

**ADDRESS BY HON. D. GOKHOOL
MINISTER OF INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND
RESEARCH
ON
THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING
CEREMONY OF AN
EXHIBITION OF
THE WORLD DAY FOR SAFETY AND
HEALTH AT WORK**

TUESDAY 28TH APRIL, 2009

AT 09 00 HRS

RGSC – BELL VILLAGE

Dr the Hon Rashid Beebeejaun, G.C.S.K., Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities

Hon Jean François Chaumière, Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment

Mr Patrick Assirvaden, Chairman, CEB

Mr Chavan Dabeedin, General Manager, CEB

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Goodmorning. I am very pleased to be associated with the 2days workshop being organized by the CEB in collaboration with Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre.

World Day

This event is being held in the context of World Day for Safety and Health at work with a view to raising awareness about the health and safety issues at work and the need to develop a culture of health and safety in every work organization.

It is good to remind ourselves that it was in 2003 that ILO decreed 28 April as World Day for Safety and Health at work. Since, this event is celebrated in over 100 ILO Member States.

Predominant Place

ILO has estimated that some 2.2 million women and men around the world succumb to work related accidents or diseases every year. Worldwide, there are some 217 million occupational accidents and 160 million of victims of work related illnesses annually. According to a special ILO Report “ Prevention: A Global Strategy” deaths due to work related accidents and illnesses represent 3.9 % of all deaths and 15% of the world’s population suffer a minor or major occupational accidents or work related disease in any one year. A large number of unemployed – 30% - report that they suffer from an injury or disease dating from the time at which they were employed. The unemployed often site impairment of their health as a hindrance to finding new employment. All these tragedies have dramatic, economic and social consequences. That is why occupation, health, safety and welfare has come to occupy a predominant place in labour policies and administration.

In Mauritius, Government has been closely involved with this issue, and through legislation and sustained campaigns has been sensitizing employers and employees and all other stakeholders about their responsibilities regarding this critical issue. Available statistics at the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations indicate that the situation is under control, but this is no reason for complacency. Increased vigilance and proactive measures need to be the order of the day.

Safety and health at work means safe premises, safe machinery and substances, safe systems of work and also information, instruction, training and supervision.

It is to be noted that the challenges of Occupational Health and Safety has undergone important changes over the years with the emergence of non traditional modern hazards and diseases such as problems related to the extensive of ICT and the spread of HIV AIDS. Consequently, the traditional definition of Occupation, Safety and Health has been broadened considerably.

Also there has been a shift in emphasis from prevention to overall proactive interventions.

This new situation requires greater degree of professionalism. Hence, the need for an ongoing awareness campaign at the level of all works organizations, accompanied with a strategy of continuous professional training.

We have noted the involvement of certain employers organizations in this area. This is most encouraging as it clearly indicates that quality of work life is an important factor for the success of any work organization. However I do not see the same enthusiasm among Trade Union organizations. I take this opportunity to make a strong appeal to Trade Union Organisations not to restrict their demands to bread and butter issues only but also to participate in projects and programmes which can considerably enhance the quality of life of their members. Besides this is an area where both employers and employees and trade unions have a lot of scope for participative actions for mutual benefits.

I also take the opportunity to congratulate the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations for the preparation of a National Occupational Safety and Health profile for Mauritius. This profile is a very useful instrument for gathering of data and indicators and of understanding trends in occupational safety and health. The present Workshop of

CEB is in line with Government policy in the area of Occupational Health and Safety of our workers. I would here, like to mention that the recent Safety Week initiated by the CNT for its employees. The examples of CMT and CEB need to serve as inspiration and models for other work organizations both in the private and public sector. Such programmes can have very positive impact not only on productivity and economic growth but also address fundamental issues of the quality of life of our workers.

RGSC

I am pleased that RGSC has been collaborating with the CEB. We had an active participation of CEB in the Science Festival 2007; CEB also participated in the exhibition Maurice Ile Durable early in March this year.

Recognising the link between Science and Society paves the way for the transition to knowledge based society. Bridging the gap between Policy makers, scientists and citizens is a key issue that needs to be addressed to ensure a prosperous future for all our citizens.

I am happy to state that my Ministry has taken a number of initiatives to link Science with society. I would like to mention here the recent launching of the Mauritius Science Portal which is a one stop shop for science in Mauritius. This portal will, I am sure, lead to a better coordination and communication among stake holders actively involved in the field of S&T in Mauritius.

We are also currently organizing an essay competition under the theme Science and Society for Lower V1 students.

Let me take this opportunity to highlight that the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre is currently working on a Strategy Paper on Science and Society which will touch many areas like Science and Socio Economic development, Public attitude and Understanding of Science and Science Communication.

The Ministry of Industry Science and Research is also, in the process of finalizing with the collaboration of the Mauritius Research Council, a policy paper on Science Technology and Innovation. Small economies like ours are bound to adhering to innovation systems. We need to be creative, innovative and productive so as to increase competitiveness in local, regional and International trade.

Better knowledge constitutes the foundation of empowered society and contribute significantly in the policy dialogue, its articulation and its implementation. Well framed policies will no doubt help us in going far beyond in catching up more advanced economies and to compete effectively in an increasingly globalised market place.

As far as this Workshop is concerned, I have no doubt that it will contribute to improve the knowledge about Health and Safety issues. Better knowledge and understanding of Occupational Health and Safety laws and regulations will go a long way to avoid unnecessary costs and damage to businesses caused by workplace injury and illness and provide comfortable and secure environment for workers to give the best of themselves.

I will end by wishing the exhibition a lot of success and I am sure the all participants and stakeholders present here will make the two day's event a real success.

The workshop is on an issues which concerns a fundamental human right-the right to work and the right to life. I invite the media to take the message of this workshop to the working community and to society at large.

My Ministry and the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre will continue to provide its valuable support for all such important events.

I thank you for your kind attention.

