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DEVELOP NEW OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH STRATEGIES AT INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL AND  
COMPANY LEVEL TO DEAL WITH WORK RELATED STRESS- MALLIKARJUN KHARGE

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Union Labour & Employment Minister Shri Mallikarjun Kharge, has called upon the world community to come together to develop new occupational safety and health strategies at international, national and company level to deal with work related stress.

Shri Kharge was addressing the XIX World Congress on Safety and Health at Work in Istanbul, Turkey today. He said that globalization of economies the world over has taken deep roots in the recent years. Together with the development of the new information technology regime, it is bringing about radical changes in society. Occupational safety and health has not remained aloof from these changes. The greatest challenge today for the countries is transforming difficulties into opportunities.

He reiterated that the magnitude of the global impact of occupational accidents and diseases at workplace as well as major industrial disasters, in terms of human suffering and related economic costs, have been a long-standing source of concern both nationally and internationally. According to ILO estimates, over 2.3 million workers are killed due to work related accidents and diseases world-wide every year. This amounts to approximately 6,300 work related deaths per day. Economic losses because of work related accidents have been tremendous.

He mentioned that the downturn in the global economy in the past three years has led to loss of jobs. This has resulted in work related stress, depression, family break-ups, alcoholism, drug abuse and in some extreme cases, suicides.

Shri Kharge emphasized that the recession in the global economy has affected the profitability of a number of companies. Consequently, a number of companies have cut down their occupational safety and health budgets. Though the companies may think that they save some money in short term, the overall cost in terms of accidents, ill-health, injuries and downtime would be much greater. Investing in occupational safety and health can reduce both direct and indirect costs to the company. It would decrease the injuries and accidents, thereby improving efficiency and productivity. It would also decrease absenteeism and improve the worker morale. This could again result in better performance of the company reducing payments of insurance premium at company level and social security pay-outs at Government levels.

He called upon the international community for the development of an appropriate response to these issues, which should rely on and make use of the collective body of knowledge, experience and good practice in this area. Safety and health measures are necessary to create and sustain a safe and healthy working environment. Furthermore, such measures can also improve quality, productivity and competitiveness.

He informed the House that Government of India has factored all these issues in its National Policy on Safety, Health and Environment at the Workplace in 2009. The policy seeks to provide a statutory framework on Occupational Safety and Health in respect of all sectors of economic activities. It lays down the rules for designing a suitable control system of compliance, both, through enforcement and incentives. It focuses on improving administrative and technical support services along with enhancement in research and development capability. It also emphasizes an improved data collection system.

While talking about improvements in Occupational Safety and Health standards, he emphasized the importance of OSH in the agriculture sector. This is a special concern for countries like India, where almost 65% of the population is engaged in agriculture and related activities. There is a huge scope for research and development in safe agriculture equipment, pesticide, fertilizers and other agricultural practices. There is a need to develop a comprehensive policy comprising guidelines, awareness generation, education, training, implementation, follow up, data collection, research & development.

He mentioned that we need to go much beyond legislation for a comprehensive solution to all these issues. Governments, employers, workers and NGOs all over the world must help to generate a nation-wide campaign to raise public awareness about giving importance to occupational safety and health in the national agendas.

The minister concluded with a call to ensure that Occupational Safety and Health policy should subserve the equitable cause of all the workers in the work of world collectively.

The World Congress on Safety and Health at Work Congress is held every three years, the last one being held in Seoul. The Congress is being organised this year by Turkey jointly with International Labour Organisation and International Social Security Association.

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