

## International Labour Organization (ILO) inputs to potential High-Level Declaration (HLD) - ICCM5

Dear SAICM Secretariat colleagues,

Dear German Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection,

The following contribution provides a response to the CALL FOR SUBMISSION OF VIEWS: *Possible High-Level Declaration of the Fifth International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5)* to be held on the 25 - 29 September 2023 (Bonn), on behalf of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this input.

--

### **The High-Level Declaration should take note of and acknowledge that:**

1. Workers are among those most exposed to hazardous chemicals and waste in nearly all sectors around the world and are at risk of serious injury, debilitating chronic conditions and death. They are exposed to hazardous chemicals throughout the entire supply chain: from primary extraction, to production, to handling, to storage, to transport, to disposal and treatment of waste chemicals.
2. Every year more than 1 billion workers are exposed to hazardous substances, including pollutants, dusts, vapours and fumes in their working environments<sup>1,2</sup>. Many of these workers lose their lives following such exposures or suffer from non-fatal injuries, often resulting in life-long disability and debilitating chronic diseases.
3. Estimates published by the ILO have found that over 2.78 million workers die each year due to their working conditions; and that exposure to hazardous substances claim the lives of around 1 million workers<sup>3</sup>. This translates to at least one worker dying every 30 seconds due to occupational chemical exposure<sup>4</sup>.
4. Workers in developing countries, economies in transition and in the informal economy are particularly vulnerable and frequently have limited occupational safety and health (OSH) protections. In addition, consideration should be made for groups of workers such as women, youth, people with disabilities, migrant workers and those in the informal economy or micro-, small and medium sized enterprises, who may be particularly vulnerable to being exposed to chemical risks or their effects.
5. Workers may be exposed to numerous different types of chemicals, including 'classic' chemical hazards, such as pesticides, asbestos and heavy metals, as well as 'emerging' chemicals, for example, nanomaterials, or novel

---

<sup>1</sup> ILO. 2021. "Exposure to hazardous chemicals at work and resulting health impacts – A global review".

<sup>2</sup> WHO/ILO. 2021. "WHO/ILO joint estimates of the work-related burden of disease and injury, 2000-2016: global monitoring report." Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240034945>

<sup>3</sup> Hämäläinen, Päivi, Jukka Takala, and Tan Boon Kiat. 2017. "Global estimates of occupational accidents and work-related illnesses 2017." *World 2017*: 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> UN. 2018. "Report from the Special Rapporteur on Toxics "Workers' Rights and Toxic Exposures" - report to UN Human Rights Council."

substances that enter the market each year. The HLD should ensure that all chemicals are included in an inclusive matter, to protect populations from existing hazards as well as those that may appear in the future.

**In addition, the HLD should reference and commit to the following:**

**1. International Labour Standards as essential components towards a normative framework for sound chemicals and waste management**

There is a need for normative, legally binding instruments on chemicals and wastes as part of the beyond 2020 framework. The ILO has adopted more than 40 international labour standards on the protection of workers, as well as the public and the environment, from occupational safety and health hazards, including those from chemicals and wastes. These include international labour standards on chemical safety, such as the ILO Chemicals Convention, 1990 (No.170) and the Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents Convention, 1993 (No. 174), as well as sector-specific instruments, for example, the Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184) and risk-specific instruments, for example, the Occupational Cancer Convention, 1974 (No. 139). International labour standards offer a legally binding framework for action on sound chemicals management and should be referenced and integrated within the HLD (see Annex I).

**2. A “safe and healthy working environment” as a Fundamental Principle and Right at Work**

Following the addition of ‘a safe and healthy working environment’ to the ILO’s Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRW)<sup>5</sup>, the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) are now designated as fundamental Conventions. ILO member States, even if they have not ratified these two conventions, are now obliged to follow up on their commitment to tackling workplace hazards, including the protection of workers from chemical exposures. It is important that the HLD emphasizes a human rights-based approach, taking into account the systems approach for managing OSH provided for in Convention No. 155 and Convention No. 187 as a framework for managing chemicals and hazardous substances in the world of work.

**3. The promotion of decent work and green jobs within a just transition**

Decent work is work that is productive, delivers fair income, includes adequate social protection and ensures security in the workplace, including safety and health at work. When considering the sound management of chemicals globally, the ILO advocates for human-centered policies that ensure new strategies, policies and technologies consider the potential risks posed to workers and mitigate them appropriately.

The environment and the world of work are intrinsically connected. As the world works to address the root causes and impacts of climate change, new green technologies continue to emerge in the world of work with new potential risks for workers. Ensuring the sound management of chemicals and waste within new green jobs is crucial toward ensuring decent work.

As the economy transitions toward a greener and more sustainable economy, a just transition ensures that workers are not left behind and that decent work opportunities are created as new technologies emerge and means of production evolve. Within a just transition, it is important to ensure that any potential risks from new chemicals utilized toward green processes are appropriately eliminated or controlled.

---

<sup>5</sup> ILO. 2022. “A safe and healthy working environment is a fundamental principle and right at work”. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/safety-and-health-at-work/areasofwork/fundamental-principle/lang--en/index.htm>

#### 4. **The importance of the world of work contribution to SDGs**

Improving the sound management of chemicals in the world of work contributes to the following sustainable development goals (SDGs): SDG 3 Good health and well-being, SDG 6 Clean water and sanitation, SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth, SDG 12 Responsible consumption and production, SDG 13 Climate action, as well as many of the other 17 goals. Improving the sound management of chemicals through the supply chain and life cycle of chemicals helps ensure health and well-being for workers and the public who may come into contact with these substances. Furthermore, as chemicals are widely used in the world of work in nearly every sector, improving their management at the workplace level and throughout the supply chain can reduce their impact on the environment and the wider public.

#### 5. **Social dialogue as a mechanism towards sound chemicals management in the world of work**

Meaningful involvement of tripartite actors, including workers, employers and OSH authorities at the government level, is key to ensuring the sound management of chemicals throughout their lifecycle through negotiation, consultation and information sharing. Social dialogue acts as an essential driver toward development and implementation of strategies to improve chemicals management and address workplace risks, through ensuring that roles and responsibilities for action are defined and that knowledge and lessons learned from all parties are taken into account.

### **Annex I: International Labour Standards on OSH and Chemicals**

#### General Chemicals Conventions

- [Chemicals Convention, 1990 \(No. 170\)](#)
- [Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents Convention, 1993 \(No. 174\)](#)

#### Occupational safety and health standards

- [Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 \(No. 155\)](#)
- [Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 \(No. 187\)](#)
- [Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 \(No. 161\)](#)
- [List of Occupational Diseases Recommendation, 2002 \(No. 194\)](#)

#### Risk specific standards

- [Benzene Convention, 1971 \(No. 136\)](#)
- [Occupational Cancer Convention, 1974 \(No. 139\)](#)
- [Working Environment Convention, 1977 \(No. 148\)](#)
- [Asbestos Convention, 1986 \(No. 162\)](#)

#### Sector specific standards

- [Safety and Health in Construction Convention, 1988 \(No. 167\)](#)
- [Safety and Health in Mines Convention, 1995 \(No. 176\)](#)
- [Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 \(No. 184\)](#)