

Monday 28 April, 2008
Backgrounder

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

Our Priority for 2008

**Good Occupational Health
for All Workers**



☞ This document is available at:

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewp28Ap08Backgrounder.H_5Cd.EN.pdf

Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewp28Ap08Backgrounder.H_5Cd.FR.pdf

Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewp28Ap08Backgrounder.H_5Cd.SP.pdf

☞ Periodic Updates of 28 April 2008 Activities

English http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewp28Ap08Summary.H_5Ce1.EN.pdf

*International
Commemoration
Day Symbol*

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

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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 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 Work-

¹ **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".

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>

places. 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 nineteen countries or territories³. 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 1st 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. 144 trade unionists were murdered for defending workers’ rights in 2006, while more than 800 were subjected to violent assaults and some 5,000 arrested, according to the ITUC’s *Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights Violations*. Thousands more were sacked for trade union involvement, and almost 1,700 detained⁴.

B. 2008 Priority: “Good Occupational Health for All Workers”

Our aim for 28 April 2008 is to build on our successes in 2007. 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 ceremony⁵, 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.⁶

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. 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.

³ 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.

⁴ ITUC 2007 Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights Violations. For information on each country see: <http://survey07.ituc-csi.org/getcontinent.php?IDContinent=0&IDLang=EN>

⁵ 28 April Candle Interpretation: *Arabic*: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewPH_4.AR.pdf, *Español*: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewPH_4.SP.pdf, *English*: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewPH_4.EN.pdf, *Français*: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewPH_4.FR.pdf.

⁶ 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

The theme priority for 28 April 2008 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”:

1. 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. For this reason, public health systems should also be a focus of 28 April 2008 activities because they provide a framework which determines the quality and scope of more specific occupational services available in each country. In addition, in countries where worker compensation or worker rehabilitation is inadequate or non-existent, public health care often provides the last resort for workers.

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.

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, and that governments provide finance for both occupational and public health care. Increases in support for better health system provision must go hand in hand with other health programmes of concern to workers, e.g., cancer prevention and prevention, treatment, care and support for those living with or affected by HIV/AIDS.

In planning 28 April activities, the role of employers must not escape your attention. They have a major role to play in enforcing existing or new workplace standards on occupational health or for supporting new public policy initiatives directed at occupational and health system strengthening, where appropriate.

2. Framing 28 April 2008 around specific activities⁷: In order to clearly and practically illustrate the above, you are encouraged to plan your 28 April activities around specific aspects of occupational health, some of which have provided a focus for previous ICDs. These might include:

a) The causes of occupational & environmental cancers: The release of a booklet last year on occupational cancer provides a valuable resource for OHS Enforcement, asbestos and related themes, and 28 April participants are highly encouraged to build upon last year’s activities⁸. ‘Occupational Cancer/Zero Cancer: A Union Guide to Prevention’ was produced by the Inter-

⁷ 📄 **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>

⁸ 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

national 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 in preparation for 28 April, 2007.

☞ **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' In January 2008, the ITUC issued a circular to all affiliates concerning progress in the Global Unions' 'Ban Asbestos' campaign since it was kicked off in June 2005⁹. 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) HIV/AIDS & the G8 Campaign 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 2008 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/>

⁹ A 2006 campaign update provides good examples of possible activities for focus on 28 April. ☞ 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

Focus the G8 - Victory is within reach! Last year, many unions engaged in a campaign 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 June 2007 Summit in Germany. Trade unions made substantial progress last year when Germany, in its role as the G8 chair, responded to trade union and civil society allies by issuing the first-ever report on G8 accountability on HIV/AIDS. Many of you hand-delivered a letter to the German G8 Embassy in your country to press for such a Working Group as a means of ensuring progress on issues from one Summit to the next. This includes the G8 promise of universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010, strengthening health care systems and making treatment affordable by reducing the price of drugs. This year you are asked to focus similar activity on the Japanese embassies in your own countries

d) 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). For 28 April 2008, we strongly encourage you to involve both the Health and the Labour Ministries or Ministers in your activities.

Both the ILO and WHO are expected to once again sponsor their own activities for 28 April and information about these will be circulated as it is available. For this purpose a new series of country-by-country profiles on “Occupational & Public Health” will soon be made available to provide information about your own country’s performance along certain indicators. These profiles will be available at:

☪ **TU Public & Occupational Health Profiles**

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_7a.EN.pdf

Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_7a.FR.pdf

Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_7a.SP.pdf

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

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

e) 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

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

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

C. Report YOUR activities for 28 April 2008 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 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/ohsewp28Ap08Summary.H_5Ce1.EN.pdf

or at the Sustainable Development Unit website (under the 28 April section):

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

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: Lucien Royer, royer@tuac.org.