



**Message by Juan Somavia,  
Director-General of the International Labour Office  
on the occasion of  
World Day for Safety and Health at Work  
(28 April 2006)**

On 28 April we put the spotlight on respecting the dignity of human life at work through sound occupational safety and health (OSH) policy and practice. But OSH is also an integral component of successful and productive enterprises and of strategies for sustainable development. In more than 100 events worldwide, government, employer and worker representatives will mark this year's observance, which focuses on the theme of HIV/AIDS.

We send a triple message on this day:

- Our goal is decent work for all;
- safe work is key to decent work; and
- HIV/AIDS is a workplace issue and an occupational safety and health issue.

The global HIV epidemic hits hardest those of working age and all who depend on them. It threatens their rights at work. It undermines business and the economy and the very fabric of society. At any given moment, some 2 million workers are unable to work as a result of HIV/AIDS. That figure is expected to double by 2015. It is in the interest of all to ensure safe and healthy workplaces that protect workers from HIV and support those affected.

HIV/AIDS is an occupational concern for all. But some are particularly vulnerable by the very nature of their work – for example, health workers and emergency services personnel, custodial and security staff, funeral attendants, waste disposal personnel and others.

The ILO has drawn on different instruments at its disposal to develop an integrated approach to HIV/AIDS health and safety issues.

First, respect for fundamental principles and rights at work as embodied in the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, along with occupational safety and health and labour inspection standards, provide a sound foundation for developing workplace initiatives against HIV/AIDS.

Secondly, established OSH structures and programmes, underpinned by processes of social dialogue, including workplace committees, national structures and institutes, occupational health services and labour inspectorates, can be mobilized in the combat against HIV.

Thirdly, tools such as our Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems, our Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and labour inspection guidelines, which give practical guidance for workplace action.

These have helped support the development of workplace strategies that cover prevention, protection from stigma and discrimination at work, access to care, treatment, confidentiality and psychosocial support. We must be proactive in promoting these approaches and in demonstrating their benefits both in the workplace and the wider community. We must be advocates for and partners in their replication and expansion.

The ILO as current chair of the Committee of Cosponsoring Organizations of UNAIDS has highlighted the potential of the world of work, its partners and its mechanisms in the fight against HIV. Last December on World AIDS Day we drew attention to the efforts of the United Nations and the ILO to apply the ILO Code of Practice in our own workplaces.

But today let us also remember the majority of workers globally who are in the informal economy outside the scope of formal OSH mechanisms and health-care systems. The ILO and its constituents have taken up the challenge of reaching them. Through workers' and employers' organizations as well as cooperatives and community-based organizations, the messages of safety and prevention are being magnified and channels for access to care opened up. But this remains a formidable challenge.

On 28 April 2006, I invite you to promote decent work, safe work and support for combating HIV/AIDS for workers everywhere.

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