

**American Public Health Association (APHA) Occupational Health and Safety  
Section Leslie Nickels Health and Safety International Award**  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 5 November 2019

**Presented to Dr. Sophie Kisting-Cairncross**



**The Leslie Nickels International Health and Safety Award** recognizes individuals with outstanding achievements in the field of occupational health and safety outside the United States. It is awarded in the name of Dr. Leslie Nickels (1953-2017), who used her training as an educator and industrial hygienist to advance social justice for disenfranchised workers.

The Award was presented by Mary E Miller, who introduced Sophie to the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS section) members in attendance at the annual awards luncheon. Sophia Kisting-Cairncross is an Occupational Medicine Specialist in South Africa with extensive workplace experience in Occupational and Environmental Health and Safety. Throughout her career she has been a strong and vocal advocate for social justice and human rights; with a major focus on protecting workers' health and safety and their rights in the workplace as well as through compensation mechanisms.

She retired in 2018 as the Executive Director of the National Institute for Occupational Health, South Africa. Prior to this position, she led the International Labour Organisation's global Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work, where she was the ILO lead in developing guidelines with the WHO and UNAIDS to protect health workers from HIV/AIDS and TB. She played a major role in developing the ILO international labour standard on HIV/AIDS protecting human rights. For 12 years earlier Sophie had practiced occupational health and medicine at the University of Cape Town caring for ill workers from all sectors of the economy, and especially women farm workers and mine workers. Significantly, she worked for nearly 20 years in public health hospitals in different countries in Africa.

She was Medical Advisor for the Parliamentary Committee coordinating the ground-breaking Parliamentary Asbestos Summit in 1998 with extensive worker and community participation. This contributed to the discontinuation of mining and use of asbestos in South Africa. Sophie is

a Trustee of the Tshiamiso Trust, which is in the process of attending to the compensation of thousands of gold mineworkers in southern Africa suffering from silicosis and tuberculosis (TB). Since 2016, she has been Chairperson of the Qhubeka Trust which has already paid millions of South African Rands to former gold mineworkers suffering from silicosis in Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa.

Sophie is currently working tirelessly toward the prevention and elimination of TB among health workers and miners. She led the team writing the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) position paper on TB among Health Workers; and she represented ICOH at the Africa Union side event on TB prevention during the United Nations General Assembly High level TB meeting in New York, 2018.

It has been an honor and a privilege to know and work with Sophie over many years. I am inspired by her unwavering commitment and persistence to work for justice for workers and other vulnerable populations. She brings so much compassion in her approach to work on these issues. I am thrilled that we present this year's Leslie Nickels International Health and Safety Award to Sophie Kisting-Cairncross. She is a fierce warrior always committed to protecting workers and their rights.

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**Acceptance Speech for the American Public Health Association Leslie Nickels  
International Health and Safety Award**

**Dr. Sophia Kisting-Cairncross  
November 5, 2019**

I would like to thank the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Section of the American Public Health Association (APHA) for recognizing my contributions to OHS, which primarily focused on Africa but also included global aspects. It is a significant honour for me that this award is named after my colleague Leslie Nickels, and I am deeply humbled to be the recipient of this award.

Dr. Leslie Nickels is a daughter of America who made an immense contribution to OHS in several counties in Africa (and beyond) through her selfless dedication to the sharing of knowledge, information, research, teaching and training for a healthier and safer world of work. Leslie's untimely passing has left a huge void, and we miss her enthusiastic engagement with the OHS challenges of workplaces in Africa.

My sincere appreciation to Mary Miller, who has become a daughter of Africa and with whom we have collaborated over nearly two decades on OHS in Southern Africa. I am happy to acknowledge Marilyn Fingerhut, a longstanding friend and colleague from NIOSH, who is present here today. We have collaborated on OHS in Africa over several decades and have worked together on TB prevention through the extensive efforts of colleagues of ICOH.

It has always been my fervent belief that the cumulative scientific knowledge and wisdom of all humanity should be utilized in a dedicated manner to make workplaces safer and healthier for all and in the process protect the environment where communities live. My greatest teachers at workplaces were often women and men whom history disadvantaged in many different ways. They taught me about the dignity of having a job, how to strive for decent work, how to stay

alive under difficult circumstances and how to nurture our common humanity by being interdependent and respectful of each other at work and beyond. They taught me about the importance of protecting human rights at work and the vision of a world of work where equality and social justice can prevail.

It is my wish to work with kindred spirits across the globe towards a greater focus on **Primary Prevention** of occupational diseases and injuries. I refer to the United Nations Political Declaration on TB adopted by UN Member States in New York in September 2018 and to the high incidence of TB in many workplaces in Southern Africa. It is my belief that TB related to silica dust exposure and TB among health workers can only be properly prevented by significantly improved OHS structures and programmes at workplaces in the global south. TB is an overlooked occupational disease that causes immense suffering, many preventable deaths and debilitating poor quality of life for tens of thousands of survivors. There is currently a global momentum in finding inclusive solutions for the TB epidemic. It is a disease whose time for greater prevention has come!

I know you do not have the high incidence of TB in the United States, as we have in many low and middle-income countries. It is however essential that we work collaboratively to overcome this global preventable public health and workplace challenge. I invite you to walk this journey of prevention with us by helping to build strong OHS and Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) programmes at our workplaces and support inclusive research and mentorship. My deepest appreciation to the countless OHS professionals throughout the globe for your dedication to a healthier, safer and happier world of work and environment. My deepest appreciation to the workers throughout the globe whose skills and commitment make it possible to believe that a healthier and safer world of work and environment is possible for us all. Thank you to the APHA OHS Section for your deep commitment to occupational and environmental health and for emphasizing the importance of our international collaboration and affirming our common humanity. In conclusion, I share my sincere appreciation to my family in South Africa and Namibia for unconditional support during countless workplace journeys.