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## **UN forum on healthier and safer workplaces kicks off in Istanbul**



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The United Nations labour agency has brought together more than 3,000 leaders and experts from over 100 countries to discuss how to ensure a culture of safety and health at work amid the uncertain global economic environment.

The XIX World Congress on Safety and Health at Work, co-organized by the International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)) and the International Social Security Association (ISSA), has before it the latest ILO report on occupational safety and health, which shows that the overall number of fatal work-related accidents and diseases increased between 2003 and 2008.

The [week-long meeting](#) in Istanbul – the world’s largest gathering of health and safety experts – will discuss issues such as comprehensive and proactive approaches to safety and health at work; social dialogue and partnerships on occupational safety and health; and new challenges in a changing world of work and an uneven global economic recovery.

In his statement on the occasion of the World Day for Safety and Health at Work, observed annually on 28 April, ILO Director-General Juan Somavia had stated that dramatic events such as this year’s nuclear accident at Fukushima, Japan, or the Pike River mining accident in New Zealand last year feature in the headlines.

“Yet most work-related injury, illness and deaths go unnoticed and unreported. Workers and families are commonly left unprotected and unaided to cope,” he noted.

According to the report, there have been considerable advances in occupational safety and health over the past decades, due to an increased understanding in many countries of the need to prevent accidents and occupational diseases.

There is also a growing acceptance of the heavy burdens that unsafe and unhealthy working conditions impose on women and men's health and their well-being, in addition to the adverse affects on productivity, employment and the economy as a whole.

However, the report points out that the global economic recession appears to have had a significant impact on workers' safety and health and on their working conditions.

“While it is too soon to tell what long-term effect it has had on rates of accidents and ill-health, there is evidence that some of the recent advances in terms of promoting OSH [occupational safety and health] are being lost as enterprises struggle to remain productive.”

This week's meeting is also expected to set the guidelines and priorities ahead of the next global gathering in 2014.

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