

Message from the Director-General for the Launch of the Red Ribbon Health Campaign for Employees

(Beijing, 25 November 2004)

My warmest greetings to all of you gathered in the Great Hall of the People for the launch of the Red Ribbon Health Campaign for Employees. This is an important initiative for China – and the world.

HIV/AIDS causes great human suffering. First there is the loss of life. But it also devastates families and destroys communities. It leaves children without parents; grandparents without support. It damages business – they lose workers, productivity decreases, costs increase. HIV/AIDS holds back development. We estimate that in ten to fifteen years, the labour force will be between 10 and 34 percent smaller in high-prevalence countries, as a result of AIDS. In many cases it is primarily highly skilled and experienced workers are lost.

HIV/AIDS is a public health issue and a medical challenge. But it is also linked to gender inequality - without social and economic empowerment, women will be more vulnerable to infection; it is also linked to unemployment and poverty which influence people's life choices and possibilities, the information they have and their access to care.

Those of working age are hardest hit by HIV/AIDS. Over 27million of the estimated 42 million people living with AIDS are workers. HIV/AIDS is a workplace issue and this is why the ILO has engaged in the fight. Our action is guided by principles of non discrimination, tolerance and solidarity.

We focus on: analyzing the human capacity and labour implications of the epidemic; giving policy guidance; mobilizing and supporting workplace action and tripartite engagement. We develop tools to guide action and I am certain that the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work and accompanying training manual will be invaluable as you develop your work place initiatives.

The ILO is pleased to be associated with the Red Ribbon Campaign.

I commend the All China Federation of Trade Unions, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the Ministry of Health, the China Enterprise Confederation and the China Enterprise Directors Association for coming together in this way to bring HIV/AIDS out of the darkness; to promote awareness; to protect the rights and interests of employees; to prevent the spread of infection; and to improve the health and well being of employees living with HIV/AIDS. .

When China sets herself a goal it is taken seriously – you work systematically to achieve it. Fighting HIV/AIDS demands such commitment. China can lead by example in the global campaign against HIV/AIDS.

Count on our support and I wish the meeting every success.

