



International Commission on Occupational Health - ICOH
Commission Internationale de la Santé au Travail - CIST
Founded in 1906 as Permanent Commission



Centennial Declaration of the International Commission on Occupational Health, ICOH

The Permanent Commission – International Association on Occupational Health, now named International Commission on Occupational Health, ICOH, was founded on 13 June 1906 in Milan by Austrian, French, Bavarian, Belgian, Canadian, Dutch, Hungarian, Italian, Prussian, Swedish, Swiss and UK occupational health scientists and physicians. The aim of the Commission was to promote research on occupational diseases worldwide and disseminate the available knowledge on occupational health to the entire scientific community, to physicians, and practitioners, employers and workers. To achieve these goals it was further decided to regularly hold a Congress every three years. In June 2006, a century after the foundation of ICOH, the occupational health experts once more convene for the Centennial ICOH 2006 Congress in its birthplace, Milan, Italy.

In spite of the impressive progress made in the improvement of health, safety and social conditions of work, in the industrialised countries, the need for occupational health and safety is as evident as it was 100 years ago. While the nature of the problems, hazards and risks has changed the traditional hazards and particularly the new problems of work life still need much expert knowledge, research, training and information in order to be controlled, managed and prevented.

The conditions of work for more than two thirds of the almost three billion workers of the world do not meet the minimum standards and requirements set by the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization for occupational health, safety and social protection. Over 2 billion workers in the developing countries work under conditions which are hazardous to their health, safety and work ability. Those workers do not have access to occupational health and safety services and are not covered by safety and health inspection. In both the industrialised and developing countries working people are increasingly exposed to time pressure, continuously increasing job demands, frequent reorganization, and job insecurity. This has led to an unreasonable work load, stress-related somatic and mental disorders such as cardiovascular diseases and depression, thus affecting work ability and shortening the work career of ageing workers.

Poor occupational health and safety results in 270 million occupational accidents and 360 000 fatalities and causes 160 million new cases of occupational diseases a year. Altogether these lead annually to 2.3 million deaths of people at their best working age. In principle they all should be preventable. We want to commemorate the millions of people who have lost their lives at work during the past 100 years of industrialization.

The adverse conditions of work constitute an enormous and unnecessary loss of health, work ability, productivity and loss of well-being among working people and their families and communities. The burden to national and company economies is also high amounting to 4–5% of business turnovers and national GDPs.

The globalization process has not succeeded in equalising the conditions of work but in fact the opposite has occurred; the gaps are increasing. Poverty, inequality and under-development are closely associated with the poor safety, health and social conditions of work, as they are also linked with illiteracy, lack of education, poor access to health services and low or non-existent social protection. Sustainable development, equity and elimination of poverty, cannot be achieved without good work ability, safety and health of working people.

Moreover, decent conditions of work will ensure work ability and productivity of people and enable them to sustain themselves, their families and communities and to contribute to the national development and GDP.

Such objectives require us to ensure decent, safe and healthy conditions of work for each working individual in the world, in industrialized and developing countries, covering formal and informal sectors including self-employed and home workers.

We, the 3000 experts in occupational health and safety, who convened in Milan to share our research results and practical experiences on the improvement of health, safety and well-being at work, want to honour the work done by the Founders and previous Members of our Commission during the past 100 years.

By improving the health, safety and conditions of work, we for our part and together with our allies can ensure the healthy development of modern work life and contribute to sustainable development. We can also help to break the vicious circle of poverty and under-development, illness and inequity and direct the development of work life in the third world towards a new phase aiming at wider equality, safety, peace and well-being, in brief – Fair Globalisation.

The International Commission on Occupational Health wants to call all the Intergovernmental Organizations, Governments, Industrial and other Economic Organizations, Professional Associations and Non-governmental Organizations to join forces for improvement of the conditions of work, health, safety and well-being at work and to provide basic occupational health services to all working people throughout the world, particularly in the developing countries.

We particularly call for the following global actions:

1. Effective prevention and control, through legal and other appropriate means, of all types of hazards, risks and conditions affecting the health, safety and work ability of working people
2. Development of working conditions, which are conducive to health, safety, well-being and work ability of workers and productivity of their workplaces
3. Provision of competent occupational health services for every working individual and every workplace in the world, ensuring services for prevention and protection as well as competent diagnosis, recognition and just compensation of occupational diseases and injuries
4. To strengthen research efforts on the relationship between work and health, and the development of good occupational health practices as important prerequisites for the quality of work life.
5. To adopt occupational health as a basic right of working people, as an important means for sustainable development and for social and economic productivity of people, companies, communities and nations.

ICOH is committed to contributing to those goals with all our professional competence, experience, energy and enthusiasm and thus also to meeting the expectations that the Founders of ICOH set 100 years ago.

Milan 11 June 2006

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