



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF LABOUR, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND EMPLOYMENT CREATION

**STATEMENT BY HONOURABLE ERKKI NGHIMTINA, MP
AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE WORLD SAFETY AND
HEALTH DAY
26 April 2019
Windhoek**

Director of Ceremony

Deputy Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation, Honourable Tommy Nambahu;

Executive Director, Bro-Matthew Shinguadja;

Management Team;

Representatives of the Namibian Employers' Federation (NEF),
Representatives of TUCNA and NUNW,

Members of Inter-Ministerial Committee on Child Labour,

Staff members of the Ministry of Labour Industrial Relations and Employment Creation,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen. Good morning.

It is indeed a great honour for me to address you on the Commemoration of the World Safety and Health Day, a day that is aimed at remembering victims of occupational accidents, deaths, injuries and diseases. On the 28 April 2019, the World's Safety and Health Day will be commemorated worldwide, under the theme **"Safety and Health and the Future of Work"**. Since 28 April 1985, the world, through International Labour Organization (ILO), began to observe World Day for Safety and Health at Work stressing the importance of prevention of illness, accidents and deaths at work while capitalizing on its traditional strengths of tripartism and social dialogue.

This year's theme is inspired by the ILO Centenary Celebrations on the Future of Work. The whole idea is to reflect or take stock of the 100 years of ILO's work in improving occupational safety and health. It further looks to the future for continuing these efforts through major changes such as technology, demographics, sustainable development including climate change and changes in organization of work. A detailed Global Report to that effect, sharing the story of a 100 years by reflecting on the major turning points that have influenced this field and the way ILO has contributed to improving safety and health at work, from its inception in 1919, up to date, has been launched in February 2019.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Following the attainment of independence on 21 March 1990, the Namibia Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Legislative Framework went through various developmental stages. Shortly after that, the Labour Act, 1992 (Act 6 of 1992) that provided for the establishment of OSH Systems at work places was enacted to protect workers against occupational hazards and diseases. The OSH Regulation which catered for high risk classified sectors and dangerous machineries (Elevators/escalators and Boilers) was promulgated in 1997. In 2007 the Health and Safety provisions under the 1992 Act were improved and lifted into the current OSH Legislation namely Chapter 4 of Labour Act, 2007 (Act 11 of 2007). It is important to mention milestone development that has greatly contributed to the legislative framework evolution of OSH in Namibia which came with the adoption of the ILO – Namibia Decent Work Country Program (DWCP) (2010 – 2015).

The Ministry has successfully managed to compile a Country Occupational Health and Safety Profile Report which highlights the national strengths and gaps in occupational health and safety area. Guided by recommendations contained in this Profile, a National Occupational Safety and Health Policy has been drafted and validated in conjunction with tripartite stakeholders. The validated draft OSH Policy with its set objectives and strategies is aimed at strengthening the National OSH System by addressing the numerous gaps and challenges identified by the Profile.

One of the key strategies in strengthening the National OSH System is to harmonize the existing OSH Legislations through the enactment of an OSH Act. The Act that will provide for the establishment of an Occupational Safety and Health Body, building on the existing Occupational Health and Safety Structure within the Ministry, to administer and manage OSH System at national level. The envisaged Body will ensure effective collaboration and cooperation amongst the existing OSH Authorities through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The signing of MOU, and as well as, the official launching of both the OSH Profile and the National OSH Policy are anticipated to take during the first quarter of this Financial Year (2019 – 2020).

Ladies and Gentlemen

It may be agreed to that, in Namibia just like many other countries in the world, the concept of social justice is central to many of political, economic and social debates. The ILO describes the term **“Social Justice”** as follows “Social Justice is based on equality of rights for all people and the possibility for all human beings without discrimination, to benefit from economic and social progress everywhere. Promoting social justice is about more than increasing income and creating jobs. It is also about rights, dignity and voice for working women and men as well as economic, social and political empowerment”.

An estimated **160 million** workers worldwide suffer from work-related diseases, and there are an estimated **270 million** fatal and non-fatal work-related accidents per year. The sufferings caused by such accidents and illnesses to workers and their families are incalculable, irrespective of the economic sector.

While at this juncture, allow me to draw your attention to one of the most risky but totally neglected economic sectors in Namibia, the Agricultural Sector. Agriculture is one of the three most hazardous sectors of activities, both in industrialized and developing countries. According to estimates from the ILO, at least **170,000** agricultural workers are killed each year. This means that workers in agriculture run at least twice the risk of dying on the job as compared with workers in other sectors. Due to the widespread under-reporting of deaths, injuries and occupational diseases, the real picture of the occupational health and safety of farm workers is likely to be worse than what official statistics indicate. There are also thousands and thousands chemicals entering this sector annually.

Millions of agricultural workers worldwide are injured due to workplace incidents while using agricultural machinery; some are poisoned by pesticides and other agrochemicals. The situation is mainly exacerbated by:

- lack of sufficient training of agricultural workers and their employers which result in lack of knowledge on how to manage hazardous chemicals, equipment and machinery;

- lack of knowledge of preventative and protective measure to be put in place; and
- lack of understanding of hazards identification.

In order to guarantee sustainable agricultural development, farm workers and their families should have access to adequate working and living conditions, health and welfare as provided for under the Labour Act. Although it is encouraging to see that employers and workers have taken an progressive initiative in making agricultural workplaces safer by coming up with a Collective Agreement in the sector, there is still much to be done in terms of improving the overall working conditions within the same sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen

While commemorating this special event let me also draw your attention to some of the ongoing OSH activities within the Ministry. During the 2018 – 2019 Financial Year, the Ministry, and where required, jointly with relevant stakeholders, **conducted 786 OSH workplace inspections**. During the same period, **the Ministry received 14 accident notifications** of which **9 were for major injuries** and **5 were for fatal** at various workplaces around the country. Given the numbers, it is evident that the notified incidents to the Ministry are low while it is believed that the rate of accidents out there could be much higher than this. It is the aim of the Ministry therefore that dangerous occurrences and accidents are kept to the minimal and recurrence thereof is prevented. Given the high risk work activities to which workers are exposed to in the construction sector, the majority of the above mentioned notified accidents were recorded in the this sector.

It is indeed saddening to have recorded such a big number of accidents in a space of a year. Therefore, the Ministry continues to raise awareness to the public on the matter of safety and health at workplace, thus an initiative to engage stakeholders in construction sector before commencements of any construction work is appropriate.

Finally, as for the way forward with respect to this very important day, where we are expected to reflect or take stock of the OSH developments in the country, let me encourage everyone present here today to join me and the Government in promoting a positive safety & health culture for much improved working conditions. Since OSH is a collective responsibility, it goes

without saying, the successful implementation of OSH depends largely on the active involvement of all social partners i.e. the Government, the employers, workers and other stakeholders.

I thank you all for your kind attention

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