most widely ratified ILO Convention No.81 on Labour Inspection in 1947 and the important Convention No. 155 on Occupational Safety and Health in 1981 had documented this good practice as an international benchmark.

As an institutionalised tripartite organization, the ILO itself is a partnership between the governments, workers' and employers' organizations. It is our belief that lasting peace can only be achieved through the unique tripartite cooperation of governments, employers and workers, all three of whom are members of ILO. I am pleased to see that China has established a tripartite consultation mechanism on labour and social security issues among Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MOLSS), All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) and China Enterprises Confederation (CEC). I look forward to seeing such a working mechanism in the field of occupational safety and health in China.

China is the biggest developing country with both a huge population and dynamic economic and social development closely watched across the world. It is also a country where the whole world is expecting success in improving safety and health at work. The commitment of the Chinese Government is strong, but it requires the support of all sectors of society, including trade unions and the business sector.

Partnerships are important not only in the process of policy-making and national law formulation, but also in the implementation of the policy and laws. As former ILO Director-General Francis Blanchard once said: "Labour legislation without labour inspection is an exercise in morals, but not a binding social discipline."

Building partnerships in law enforcement has become more important in today's context of national economic restructuring and rapid, competitive globalisation. OSH inspection systems are facing a series of challenges both internally and externally. Many of these external challenges you face in common, for instance those brought by rapid increase in the number of small, private businesses, diversity of new forms of employment, new work processes and substances, new or recurrent diseases including HIV/AIDS and

TB, increased mobility of workers, and the increased difficulty in identifying, reporting on, reducing and preventing hazards. Therefore, national OSH inspection systems must think globally but take practical actions locally.

You are the experts from approximately 30 countries so you know these challenges far better than I since you face them on a daily basis in your work. Let me simply encourage those of you who work in this field to continue to pursue your profession with courage, wisdom and discipline. Yours is not an easy task but it is essential to the safety and health of many of people. This is a field in which we must always strive to do better. I am sure that this Conference provides all of us a good opportunity to share international best practices on OSH inspections and to exchange views, experiences and lessons learned.

I wish you an enjoyable stay in Beijing in the springtime.