

28 April, 2007
Backgrounder

**The International Commemoration Day (ICD)
For Dead and Injured Workers**

Priorities for 2007

- Address the causes of occupational & environmental cancers
- Demand safety & health standards and enforcement
- Build on 28 April campaigns targeting asbestos & HIV/AIDS



*International
Commemoration
Day Symbol*

☞ This document is available at:

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_5Ag.EN.pdf

Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf//ohsewpH_5Ag.FR.pdf

Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf//ohsewpH_5Ag.SP.pdf

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

28 April Backgrounder

The International Commemoration Day (ICD) For Dead and Injured Workers¹

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A. History & Introduction to 28 April ICD

28 April is the Day on which we remember the over 2 million workers who die, the more than 1.2 million who are injured, and the more than 160 million who fall ill each year due to unsafe, unhealthy, or unsustainable work and workplaces².

Historically, International Commemoration Day (ICD) is rooted in the Canadian labour movement whose actions led to the first national recognition of 28 April by any government when Canada adopted the “Day of Mourning” Bill C-223 in 1989. In that same year, the AFL-CIO in the United States also adopted 28 April as the national day for workers in that country to observe every year.

28 April became an “international day” in 1996 at the United Nations in New York when a Global Union delegation lit a Commemoration Candle and Incense in memory of workers who are killed or become ill because of their work, as well as to promote Decent Work and Sustain-

¹ **28 April ICD was officially supported** at the ICFTU 2004 World Congress when the world’s trade unions agreed to “promote world-wide recognition of 28 April as the International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers, as a way of educating workers and the public about workplace hazards and to promote safe and sustainable workplaces, whilst retaining the specific character of 28 April as a day primarily led by trade unions.” Recently, at the 2006 ITUC Founding Congress in Vienna, affiliated organizations called for “world-wide recognition and observance of 28 April as the International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers”.

² **2005 World injury and fatality statistics:** Each year, over two million women and men die as a result of 270 million occupational accidents and 160 million new cases of occupational disease, figures that are supplemented by ILO/WHO estimates that occupational diseases alone cause over 1.7 million deaths, and that at least 268 million non-fatal workplace accidents occur each year. It is furthermore estimated that over half of the 355,000 on-the-job fatalities occur in agriculture, the sector with half the world’s workforce. Other high risk sectors are mining, construction and commercial fishing. Four percent of the world’s gross domestic product (US \$1,251 billion) is lost through absence from work due to injury, death and disease, sickness treatment, and disability and survivor benefits. Illness results in a loss of four or more working days in at least 1/3 of all cases. The loss in GDP resulting from the cost of death and illness in the work force is 20 times greater than all official development assistance to developing countries. Each year, 12,000 children are killed on the job and hazardous substances kill 340,000 workers annually, while asbestos alone claims about 100,000 lives. See ILO death/injury statistics:

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actrav/new/april28/facts04.pdf>

able Workplaces. This ceremony coincided with a special “Day of the Workplace” organised by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in New York.

Since then, the international labour movement has observed and promoted 28 April around the world, and it is now officially recognised by national governments in 14 countries or territories: *Argentina, Belgium, Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, Dominican Republic, Greece, Luxembourg, Panama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Taiwan*. Trade unions elsewhere are invited to obtain similar recognition from their governments. In 2005, efforts began to have the UN eventually adopt 28 April in the UN General Assembly. Having more countries join the list of those already recognizing 28 April will increase the likelihood of the UN recognition.

Since 1996, the number of commemoration events has grown. They are now organized in 118 countries, and feature a wide range of activities that include large rallies, sectoral mobilisations, educational and lobbying events and information dissemination. In addition, many unions take the opportunity on 28 April to publicise results of such actions as workplace assessments, surveys and research, as well as to announce initiatives they intend to pursue.

Planning Your 2007 Activities: Our aim in 2007 is to build on the success we experienced in 2006. It is up to trade unions in each country or sector to decide the focus and scope of their activities for this year’s 28 April. In the past, some unions chose to mark the day with a simple candle or incense-lighting ceremony, in conjunction with a brief commemoration in the form of speeches, and a moment of silence, broken by a poem or some music. Whatever ceremonies or events are chosen should reflect the overall themes of 28 April, normally beginning by commemorating the dead, sick and injured workers in some fashion, and ending with a message of hope for life and the living.³

Many unions enlist the cooperation of supportive individuals and groups in their community or country. Trade unions have often been successful because they have worked through coalitions, and 28 April, in particular, could take on added meaning this year if employers, professional bodies, governments and community leaders participate in the commemoration.

As a ‘Commemoration Day’, 28 April is more than a ‘memorial’ day to remember victims of the past. By highlighting those who are still alive, but continue to be exposed to risk of injury or death, the Day also serves to symbolically transform sentiments of mourning, loss and suffering into positive action for dialogue and change. For this reason, 28 April is forward-looking, a day for action, as well as for mourning.

For this reason, 28 April also connects with the spirit of May Day, and you are therefore encouraged to link your activities to May 1st themes wherever possible. The right of all workers to form trade unions and bargain collectively with employers is crucial to securing safe workplaces; yet these rights are under attack in many countries. 115 trade unionists were murdered for defending workers’ rights in 2005, while more than 1,600 were subjected to violent assaults and some 9,000 arrested, according to the ICFTU’s Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights Violations. Nearly 10,000 workers were sacked for their trade union involvement, and almost 1,700 detained⁴.

³ In 2006 more than 12,000 activities were organised by the ICFTU and Global Unions in over 118 countries or regions across the world. See summary 2006 wrap-up at: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_3h.EN.pdf

⁴ ICFTU 2006 Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights Violations. For information on each country see: <http://www.icftu.org/survey2006.asp?language=EN>

B. The 28 April 2007 Priorities

Priorities for 28 April 2007 were chosen after widespread consultation with the international labour movement. Country-by-country⁵ information on this year's priorities is available in the trade union *profiles for occupational health and safety*.

☞ **The TU profiles for occupational health and safety** are available in **English, French and Spanish** at the Trade Union Sustainable Development Unit website, under the OHS profiles section: <http://www.tradeunionsdunit.org/profiles/>

Please Note: At the time of writing, these profiles were still undergoing updates to include national cancer rates and occupationally related cancer information. Please check for updates, which will also be announced through our electronic forums. You will see that currently these profiles contain information on whether or not your country has ratified or adopted certain ILO or other Instruments and measures related to occupational health and safety.

The ILO ACTRAV has produced highly visual and coloured posters that relate to relevant ILO OHS Instruments, which are listed in our profiles. It is recommended that you print these at your office and use them as visuals for 28 April.

☞ **The ILO ACTRAV Posters** in English, French or Spanish <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actrav/genact/socprot/protect/ratify.htm>

1. Address the causes of occupational & environmental cancers:

The release of a new booklet on occupational cancer provides a timely boost to the April 28, 2007 priorities on cancer, OHS Enforcement, asbestos and related themes. '*Occupational Cancer/Zero Cancer: A Union Guide to Prevention*' was produced by the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) with the support of the ITUC, BWI, ICEM, IFJ, ITGLWF, IUF and ITF. The 16-page guide is written in clear language and produced in easily usable format in preparation for 28 April.

☞ **IMF Booklet 'Occupational Cancer/Zero Cancer: A Union Guide to Prevention'**
Available this March in English, French, Spanish & Russian: <http://www.imfmetal.org/cancer>.

International Labour Organization (ILO) statistics are utilized in the booklet to show that cancer is far and away the most common work-related cause of death, with 1 out of every 5 workers being at risk, leaving accidents and other occupational diseases well behind. It estimates that occupational cancers make up almost one-third of all work-related deaths, with at least one out of every 10 cancers resulting from preventable, predictable workplace exposures. Find information

⁵ **Trade Union Country-by-Country Profiles** can help trade unions and other actors define their national, sector and workplace-level actions on given topics. Profiling refers to development of analysis based on specific groups of information entered in database maintained country-by-country by the *Trade Union Sustainable Development Unit* at <http://www.tradeunionsdunit.org/profiles/>. This data is broken down and made available in a variety of forms to facilitate analysis on a number of topics. However, the production of Profiles has been standardised and some are available on an ongoing basis for specific topics: Sustainable Development, Energy and Climate Change, Occupational Health and Safety, Asbestos, HIV/AIDS, Trade Union Rights, and Corporate Accountability. A full glossary defining the data and sources contained in the Profiles is available in English, French and Spanish at: <http://www.tradeunionsdunit.org/profiles/>.

on your country's performance in terms of national environmental and occupational cancer rates in the above country *profiles for occupational health and safety*.

The booklet also contains information about the 100,000 synthetic chemicals that have been introduced into workplaces, resulting in sustained worker exposure over the last century. Of all these substances, asbestos is singled out as 'the world's biggest ever industrial killer', as it is responsible for 100,000 deaths each year, a toll that could eventually amount to more than 10 million deaths worldwide.

Chemical & Toxic Substances The booklet lists the 10 substances and forms of exposure most likely to place workers at risk, at the same time as it clarifies some of the jargon commonly used by experts. Under 'Jobs to Die For' it provides a sobering list of the 25 most common forms of cancer originating in the workplace and the major reasons – including industry financed studies and lobbying - why these are so often missed. Chemical & toxic substances and the threat they pose to occupational and public health can be clearly seen in the case of asbestos, as well as persistent organic pollutants (POPs), including its three chemicals groups - pesticides (aldrine, DDT, dieldrine, endrine, heptachlor, chlordane, mirex and toxaphen), industrial compounds (PCB's) and by-products (PCB variations, PCDD, PCDF, and dioxins). Trade unions have taken an active part in a process for countries to establish global harmonisation in chemical classifications and labelling, and a new Globally Harmonised System (GHS) has now been adopted to be overseen by the UN Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC). 28 April provides a prime opportunity to encourage individual countries to adopt this new instrument, as none have yet chosen to do so.

The booklet is available for 'Workplace detectives' who are provided with a list of strategies they can readily employ to find out if there is a risk in their workplace requiring union vigilance and action. This includes a number of steps and short-term responses for 'Getting Started' that are part of a properly designed cancer prevention strategy. ILO Conventions that relate to cancers are also reviewed.

For 28 April, unions are encouraged as much as possible to show the connection between occupational cancers as they relate to environmental or public health. For your information, consult the following:

☞ The Hazards Magazine web site contains a special page on cancer & additional resources (in English only): <http://www.hazards.org/cancer/index.htm>

☞ The World Health Organisation (WHO) has produced a recent newsletter on occupational cancers, which contains other information sources: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewPH_5Ae.EN.pdf

2. Demand safety and health standards & enforcement

Trade unions are invited to measure the strengths and weaknesses of occupational health standards and enforcement mechanisms in their respective countries against measures proposed or already accepted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). For this April 28, we strongly encourage you to involve both the health and the labour ministries or Ministers in your activities.

a) The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has produced a special document, *Safe & Healthy Workplaces: Making Decent Work a Reality*, for this year's 28 April. The document reviews ILO labour standards and occupational health and safety-related Conventions, especially the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health (Convention #187).

The ILO document also reviews and clarifies the connection between Decent Employment and income, as well as issues related to social protection, its occupational health management system and information on training and education. The roles for tripartism and social dialogue are also discussed.

As much as possible, 28 April activities should promote ratification of these instruments where governments have not already done so. Again, please consult our *profiles for occupational health and safety* (above) to find your country's current ratification status relative to these.

☞ ILO's "Safe & Healthy Workplaces: Making Decent Work a Reality" will soon be available at:
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/worldday/index.htm>

b) The World Health Organisation (WHO) will hold its annual meeting in early May 2007, just after 28 April, at which time, Health Ministers will consider adopting a *Global Plan of Action On Workers' Health* for 2008-2017 (see below). The plan currently relates in some way to each our themes for April 28, 2007⁶, including our campaigns on asbestos and HIV/AIDS. You are therefore highly encouraged to link your activities to show support for the Global Action Plan document and to ensure that your Health Minister is informed. Include your health ministry or Minister in your activities and encourage them to express support for the passage of the Plan at the WHO World Health Assembly in May.⁷

☞ WHO **Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health** is available at:

Arabic: http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB120/B120_28Rev1-ar.pdf
 Chinese: http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB120/B120_28Rev1-ch.pdf
 English: http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB120/B120_28Rev1-en.pdf
 Français: http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB120/B120_28Rev1-fr.pdf
 Español: http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB120/B120_28Rev1-sp.pdf
 Russian: http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB120/B120_28Rev1-ru.pdf

3. Build on 28 April campaigns targeting asbestos & HIV/AIDS

Last year, 28 April became an opportunity to mobilise support for programmes of action on asbestos and HIV/AIDS. You are encouraged to build upon the strengths of these activities, by once again focusing on these issues in your 28 April plans.

⁶ *The Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health* addresses or includes: a) **Cancer**, through its references on occupational diseases, workplace hazards, radiation protection and chemical safety, b) **Standards & Enforcement**, issues by reference to the strengthening WHO collaboration and joint actions with the ILO, in dialogue with Labour ministries, and by seeking to adopt a basic set of occupational health standards and strengthening enforcement systems, c) **Asbestos**, by including a global campaign and national approaches for the elimination of asbestos-related diseases, d) **HIV/AIDS**, by agreeing to prevent and control the disease at the workplace, e) **Cross-cutting issues**, by recognizing the centrality of employment, sustainable development, poverty reduction and environmental protection, f) **Workers**, by making them a focus of training and for consultation on capacity building exercises, communication and awareness raising, and implementation of the *Action Plan*, which also includes a special focus on health-care workers and g) **Trade Unions**, by including worker and employer representatives in the planning and implementation for reducing inequalities in workers' health, and in developing strategic tools for communication and awareness raising.

⁷ This is a skeletal *Plan of Action*, at this stage. However, once adopted trade unions would call upon the WHO to bring together relevant parties to further elaborate its implementation, by identifying concrete priorities with timelines and clearer division of responsibilities of various actors, incorporating monitoring and evaluation procedures for the entire 2008-2013 year period of the Plan.

a) The ‘Ban Asbestos Campaign’ In January 2007, the ITUC issued a circular to all affiliates concerning progress in the Global Unions’ ‘Ban Asbestos’ campaign since it was kicked off in June 2005. You are encouraged to consult the campaign’s backgrounder for planning activities to highlight asbestos on 28 April.

☞ **The ‘Ban Asbestos’ Campaign information is available at:**

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_8Ab.EN.pdf

Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_8Ab.SP.pdf

Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_8Ab.FR.pdf

The dangers of asbestos are now considered irrefutable. A substantial body of literature blames asbestos for the deaths of more than 100,000 people, as well as resulting costs to society.

☞ **This evidence is available in the *ILO Encyclopaedia Of Occupational Health and Safety*:**

English: <http://www.ilo.org/encyclopaedia/?find=&bsearch=asbesto&whereSelectSW=1>

Español: <http://www.mtas.es/insht/EncOIT/tomo3.htm>

Français: <http://www.ilo.org/public/french/protection/safework/cis/products/encyclo/pdf/index.htm>

You are strongly advised to focus your 28 April message on your country’s record in ratifying and implementing Conventions or Instruments of the International Labour Organization (ILO) which pertain to eliminating asbestos use and related employment transition issues. Background information about your country’s status with respect to asbestos uses and related compliance with Conventions and Instruments can be found in the most recently updated ***country-by-country profiles on asbestos***.

☞ **The TU profiles on ASBESTOS** are available in **English, French and Spanish** at the Trade Union Sustainable Development Unit website, under the Asbestos profiles section:

<http://www.tradeunionsdunit.org/profiles/>

We have produced a country-by-country asbestos ***campaign workbook*** on recent activities related to our asbestos campaign, including those leading up to last year’s 28 April. Countries have been placed in one of three clusters, showing priorities for each and providing contact names (where these could be identified).

☞ **The Asbestos campaign WORKBOOK** is available **only in English** at the Trade Union Sustainable Development Unit website, under the Asbestos profiles section:

<http://www.tradeunionsdunit.org/profiles/>

It is important that 28 April activities everywhere raise worker and public awareness about the dangers associated with asbestos and the need for countries to cease production or trade in this substance. In addition, we urge you to help build our roster of Asbestos Campaign contact points in your country, as these are crucial to the success of our campaign.

b) HIV/AIDS & the G8 Campaign HIV/AIDS is a workplace issue for three main reasons: it impacts on the health, jobs and security of workers generally; it is an occupational risk for workers in health and security services; and the workplace is well positioned to contribute positively to prevention and treatment. ILO statistics show that the epidemic is concentrated on people in their working years, with direct implications for the labour force, their families and communities, enterprise productivity, and human resource development⁸. 28 April 2007 pro-

⁸ **Nearly 36.5 million people** around the world involved in productive work (a wider definition than ‘labour force’) are HIV-positive – see *HIV/AIDS and work: global estimates, impact and response*, ILO, 2004. The vast majority, over 70%, live in Africa, with several African countries reporting over 1 million economically-active workers who are HIV-positive; e.g., Kenya (1 million), Mozambique (1.1 million), Ethiopia & Zimbabwe (1.3 million each), Tanzania (1.4 million), Nigeria (2.4 million), and South Africa (3.7 million). See statistics for each country in *Country Profiles for HIV/AIDS* (next page).

vides an opportunity to demonstrate the strengths and the potential of occupational safety and health structures at national and workplace levels by showing how HIV/AIDS can be mainstreamed within the occupational health and safety activities of trade unions.

Trade union campaigns and programmes on HIV/AIDS have emphasised the need to establish or strengthen joint health & safety committees to meet this pandemic head-on with sympathetic and effective workplace education, counselling and treatment. Recognition of HIV/AIDS as a workplace issue allows us to invoke the full weight of ILO Convention 155 for Occupational Safety and Health to support advocacy efforts.

Access to public health services, affordable treatment and care, and the right to compensation are issues that workers with HIV/AIDS and their families have in common with all those we remember on 28 April. By including HIV/AIDS as a 28 April theme, trade unions will influence governments as employers and policy makers to provide services for its prevention, detection and treatment.

☞ **The TU profiles on HIV/AIDS** are available in **English, French and Spanish** at the Trade Union Sustainable Development Unit website, under the HIV/AIDS profiles section:
<http://www.tradeunionsdunit.org/profiles/>

Our 28 April focus on the G8 Summit Last year, many unions engaged in efforts to build support for our demand that G8 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, U.S. and the U.K.) establish a high level Working Group on HIV/AIDS at their Summit last July 2006 in Russia. Many of you hand-delivered a letter to G8 Embassies in your countries to press for the Working Group as a mechanism for ensuring a means of assessing progress on issues from one Summit to the next, including universal access to HIV treatment through strengthening health care capacity and reducing the price of drugs and testing.

Further to our pressure, the 2006 Summit in Russia committed the G8 to tangible steps towards surveillance of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, with timely reporting and information-sharing. However, it fell short of actually creating a Working Group. Therefore, you are asked to consider ways of building upon last year's activities to intensify our call. We will communicate with you soon to make suggestions for coordinating this follow up.

In the meantime, you are asked to consult our country-by-country HIV/AIDS ***campaign workbook***, as it tracks recent activities related to our campaign, including last year's 28 April activities. You will find that it places your country in one of five clusters, showing priorities for each and providing contact names, where these have been identified.

☞ **The HIV/AIDS campaign workbook** is available in **English only** at the Trade Union Sustainable Development Unit website, under the HIV/AIDS profiles section:
<http://www.tradeunionsdunit.org/profiles/>

As 28 April approaches, you will receive updates about the G8 campaign through our HIV/AIDS electronic forum. If you are not yet represented on this forum, please contact us.

☞ **Other sources of valuable information on aspects of HIV/AIDS** that may provide a focus for your 28 April activities can be found at

Global Unions Programme on HIV-AIDS: <http://www.global-unions.org/hiv-aids>

ILO Programme on HIV-AIDS: <http://www.ilo.org/aids>

UNAIDS: <http://www.unaids.org/en/default.asp>

WHO: http://www.who.int/topics/hiv_infections/en/

World AIDS Campaign: http://www.worldaidscampaign.org/index_en.htm

☞ Because 28 April will also focus on support for ILO instruments and enforcement standards, trade unions are encouraged to make more people aware of and using the following:

* ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work:

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/trav/aids/code/codemain.htm>

* ILO/WHO Guidelines on health services and HIV/AIDS: <http://www.who.int/3by5/news44/en/>

C. Cross-cutting issues & reporting of your activities

a) Promotion of sustainable patterns of production and consumption is a growing priority for trade unions, especially as it implies links between occupational health and the social and community dimensions of workplaces and workers. This matter was the subject of extended discussion last year at the Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment (Nairobi, January 2006), where delegates unanimously endorsed a resolution calling for action in this area. You are invited to support these priorities as they relate to the themes for this year's 28 April.

☞ For guidance, see the Assembly resolution at:

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.EN.pdf

Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.SP.pdf

Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.FR.pdf

In addition, you are encouraged to access the Sustainable Development Country-by-Country profiles prepared for the upcoming UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). These will help you connect 28 April issues to other social and environmental matters.

☞ The TU profiles on Sustainable Development are available in English, French and Spanish at the Trade Union Sustainable Development Unit website, under the Sustainable Development profiles section:

<http://www.tradeunionsdunit.org/profiles/>

b) Reporting YOUR activities The success and continued growth of 28 April as an International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers is totally dependent on the reporting of activities by trade unionists such as you.

Please keep up us informed of your plans and activities for 28 April ICD by communication in English, French or Spanish with Lucien Royer at royer@tuac.org.

☞ Information from each country or sector will be periodically summarised and posted in a special country profile for 28 April 2007 in English only, at:

http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_FAd.EN.pdf

or at the Sustainable Development Unit website,

<http://www.tradeunionsdunit.org/profiles> , under the 28 April section.

We look forward to working with you to make this year's 28 April the most successful yet. Please send all information and reports to:

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