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It is a privilege to take part in this important forum. Thanks to the organizers for inviting the World Health Organization.

WHO is a specialized UN agency dealing with health. WHO has 192 MS and works closely with the health sector, other intergovernmental organizations and the civil society for improving health. Trade unions are natural partners in the WHO efforts for improving health in the world of work.

Recent WHO study demonstrated that factors in the human environment determine 24% of global ill-health. Therefore, concerted efforts to be discussed at this forum could save about 13 million lives every year.

WHO and its Member States carry out a number of activities to reduce the burden of disease and death caused by human environment. These efforts encompass many areas such as water and sanitation, chemical safety, radiation, occupational health, climate change, indoor air pollution, and the studying the health impact of development.

The combat against global health threats such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, avian flu, TB, tobacco smoking, obesity or injuries can certainly benefit from actions at the workplace. Unfavourable working conditions are to blame for the shortage of health care personnel in some parts of the world and create obstacles for health interventions. The involvement of civil society and the trade unions in particular are essential for the success of such action.

Deadly diseases such as SARS and avian flu have origins in unsustainable and unsafe methods of production. For example, 40% of the cases of last SARS outbreak in Canada originated from the workplace.

Globalization and the liberation of trade and markets provide both challenges and opportunities for improving health. As a matter of fact, one third of the trade disputes between the countries are on the grounds of health issues. Later on we will share with you some ideas about how to utilize the driving forces of globalization and trade for the advancement of health in the world of work.

At the WSSD in 2002 in Johannesburg the people of the world have asked WHO and ILO to strengthen and promote their programmes to reduce occupational deaths, injuries and illnesses, and to link occupational health with public health promotion. In response to this WHO has launched the development of a Global Plan of Action on Workers Health. This plan will focus on developing healthy workplaces, strengthening the performance of the health systems in workers health and reducing health inequalities at the workplaces. It will be presented to the World Health Assembly in 2007 and will provide impetus for mobilizing global health community for action on workers health in addition to the ILO framework convention on promotion of occupational health and safety to be discussed by the International Labour Conference later this year.

Developing healthy workplaces in the global village requires collaboration and action in partnership between health, labour, environment and social partners. Therefore we look forward to the deliberations of this forum as an important milestone in moving forward the international agenda on environment, labour and health ....