

## **4<sup>th</sup> China International Forum on Work Safety**

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Opening Speech by Ms. Constance Thomas,  
Director of ILO Office for China and Mongolia at

Your Excellence Vice-Premier Zhang Dejiang, Distinguished Ministers and participants, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues from Geneva, Bangkok, Good morning!

The message of my Director-General Juan Somavia highlights the importance of the Forum theme today. I now take this opportunity to welcome and thank all of you here representing governments, employers and workers as well as from academia, NGOs and the media for actively participating in this important biennial China International Forum on Work Safety.

(Xie Xie Ni in Chinese)

This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China's adoption of the reform and opening-up policy. Over the past 30 years, China has made a remarkable progress in its social and economic development.

Even so, China is still in the process of rapid industrialization and urbanization in the context of globalization. It faces challenges in providing full and productive employment opportunities for women and men. While this is always a daunting never ending task, China is also in a process of upgrading industries and improving the quality as well as the quantity of jobs.

Like many countries in transition, China has many old industries using outdated, dirty and unsafe technologies. It also has some newly developing sectors which may also involve hazardous work and could pose great risks to workers if left unprotected.

In the field of occupational safety and health, we have observed ups and downs of the OSH administration evolution in the country. We have also observed the recent tremendous efforts made by the government in trying to control the occurrence of the major industrial accidents and improve safety and health at work.

In particular, we note that within the context of implementing your five-year National Work Safety Programme, numerous policy, regulatory, penal and practical measures have been taken. The commitment of the State Administration of Work Safety is impressive. Nevertheless we also know that thousands of workers die each year, are injured in work related accidents, or suffer from occupational diseases. Many of these are the most vulnerable of workers, the rural migrants.

Given the current situation in China and elsewhere, I would like to draw this Forum's attention to three aspects which are of critical importance to be addressed in policy-making and the implementation of the National Work Safety Programme: within the context of this Forum's theme.

Firstly: strengthening the State OSH inspection. The former ILO Director-General Francis Blanchard once said "Labour legislation without inspection is an exercise of ethics, not a binding social discipline."

It is proven international good practice to establish effective labour inspection systems, including OSH inspection, to enforce the laws and protect workers, especially those vulnerable groups such as migrants.

In China, it is time for the State inspectorates to more meaningfully play their role in fulfilling this important mission under the spirit of rule of law and people-oriented scientific development perspective.

Second, improving occupational safety and health services to enterprises, especially small and medium sized ones. A modern State inspection should combine inspection with quality service, which provides technical information and advice to employers and workers on the most effective and practical means of complying with the legal provisions and establishing workable safety and health management systems. Therefore, State inspectors should be recruited, equipped and trained to be able to perform such a duty.

Last but not the least, the ILO believes that addressing any issue in the world of work including occupational safety and health benefits from a tripartite interaction among governments, employers and workers' organizations. This enables the parties to be actively involved in issues of mutual concern, thereby promoting improved understanding of their common and conflicting interests.

Although tripartism is relatively new in China, it has proved very effective in areas such as wage fixing and more recently in HIV AIDS workplace information and protection. Also in the area of OSH, tripartite cooperation can result in a broader consensus in decision-making, thereby enhancing the legitimacy of the process and acceptability of its outcome, and ultimately, easing the task of enforcement by inspectors in the field.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While highlighting the roles of the State inspection service and tripartite cooperation, we all know that it is the responsibility of employers to ensure that the working environment is safe and healthy. This is why workers' rights to safety and health are indispensably enshrined in the international and national laws. Beyond this, employers should be clearly aware that occupational safety and health is not only a social policy but also a good investment from an economic point of view. I am sure that you will learn business cases from this Forum particularly in the area of prevention.

To close, I would like to thank you for your commitment and support to the efforts to improve safety and health at work in China and elsewhere over the world. I wish the Forum every success.