

**Tuesday 28 April, 2009**  
**Backgrounder**

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

Our Priority for 2009

**Good Occupational Health  
for All Workers**



☞ This document is available at:

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*International  
Commemoration  
Day Symbol*

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

## Tuesday 28 April Backgrounder

### The International Commemoration Day (ICD) For Dead and Injured Workers<sup>1</sup>

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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 workplaces<sup>2</sup>.

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 as 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.

28 April became an “international day” in 1996 at the United Nations in New York, when a Global Union delegation lit a Commemorative Candle and Incense for workers who are killed or become ill because of their work, as well as to promote Decent Work and Sustainable Workplaces. Inspired by events surrounding the 1993 Kader toy factory fire they chose the occasion of a special “Day of the Workplace” organised by international trade union representatives with the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in New York to inaugurate this tradition.

Since the 1996 celebration at the UN, the international labour movement has observed and promoted 28 April around the world, and it is now officially recognised by national governments in

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<sup>1</sup> **28 April ICD was officially supported** at the 2006 ITUC Founding Congress in Vienna when the world’s trade unions called for “world-wide recognition and observance of 28 April as the International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers”.

<sup>2</sup> **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>

nineteen countries or territories<sup>3</sup>. Unions in other countries are now encouraged to enlist recognition by their own governments in the same way. 2005 saw the beginning of a process to have the 28 April Day officially adopted by the UN General Assembly.

28 April is more than a ‘memorial’ day to remember victims of the past. It also draws attention to the living who continue to be exposed to risk of injury or death, and thus 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.

In this way, 28 April connects with the spirit of May Day. You are therefore encouraged to link your activities to May 1<sup>st</sup> themes wherever possible, as the right of all workers to form trade unions and bargain collectively with employers is crucial to securing safe workplaces. These rights are under attack in many countries. 91 trade unionists were murdered for defending workers’ rights in 2007, while serious and systematic harassment and intimidation was reported in 63 countries, according to the ITUC’s *Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights Violations*<sup>4</sup>.

## **B. 2009 Priority: “Good Occupational Health for All Workers”**

Our aim for 28 April 2009 is to build on our previous successes. Unions will be tackling the broadest range of concerns ever on 28 April this year. Under the general theme of occupational health for all, unions will target everything from injuries, to chemicals, to inequalities and workplace health.

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<sup>5</sup>, in conjunction with a brief programme of speeches, and a moment of silence, broken by a poem or some music. Whatever ceremonies or events are chosen, they 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.<sup>6</sup>

Since 1996, the number of commemoration events has grown. They are now being organised in 120 countries, featuring a wide range of activities which include large rallies, sectoral mobilisations, educational and lobbying events and information dissemination<sup>7</sup>. Many unions take the opportunity to publicise results of such actions as workplace assessments, surveys and research, as well as to announce initiatives they intend to pursue. In many cases, non-union organisations and government and intergovernmental bodies are involved.

<sup>3</sup> Governments that now officially recognise 28 April: *Argentina, Belgium, Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, Dominican Republic, Greece, Luxembourg, Panama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Taiwan and Ukraine*. In addition, the Andean Community of countries has also adopted 28 April for *Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador* and their associate member *Venezuela*, bringing the total to 19 countries.

<sup>4</sup> ITUC 2008 Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights Violations. For information on each country see: <http://survey08.ituc-csi.org/survey.php?&mode=pr&IDCont=0&Lang=EN>

<sup>5</sup> 28 April Candle Interpretation: Arabic: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH\\_4.AR.pdf](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_4.AR.pdf), Español: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH\\_4.SP.pdf](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_4.SP.pdf), English: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH\\_4.EN.pdf](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_4.EN.pdf), Français: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH\\_4.FR.pdf](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_4.FR.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> In 2007 more than 10 million people were involved in 28 April through activities organised by the ITUC, Global Unions and others in over 120 countries or regions across the world. See summary 2007 wrap-up at: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH\\_5Ad.EN.pdf](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_5Ad.EN.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> ♪ The ILO ACTRAV Posters in English, French or Spanish: highly visual and coloured posters that relate to relevant ILO OHS Instruments can be printed in your office as visuals for 28 April. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actrav/genact/socprot/protect/ratify.htm>

The theme priority for 28 April 2009 was chosen after widespread consultation with the international labour movement. As in past years, you are invited to focus on specific issues and sectors that encompass any or all of the following, all covered by the theme of “Good Occupational Health for All Workers”, some organizations will be focusing on the following:

**a) The causes of occupational & environmental cancers:** The booklet on occupational cancer<sup>8</sup> ‘*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 was written in clear language and produced in easily usable format.

☞ **IMF Booklet ‘Occupational Cancer/Zero Cancer: A Union Guide to Prevention’**

Available in English, French, Spanish & Russian: <http://www.imfmetal.org/cancer>.

**b) The ‘Ban Asbestos Campaign’** Evidence of dangers posed by asbestos is now considered irrefutable, and a substantial body of research findings and literature blames asbestos for the deaths of more than 100,000 people, as well as resulting costs to society.

You are strongly advised to focus your 28 April message on your country’s record for importing, exporting or using asbestos. Focussing on the ratifying and implementing Conventions or Instruments of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which pertain to eliminating asbestos use and related employment transition issues, would also be useful. 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. A country by country workbook also includes information on asbestos related activities up to last year’s 28 April:

<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.

**c). Provision of public health care for occupational diseases and injuries:** Efforts to highlight health system development and delivery for better prevention of disease or injury, or for better treatment and care of workers must be a priority.

Currently, 36% of the world’s population lacks access to health services. For many of the world’s working poor, sickness or injury often leads to job loss with no compensation or health care. The high cost of health care is the single most important determinant driving the working poor into deeper financial difficulties, and occupational injury or disease is one of the main factors aggravating world poverty.

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<sup>8</sup> For further information, consult ☞ The Hazards Magazine web site contains a special page on cancer & additional resources (in English only): <http://www.hazards.org/cancer/index.htm> or ☞ The World Health Organisation (WHO) 2007 newsletter on occupational cancers, which contains other information sources: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH\\_5Ae.EN.pdf](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_5Ae.EN.pdf)

The priority governments place on adequate occupational and public health system financing is of major concern, as is the sufficient provision of health care and other government service workers for detecting or preventing disease and injury (e.g. through research, monitoring, enforcement and inspections) or for their treatment and long-term care. We call for occupational health of workers to become a priority for these systems.

**d) HIV/AIDS.** HIV/AIDS is a workplace issue because it impacts on the health, jobs and security of workers generally and most obviously on the occupational health of workers delivering health care and health related services. As in previous years, 28 April provides an opportunity to demonstrate the capacity of occupational safety and health structures at national and workplace levels to respond to this threat by illustrating how HIV/AIDS can be and is being mainstreamed within the occupational health and safety activities of trade unions.

The right of access to public health services, prevention programmes, affordable treatment, care and support, the right to appropriate work for those receiving treatment, and to receive health and death benefits 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, especially those in the public sector, can influence governments as employers and policy makers to prohibit discrimination against the HIV positive, and to provide programmes for prevention, voluntary counselling and testing, treatment care and support for their own workers.

☞ **The TU country and workbook 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/>

**e) Demand occupational safety and health standards & enforcement:** Trade unions are invited to measure the strengths and weaknesses of occupational health standards and enforcement mechanisms in their countries against measures proposed or already accepted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Furthermore, with respect to the ILO, 28 April activities should highlight the need to ratify its OHS-related Conventions and Instruments. With respect to the WHO, activities to spotlight any provision of its *Global Plan of Action On Workers' Health* for 2008-2017 (adopted in 2007) would also be encouraged.

☞ **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](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](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](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](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](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](http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB120/B120_28Rev1-ru.pdf)

**f) Attention to cross-cutting issues:** Promotion of sustainable patterns of production and consumption is a growing priority for trade unions, especially as it implies links between occupational health & safety and social and community dimensions of development. This matter was the subject of extended discussion at the Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment (Nairobi, January 2006), in which 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](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.EN.pdf)  
 Español: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO\\_6d.SP.pdf](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.SP.pdf)

Français: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO\\_6d.FR.pdf](http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.FR.pdf)

### **C. Report YOUR activities for 28 April 2009**

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.

Therefore, be sure to keep us informed of your plans and activities for 28 April ICD by communicating in English, French or Spanish with Anabella Rosemberg at [anabella.rosemberg@ituc-csi.org](mailto:anabella.rosemberg@ituc-csi.org).

Information from each country or sector will be periodically summarised and posted in the ITUC website or through the electronic distribution list.

We look forward to working with you to make this year's 28 April the most successful yet, and thereby to advance the cause of worker health & safety another step. Please send information, reports, questions or suggestions to: [anabella.rosemberg@ituc-csi.org](mailto:anabella.rosemberg@ituc-csi.org)