



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
19 April 2013

Original: English

Substantive session of 2013

Geneva, 1-26 July 2013

High-level segment: annual ministerial review

Statement submitted by International Commission on Occupational Health, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

The International Commission on Occupational Health is an international non-governmental professional society whose aims are to foster the scientific progress, knowledge and development of occupational health and safety in all its aspects.

The Commission recognizes that adverse working conditions constitute an enormous and unnecessary loss of health, work ability, productivity and well-being among working people and their families and communities, recalling that, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), more than 2.3 million people lose their lives because of occupational injuries and diseases annually, with immeasurable human suffering and economic loss amounting to 4 per cent of global gross domestic product.

The Commission, acknowledging the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), as well as the content of the Millennium Development Goals and the recommendations of ILO and the World Health Organization (WHO) on decent work and the integration of workers' health into the measures for environmental protection, notes that new technologies and greener economies will bring a number of opportunities with special reference to employment, income effects, productivity and economic growth.

At the global level, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) notes that, in 2008, there were 11 million employed in the green sector; ILO estimates that green jobs have the potential to employ 100 million worldwide over the coming years.

Even though the concept of employment in the "green sector" suggests an idea of preserving the environmental quality by using less polluting technologies, this does not mean that the so called "green jobs" are safe jobs. In fact, in addition to the traditional occupational risks, workers employed in the green sector can be exposed to previously unidentified risks related to the introduction of new technologies, for example, nanotechnologies, new substances and work processes.

Thus, there is a strong need for expert knowledge, research, training and information in order to control, manage and prevent the effects of these new and emerging risks, and to avoid the repetition of past errors due to lack of knowledge and preventive actions.

The asbestos experience is a clear example of the negative impact of lack of prevention on the health of workers and of communities. Notwithstanding the bans adopted in many countries and the international organizations' recommendations to ban the use of every form of asbestos, the burden of asbestos-related diseases is still rising. According to WHO estimates, over 100,000 people die each year from asbestos-related lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis resulting from occupational exposure.

To prevent the burden of health problems caused by exposure to the new and emerging risks associated with the "green" economic development, it will be required that physicians and occupational health personnel responsibly and persistently express their concerns, raise awareness and take necessary action regarding the need to prevent this kind of risks.

The Commission will promote the engagement of its members in training occupational health and safety professionals in competencies needed to support comprehensive national efforts to efficiently protect the health and safety of every working individual, including the vulnerable workers and those employed in large, small, medium-sized and microenterprises, the self-employed, informal, domestic and precarious workers.
