



INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION OF EMPLOYERS  
ORGANISATION INTERNATIONALE DES EMPLOYEURS  
ORGANIZACION INTERNACIONAL DE EMPLEADORES

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## ***PRESS RELEASE***

# **World Employers Renew their Commitment to Address HIV/AIDS Issues in the Workplace**

***Mexico City, 6 August 2008 – The 17<sup>th</sup> International AIDS Conference, held between 3–8 August in Mexico, was attended by many high-profile participants representing the very broad sectors of society affected by the ubiquitous illness. The President of the IOE<sup>1</sup>, Professor Wiseman Nkuhlu, was among these participants sharing employer experiences to reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS ‘on’ and ‘in’ the workplace.***

The conference – which takes place every two years bringing together scientists, policy makers, community leaders and private sector representatives to take stock of the illness around the world and examine new ways to respond to it – was officially inaugurated by, among others, the Director General of the WHO, Dr Margaret Chan; the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon; and His Excellency the President of the United States of Mexico, Felipe Calderon.

In recognition of the IOE’s mobilization of the employer community to take a proactive response to the pandemic illness, Professor Nkuhlu, accompanied by a high-level delegation of IOE members from Pakistan, Kenya, Jamaica and Mexico, was invited to share experiences on the role of employers in helping reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS on businesses at the national level.

The IOE team also took part in a major panel discussion focusing on responses to HIV/AIDS in the workplace and how business initiatives can complement those carried out by the community and the government. Speaking during this session, the IOE President said:

“The IOE is pleased to join the international community in reaffirming its commitment to provide universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support by the year 2010. Members of the IOE throughout the world have been actively developing and implementing holistic approaches to HIV/AIDS in the workplace and in surrounding communities for some years. These efforts have achieved tremendous results and we are delighted to have the opportunity to share and showcase some of the most innovative of these initiatives in the context of this Conference.”

The IOE, however, also voiced concerns over the economic and social impact AIDS was having on the most productive segments of the population – many countries reporting that the supply of labour was declining both in terms of productivity (among workers affected by HIV) and in ‘absolute terms’ as death rates continue to rise.

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Concerns for the resources to implement HIV/AIDS programmes among vulnerable populations – which in some countries include significant numbers of migrant workers and refugees – were also expressed.

In addition to this, the growth in the number of people newly infected with HIV was pushing governments to divert public funds and resources to cover the corresponding rise in cost for treatment and care where, otherwise, such resources could have been used for capital investment to fuel economic growth at a time of economic downturn.

In the light of these facts, the IOE and its membership have renewed their commitment to help mitigate the impact of AIDS by continuing the implementation of workplace training and non-discriminatory programmes as well as redoubling their efforts to support HIV prevention and education strategies in the communities in which their businesses operate.

Recognizing the importance of mutual support and unity of purpose and direction to combat this illness, the IOE President urged for partnerships with the World Bank, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, and other institutions to provide the appropriate support to SMEs.

Finally, business has a vested interest in the fight against HIV/AIDS as the disease not only can kill the staff member and destroy his or her family, but it can also jeopardize the business' ability to develop or even sustain itself for the future. Furthermore, business, by combatting HIV/AIDS, is also making its contribution to society's efforts to address this global health emergency.

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<sup>i</sup> The IOE is an international member-based organization founded in 1920 representing the business community in all areas of social and labour policy. Its membership numbers 148 national employer federations in 140 countries