



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



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ILC 113 Plenary Speech of ICOH (INGO)

Scheduled in the afternoon on Wednesday, 4th June 2025.

Name of the speaker: **Prof. Seong-Kyu KANG, President**

Name of the organization:

International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH)

Title: Call to Action: Urging the ILO to Restore the ILO/WHO Joint Committee to Ensure Global Leadership in Workers' Health

Dear delegates from member state governments, employers' associations and trade unions,

I am Seong-Kyu Kang, President of the International Commission on Occupational Health - ICOH- the oldest and largest professional organization in this field, founded in 1906. ICOH unites experts across disciplines, including occupational physicians, industrial hygienists, nurses, sociologists, administrators, psychologists, epidemiologists, ergonomists, toxicologists, and others. We are committed to advancing workers' health and have long supported international bodies like ILO and WHO in fulfilling their vital roles.

In 2022, the ILO declared a safe and healthy working environment as a fundamental principle and right at work. Its 2024–2030 Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health is a welcome step. However, healthy workers cannot be ensured through workplace improvements alone. Health conditions related to lifestyle, aging, and social inequities also critically impact on the workforce, especially in informal and vulnerable sectors. These challenges cannot be addressed by ILO alone. They require partnership with the health sector - most importantly, WHO.

The ILO Constitution calls for protection against sickness, disease, and injury arising out of employment. The WHO Constitution mandates the improvement of working conditions and other aspects of environmental hygiene. In recognition of this shared responsibility, ILO and WHO established the Joint Committee on Occupational Health - formally acknowledged by the UN General Assembly. Between 1950 and



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2003, thirteen sessions of this Committee set global standards and strategic directions. Its 1995 revision of the definition of occupational health reflected evolving societal needs, including an expanded scope, a holistic approach, and greater emphasis on worker participation.

Today, we face even more complex challenges: platform work, digital transformation, precarious employment, mass migration, aging workforces, and widening inequalities. Climate change now threatens workers through heat stress, pollution, vector-borne diseases, and psychological strain. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed deep vulnerabilities in protecting worker health.

Yet, global governance in occupational health is at stake. The Joint ILO/WHO Committee has not met since 2003. ILO, despite its sustained leadership, cannot fully meet today's demands without the health sector's involvement. Meanwhile, the WHO's attention to occupational health has declined - even though its mission, health for all, cannot be achieved without addressing workers, who spend one-third of their waking hours at work and comprise at least half the world's population. WHO can contribute to occupational health through health ministries and public health systems by integrating it into universal health coverage, national health plans, and pandemic preparedness. Without renewed collaboration, the ILO's efforts may lack the comprehensive reach needed for system-wide effectiveness.

Occupational health must now be reestablished by WHO as one of the core pillars of its mission. Its scope should expand to include occupational health within actions on non-communicable diseases, mental health, aging, pandemic preparedness, and planetary health.

As the leading international NGO in occupational health, ICOH strongly urges ILO to restore the ILO/WHO Joint Committee on Occupational Health as an essential first step. This call is echoed in the Marrakesh Declaration, adopted at the ICOH 2024 Congress in Morocco.

Occupational health lies at the heart of human rights, health equity, and resilient development. We must not let another generation of workers suffer under fragmented and insufficient action. The time to act is now.

Thank you.