

Occupational health and safety is a fundamental human right and necessity for sustainable and resilient future

International Workers Memorial Day
28 April 2022



The International Trade Union Confederation – Asia Pacific (ITUC-Asia Pacific), representing an effective membership of 60 million workers from 34 countries and territory in Asia and the Pacific, honours workers who have died or been injured because of their work. Occupational health and safety (OHS) is a fundamental human right, well enshrined in the International Bill of Human Rights. It is also a necessity for sustainable and resilient future, as clearly highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, occupational accidents and diseases still kill around 2.9 million workers and injure 402 million people every year, and Asia and the Pacific records the highest rate of both fatality and non-fatality cases. In reality, considering the inadequate OHS policies, including registration as well as social protection measures in our region, more workers have lost their lives while their families have lost their livelihoods. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was also observed that the failure of ensuring health and safety at work has direct links to the failure of rapid and sustained containment of the virus.

We must understand that all the occupational accidents and diseases are preventable. Therefore, any inaction can result in accidents or worse, deaths. Moreover, the economic cost of occupational accidents and diseases account for 5.4 percent of annual GDP of the world. We must stop these preventable work-related killings and ensure sustainable path for workers and their future.

The ITUC-Asia Pacific has been calling for the recognition of OHS as a fundamental workers' right. Needless to say, the safety of workers' lives must come first and the enforcement of strong and sufficient OHS legislations is crucial in protecting workers' lives. Together with our affiliates, we have been campaigning for adoption and implementation of OHS standards at workplace. It has already been proven that strong trade union involvement in ensuring OHS makes not only our workplaces but also whole society safer and healthier.

Therefore, the ITUC-Asia Pacific strongly urges governments and employers in our region to support the inclusion of occupational safety and health as a fundamental principle and right at work at the 110th International Labour Conference in June 2022. Furthermore, we demand governments and their legislative bodies to formulate without delay national policies and legislations that guarantee health and safety at work based on genuine and constructive social dialogue.

OHS is not an option; it is a right. No one should be killed because of her or his work. There is no question about the importance of the workplace safety and health for the whole society. The ITUC-Asia Pacific will continue its all-out efforts to protect workers' lives and livelihoods and to make workplaces free from occupational accidents and diseases.