

**Opening Message  
Ms Linda Wirth  
11<sup>th</sup> National Occupational Safety and Health Congress  
08 October 2008**

Honourable Secretary Marianito D. Roque  
Undersecretary Lourdes M. Trasmonte  
Atty Democrito R. Mendoza  
Mr Sergio Ortiz-Luis, Jr.

Good afternoon.

On behalf of ILO, I would like to congratulate the Occupational Safety and Health Center for two things: first on the occasion of the 11<sup>th</sup> National OSH Congress and secondly for organizing this knowledge-sharing platform for more than ten (10) years now. Based on the depth and breadth of participation today and of the issues to be discussed during the next two days, I have no doubt that this Congress will be as successful as in previous years. I would also like to extend my congratulations to all participants, guests and speakers. Your presence today makes a big difference. Your unceasing commitment to make workplaces safe is every Filipino worker's gain in his or her quest to realize decent work.

Decent work must be safe work and increasingly green work. Safety and health are fundamental elements of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda which is based on the understanding that work is, among others, a source of personal dignity, family stability and peace in the community. Promoting occupational safety and health is therefore a means to make Decent Work a reality.

It is difficult to promote OSH effectively if we are not forward-looking. One thing that I find innovative about this year's Congress is the fact that it not only deals with what is already there - established measures to prevent and control hazards and risks - it also looks at strategies and solutions for emerging issues, such as the impact of climate change and changing patterns of contract. There are factors that will need to be considered when dealing with these issues such as gender differences, demographic, employment shifts, the fast pace of technological progress, among others. These issues can generate new types of patterns of hazards, exposures and risks. The OSHC's ability to ensure the participation of a broad range of actors in this Congress is to be commended because the development of an appropriate response to these issues relies on and makes use of the collective body of knowledge and experience coming from as wide and diverse a group of experts and practitioners as from around the country.

Let me just stress that safety and health measures are undertaken not only to create and sustain a safe and healthy working environment. In fact, more evidence is emerging showing that such measures also enhance quality, productivity and competitiveness. The theme of this year's Congress was obviously formulated to prove the point that there is a business case for OSH. I would cite a specific example here by way of a paper that the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work published in 2004. The paper is based on a joint project between the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the ILO-SafeWork programme, in close collaboration with an international working group. The findings of the study indicate that there is a strong relationship between OSH and productivity: the higher the OSH standards, the higher the

productivity and vice-versa. In some cases, a good safety record can even be used to predict future profitability. According to this study, factors that enable higher OSH standards to translate into increased productivity include: close cooperation between the company's management team and its employees; giving staff greater autonomy and more challenging tasks; and introducing more ergonomic working methods and equipment.

I hope that your discussions will likewise lead you to identify similar cases in the Philippines that this paper has identified. It would be worthwhile to document them and disseminate these stories to the widest audience as possible. Also, I hope that this 2-day Congress will bring renewed energy and commitment to take more concrete actions toward fostering a safety culture which is key to achieving lasting improvements in safety and health at work in the country.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are all participants of this Congress. But I say we must all be leaders in promoting occupational safety and health at work. And together we must build the partnerships that are needed to bring about the changes we seek.

Thank you.