

Mr. Franklin Muchiri, Senior Occupational Safety & Health Specialist of the ILO

Dr. Benjamin Alli, ILO Consultant

Mrs. Ramsamy, Permanent Secretary of my Ministry

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

A very good morning to all of you.

I am very pleased to be in your midst this morning on the occasion of the opening ceremony of this 2-day tripartite workshop on **National Profile on Occupational Safety and Health** organised by my Ministry in collaboration with the ILO.

At the very outset, let me extend a warm welcome to Dr. Ben Alli, ILO Consultant and Mr. Franklin Muchiri, Senior Occupational Safety & Health Specialist of the ILO and wish them a very pleasant stay in Mauritius. I have no doubt that the participants in this 2-day workshop will learn a lot from the expertise of these two high calibre resource persons from the ILO.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Mauritius has gone a long way in its efforts to improve the working conditions and environment of its workforce. From the Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations of 1980, we are now equipped with a comprehensive and modern piece of legislation, namely the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 2005, together with subsidiary regulations. The challenges with regard to Occupational Safety and Health have also changed over the years – from traditional mechanical hazards in the early years of industrialisation of Mauritius to new hazards such as ergonomics, stress, alcohol and drugs, workplace violence, tobacco and without forgetting non-communicable diseases, as well as the HIV/AIDS. Consequently, the traditional definition of Occupation, Safety and Health has broadened considerably.

There has been a transition from the strict concept of “**prevention of occupational injuries and diseases**” to overall protection and promotion of workers’ general health.

The new definition focuses on three different objectives, namely:

- (a) the maintenance and promotion of workers’ health and working capacity;
- (b) the improvement of work environment and work to become conducive to safety and Health; and
- (c) the development of work organisation and working cultures in a direction which supports health and safety at work and thus enhance productivity of the undertaking.

Being fully aware of these changes and challenges, my Ministry has embarked on several initiatives so as to ensure a safer and healthier working environment.

It is in this context, therefore, that government has passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act in 2005. The objectives of this piece of modern legislation are amongst others:

- ❖ To further reinforce, consolidate existing health and safety legislation in order to adapt it to the changes in the working conditions of employees brought about by the introduction of new technologies and new equipment.
- ❖ To protect employees against new hazards at the workplace.
- ❖ To cover the public service as well, thus removing the difference in treatment that has existed between private enterprises and the public service, thereby providing a decent workplace to **all employees** of the country in general.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The ILO has been the driving force behind improving the fate of millions of workers and is still taking the lead to address new challenges for the betterment of working environment. The number of conventions and recommendations made by the ILO over the years give an indication of the importance of this issue. As a constituent of the ILO, we have ensured that our Occupational Safety and Health Act of 2005, which was proclaimed in 2007, is in line with relevant ILO Conventions.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Following the adoption by ILO of the **Convention on Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health** – Convention 187 in 2006, the government started to take measures for compliance with the provisions of this Convention.

This Convention gives Safety and Health another dimension and requires members ratifying the Convention to promote continuous improvement of Occupational Safety and Health by developing a national policy, a national system, a national programme on Occupational Safety and Health. More importantly it requires us to generally promote the development of a national safety and health culture.

In this context, Dr. Benjamin Alli was appointed by the ILO as Consultant to undertake a project of preparing a **National Occupational Safety and Health Profile for Mauritius**. This profile which is being prepared in collaboration with the ILO, now needs to be validated in this workshop and appropriate programmes should be prepared.

The national occupational safety and health profile is an important document which gives an indication of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a country regarding existing occupational safety and health system.

A good occupational safety and health system ensures the provision of good working conditions, workers' health and safety protection and the environment management in enterprises. A country's occupational safety and health profile is a valuable source of information for different stakeholders inside and outside the country.

The profile is a document which is designed to serve several levels and bodies such as decision-makers within government authorities, regional and local authorities, social and health insurers, occupational health services and other enterprise consultants in occupational safety and health, social partners, training, education and information bodies, research institutions and the general public.

A national occupational safety and health profile refers to combination of description and data on the state and trends of occupational safety and health and they are presented in the form of indicators. It is worth mentioning that nowadays the provision of good working conditions, workers'

safety and health protection and the environment management in enterprises is an important issue in free trade negotiations within the World Trade Organisations.

With the validation of this national occupational safety and health profile and preparation of appropriate programmes we are paving the way forward for the mauritian working community in the field of occupational safety and health. We should ensure that we put in place systems that are not shattered or deviated by the economic crisis which is having a dramatic effect on employment worldwide. I, therefore, make an appeal to you all that we should ensure that in the face of impending challenges ahead we take the necessary measures to safeguard the health and safety of our workforce, the most valuable asset of Mauritius.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am expecting that valuable suggestions would be made during this 2-day workshop. These suggestions will no doubt be very beneficial for the elaboration of a comprehensive **National Programme on Occupational Safety and Health** for our country.

On this note, I wish all participants fruitful interactions during the workshop and I have now the pleasure of declaring the workshop open.

I thank you for your attention.