

SUMMARY of ASEM Meeting: OHS culture and SMEs Singapore September 2012

ASEM OSH Symposium on Developing a Preventative OSH Culture was attended by about 60 government representatives (departments or agencies responsible for OSH) from the ASEAN and Europe. Additional speakers were from the International Employers Organisation [Vietnam and Business Europe], ITUC, ILO, ISSA, International Association Labour Inspectorates, European multinationals and South East Asian employers.

For the following reasons it was essential that unions were represented at the seminar:

- Recognition of the importance of Worker Representation
- Getting Decent Work on the agenda
- Recognition of the informal sector and of the effects of economic crisis and precarious work on worker health and safety
- Acknowledgment that unions are collaborators on H&S and must be engaged
- Union participants improved the quality of questions to speakers.

Many of the government and company representatives appeared to be oblivious to the real world eg death of 117 people in Bangladesh was referred to as an incident/fire; European governments did not mention the economic crisis and some of the Asian governments representatives were very bureaucratic in their responses eg avoiding questions related to the health and safety of informal sector workers. The South Korean representative was the only Asian government to highlight the health and safety effects of contracting out and vulnerable workers.

Some examples of regulating and improving health and safety in SMEs included

- Danish requirements for training of SMEs i.e mandatory training of five days per year and then 1.5 annually, the content of which is decided by the SME themselves; the provision of very specific sector advice and a starter kit to all new enterprises.
- Malaysia: door to door advice for SMEs and mobile promotional services to SME
- South Korea: limited capability of government to deal with increasing numbers vulnerable workers. In 2012, in collaboration with universities, established free medical services at 5 centres for SMEs; using government funds to provide online education for foreman ; providing financial assistance to improve environment; tougher penalties
- Thailand emphasising worker involvement
- Germany improved targeting and provision of services to SMEs
- Malaysian Mud and Chemicals Sdn Bhd have active H&S committees, encourage workers to stop unsafe work, annually recognise employee participation,. These activities have initial high costs but costs are stabilized in the long run. Employs 130 people
- Multinationals influencing supply chain by audits or not engaging with companies involved in poor practices (eg sandblasting clothes, improving fire safety; H&M) or shift arrangements that are inherently unsafe (BBI)
- International Association of Labour Inspection trying to build infrastructure. ASEAN OHSNet developing code of practice for inspectors within the region.
- Strong support for tripartite approach.

Summary points made by Netherlands and European commission

- Without safe ,healthy and clean working environment--- social justice and economic wealth are not attainable
- Presence of new risks [psychosocial (stress at work emphasised by Indian government), new forms of employment and traditional risks eg cancers, musculoskeletal disorders]
- Balance between self regulation and regulation
- Interaction of OSH with general labour standards
- Multinationals can have impact on supply chains
- Business case for improving OSH
- Develop links between corporate profit margins and legislative framework
- Risk not equally distributed, we need to address these differences.

Mr Tukkala commented that core ILO core labour standards do not include OHS and maybe we need to address this, including ensuring that head of ILO should attend H&S meetings.

Union attendees

Ms Chabo Ching: ICTU Singapore

Ms Silvana Cappuccio: ICTU Europe [speaker]

Mr Chandrasekaran Rajamanikam, Mr Li Cheng, Ms Magdalene Kong Liyun: UNI Global - Asia and Pacific

Ms Deborah Vallance: ACTU – ICTU Asia [speaker]