



XVth INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE

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Session: Leaders in the World of Work – 14 July 2004

**Address by Mr Antonio Peñalosa
IOE Secretary-General**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am most pleased to be here today, under the umbrella of the ILO, in tandem with my natural social dialogue partners, the ICFTU – which is represented here by the African Secretary-General, Mr Andrew Kailembo. I most warmly thank the ILO, through you Mr Lisk, for inviting us to the debate and for giving us the opportunity to share with all present our commitment to and efforts in the struggle against HIV/AIDS.

My organization, the International Organisation of Employers, with a network of 138 national employers' organizations in 134 countries, is the recognized institution representing the interests of employers in international social and labour policy matters. Here, in Thailand, the Employers' Confederation of Thailand (ECOT) has been very active and highly motivated in guiding interested Thai companies to draft policies on HIV/AIDS at the workplace.

Since 1920, the IOE has been coordinating the voice of the business community in the ILO. We have a long experience in social dialogue as we have discussed and agreed with the trade union movement international labour standards, declarations, codes, guidelines, etc. within the ILO. We regularly unite efforts with unions at the international level for the respect of fundamental principles and rights at work. However, the first statement ever signed between the ICFTU and the IOE at the global level was in May last year when we signed together a programme for future engagements to fight globally against HIV/AIDS.

It is extremely gratifying to say that employers' organizations and trade unions, with the support of the ILO, are working together in the most harmonious way. Since one year we have jointly organized several meetings in Africa. Together, we sponsored a resolution for action at the ILO African Regional Meeting, and three months ago we launched the IOE-ICFTU national action plan in eight African countries. Employers and trade unions are working together world-wide, but in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania we have already established special pilot programmes.

To paraphrase the 2001 United Nations General Assembly Declaration of Commitment, no one group can win the fight against AIDS alone. Collaboration – be it with governments or other actors – is the key. For employers at the national level, collaboration between worker and employer organizations is critical if the fight against the pandemic in the workplace is to be successful. Employers and workers as the real actors at the workplace have a community of interests. Employers' organizations and trade unions together are stronger than the sum of their individual forces.

Fighting HIV/AIDS in the workplace is part of the employer organizations' agenda in numerous countries, mainly in the developing world, as it represents a fundamental social and labour issue as well as a threat for their companies and the national economy. Numerous employers in these countries, both individually and collectively, have taken and continue to take initiatives to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on their business and communities. They want to protect their workforce and wish to provide solutions to those infected.

We have all heard of the tremendous efforts and great impact of large numbers of multinationals in bringing the fight to the workplace level throughout the world. Their solidarity and unique commitment have been indispensable to mobilize international responses.

At the same time, very few know about the mobilization of the African, Asian, Eastern European, Latin American and Caribbean local business community. I take this opportunity to invite all of you to consider at your appropriate national level how to unite efforts with your local enterprises and their national organizations, and I especially invite international development agencies and multinational enterprises

interested in some specific countries or sectors to work with them. The IOE would be extremely pleased to facilitate any approach and exchange.

Local enterprises in remote areas in the plantation, mining, transport, tourism and agriculture sectors are uniquely placed for strategic actions on prevention or access to care. The ILO, the IOE, employers' organizations and enterprises themselves have developed tools (such as handbooks, guides, plans of action, codes, etc.) to undertake actions at the enterprise level. The ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work has been accepted as the most appropriate tool for employers and workers at the workplace.

However, for the IOE, any effort at the national level has to be fully integrated within the national strategy. Enterprises, be them local or multinational, cannot and should not replace government efforts. These efforts should be complementary and should be coordinated. Governments should also be transparent, effective and reliable.

At the international level, the IOE is mobilizing its membership. We are grateful for the support accorded to us by UNAIDS. This has enabled us to jointly develop a specific guide "The Employers' Handbook on HIV/AIDS – a Guide for Action" which is now available in English, French and Spanish. The guide is aimed at assisting employers' organizations and individual companies to develop a broad HIV/AIDS policy and programme, encompassing prevention, education, care and support for infected employees, fair employment practices and, above all, support to surrounding communities.

Similarly, the IOE and the Employers' Group in the ILO have supported the ILO Director-General in his efforts to address the challenges posed by HIV/AIDS in the workplace. The Employers' Group sponsored a special resolution during the June 2000 International Labour Conference, encouraging the ILO to become more involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS, which led to the establishment of the ILO AIDS Strategic Objectives. Through a process of tripartite dialogue, and unanimous support, the ILO developed the Code of Practice of HIV/AIDS and the World of Work which I mentioned earlier, which establishes a broad framework for action in the workplace by employers, workers and governments.

What I have said is promising, but also hides a great number of problems and challenges which are before us:

1. We have had, and continue to have, problems to mobilize employers and their organizations in the not heavily-affected areas to take a proactive response to HIV/AIDS in the workplace, before the pandemic becomes a reality.
2. The informal economy – which represents the weakest side of the economy – is often forgotten and for the organized world of work it is difficult to approach.
3. The integration of workers living with HIV/AIDS is a real societal problem which unfortunately is also present at the enterprises level.
4. Building partnerships and synchronizing present efforts within the business community is extremely important. No-one can win alone. The IOE welcomes the collaboration with other business groups providing support at the national and international level.
5. Building expertise and mobilizing resources in the developing world is the key to any action plan.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my personal and institutional commitment to strengthen our collaboration with the ILO, UNAIDS, the Global Fund, the unions and with all of you in order to bring light, hope, care and work to all.

Thank you.

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