

The **FORUM & FEDERATION Symposia Series** draws attention to the health of workers globally. In every part of the world, the vast majority of adults work, whether formally or informally, in the workplace or in the home. Daily work for income and family support is one of the most important shared experiences of adults worldwide.

The health of workers is essential for household income, national domestic product, and the global economy. There is much at stake in keeping workers healthy. Yet workers are subjected to risks and sources of ill-health from which they are unevenly protected, across all countries and at all levels of national income. Just as adults globally share the experience of work, they share occupational risks

The FORUM & FEDERATION Symposia on workers' health are jointly organized by the NGO Forum for Health, an organization of 25 health NGOs, and Public Services International, a federation of 600 trade unions in 150 countries, of which 40 percent are in the health sector.

The series highlights current issues of health and safety at work that are central to the mandates of health NGOs and of health trade unions. The Symposia bring together trade unions with key partners in the United Nations system, national governments and civil society. They are designed to bring trade union perspectives to the attention of the international health stakeholder community.

The first Symposium was held on 6 December, 2011, on *The prevention of occupational sources of Noncommunicable diseases: a needed addition to the WHO Action Plan for a Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable disease*.

The WHO Action Plan on noncommunicable diseases has been widely supported by international health stakeholders and was the subject of a High-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2011. Much had been expected from the Declaration adopted by the High-level meeting, notably that the Action Plan should be expanded to include areas of work that are associated with, or even included within the noncommunicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, mental disorders (including neurological disorders and Alzheimer's disease) and occupational health.

Nevertheless, the Declaration was adopted without these inclusions. The issue of HIV/AIDS, it could be argued, has an adequate political framework provided by the mandate of UNAIDS and the WHO Programme on HIV and AIDS, as well as a support structure provided by the Global Fund. As for mental disorders, a WHO plan of work to address the *Global burden of mental disorders and the need for a comprehensive, coordinated response from health and social sectors at the country level* was supported by an important resolution of the WHO's Executive Board in January 2012, which will be recommended for adoption by the World Health Assembly in May 2012.

Issues of Occupational Safety and Health are addressed by both the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization, and they collaborate on a number of them. Many noncommunicable diseases are occupational in origin, notably among the cancers and chronic lung diseases. Furthermore, sedentary occupations are associated with two other major groups of noncommunicable diseases, namely, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes (when obesity is a cause). Beyond this, mental disorders, stress-related problems, and violence - including physical violations, psychological harassment and verbal abuse - are important critical health problems that are present in the workplace in all parts of the world, and which can be widespread depending on factors that are both internal and external to the workplace.

As all adults work in some capacity, it could be argued that the ill-health of workers because of their work is central to the constellation of noncommunicable diseases in adults. The importance of this argument, and the extent to which it should have been considered by the High-level meeting, and

the extent to which other avenues to promote Occupational Safety and Health were questions addressed at the Symposium, by the speakers and in the debate.

Presentations were made by:

Dr. Igor Fedotov, International Labour Office's Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment (SAFEWORK)

Mr. Abu Kuntulo, West African Health Sector Unions Network (WAHSUN)

Dr. Ivan Ivanov, World Health Organization, Department of Public Health and Environment (P.N.E.)

The opening symposium was to all accounts a success, greatly enabled by the excellent presentations from the speakers. Following the presentations that highlighted key issues in regard to workers' health and the discussion from the floor, there was a call to launch an alliance to promote occupational safety and health policy and action, such as an Occupational Safety and Health Alliance (OSHA) that could allow for cooperation between the multiple stakeholders.

The FORUM & FEDERATION Symposia Series will continue in 2012, with a first event in May, and a second in December.