



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



ICOH Statement on “The Road for the Decent Work together with Healthy Workers”

ILC 112th Session in 2024, 4 June 2024

Decent work is the most important value of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The goal of decent work cannot be achieved without ensuring healthy workers in the workplace. In 2022, with this concept in mind, the ILO defined occupational safety and health as one of the fundamental principles and rights at work.

Each year, it is estimated that 2.9 million workers die due to work-related incidents caused by traditional or emerging hazards in the workplace. Every day, 8,000 workers—more than double the number of ILO employees—die from work-related causes. ICOH has estimated the economic loss to be 6% of GDP.

Occupational hazards have two aspects: physical factors, which are visible risks, and social factors, which are not visible. Physical factors include dust, noise, radiation, heavy metals, solvents, gases, vapors, and biological hazards, which is one of topics in this ILC 112th Session. Social factors include job stress, long working hours, shift work, workplace violence, and harassment.

These hazards cause or aggravate cardiovascular diseases, stroke, back pain, and mental illnesses, as well as traditional occupational diseases such as pneumoconiosis and chemical poisoning. In addition, workers with lifestyle diseases such as hypertension, diabetes and hyperlipidemia are more vulnerable to work-related diseases.

Furthermore, socioeconomic factors can influence the development or exacerbation of work-related diseases.

I was born in a low-income country, raised in a middle-income country, and now live in a high-income country. These countries are the same: the Republic of Korea. The occupational risks in Korea today are different compared to when I started working



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in occupational health 35 years ago. The hazards that disappeared from my sight still exist somewhere around the world. We continue to face the exposure of workers to various occupational hazards every day. Occupational health is not just a problem within one country or region; it is time to embrace the idea of global responsibility for workers' health.

Social inequity itself is one of the most significant occupational risks today. Incomplete social security systems affect work-related conditions in many low- and middle-income countries.

ICOH, International Commission on Occupational Health, based in Rome, Italy, is an ILO-recognized international non-governmental organization comprising 2,000 individual professionals from over 100 countries, as well as group members, including public institutes, and societies or associations in various countries and regions. ICOH has been hosting Triennial Congresses for 120 years, since its establishment in 1906, following the historic event of saving workers' lives during the construction of the Swiss tunnel.

Last April, ICOH held its 34th International Congress in Marrakesh, Morocco, and announced the ICOH Marrakesh Declaration after a week-long discussion at the Congress. In the Declaration, ICOH calls for support from the ILO to revitalize the Joint ILO/WHO Committee on Occupational Health. ICOH also urges the ILO to request its member states to ratify ILO Convention 161 as well as 187 and 155. To achieve this, ICOH commits to providing all possible support to the ILO in its highly valued efforts on global responsibility for workers' health.

Dear delegates from trade unions, employers' associations, and governments of member states, let us come together to save workers' lives and protect one of the fundamental human rights: a safe and healthy working environment.