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AND EXHIBITION ON OCCUPATIONAL
SAFETY AND HEALTH (COSH 2004)

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TAN SRI-TAN SRI, DATUK-DATUK, TUAN PUAN

ASSALAMUALAIKUM WARAHMATULLAH AND GOOD MORNING

Firstly I would like to thank the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) for inviting me to be here with all of you this morning. The Government of Malaysia is very much concerned about occupational safety and health and I am delighted to be a part of this very important conference.

The efforts of NIOSH in organizing this annual event should be applauded, as it is a most commendable initiative towards enhancing occupational safety and health awareness in Malaysia. This year, I'm told that our regional counterparts will also be participating for the first time ever. Indeed this is a welcome development and I am confident that with their involvement, this National Conference and Exhibition on Occupational Safety and Health (COSH 2004) will contribute significantly towards raising our occupational safety and health standards to a higher level.

I am pleased to note that the speakers for this year's conference are made up of specialists, practitioners and academicians from all across the country and also prominent figures from other parts of the world who have flown in from their respective countries to be with us. I am certain

that the collusion of ideas from these experts and practitioners will contribute significantly to the success of this conference

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While there are a number of workplaces with sophisticated and proactive comprehensive occupational safety and health programs which exceed the minimum requirements and intent of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) 1994, there remains quite a large number of workplaces that are still not up to mark and remain below the acceptable standards in terms of safety and health.

There are various factors that cause this problem. In some cases there is a lack of commitment and communication in co-coordinating the implementation of occupational safety and health programs, whereas in other workplaces there is an absence of awareness and knowledge on issues of occupational safety and health.

In this regard, it is important for NIOSH, as an organization entrusted to perform specific functions relating to Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), to provide a platform for employees, employers, academia, OSH practitioners, industries and members of the public to present their views and ideas on OSH issues. This conference would indeed be a most suitable platform for such a purpose. It is the best avenue for those who are striving to upgrade the safety and health standards in their respective companies and organizations, to raise their concerns and to cooperate in formulating the best solutions and strategies to address those concerns. Ultimately this will lead to improvements in the safety management systems in the workplace, the enhancement of safety standards in the country and in the long run it will lead to increased productivity.

I believe we have had some measure of success in increasing public awareness of the importance of safety in the workplace. I'm pleased to note that the rate of workplace accidents have decreased by 12% last year, compared to the workplace accident rate of 2002. However, with accident rates standing at an average of 7.4 accidents for every 1,000 workers, clearly whatever accomplishments we have made is still not sufficient. In

the year 2002, SOCSO paid out more than RM 600 million in workplace accidents compensation. That such a substantial amount was paid out indicates that there is still much room for improvement, as far as occupational safety and health in the workplace is concerned.

We need to enhance the efforts to curb workplace accidents, and we need to do so collectively and immediately. Employers, employees, union members and everyone involved must strive towards a zero-accident target in every workplace. This should be a common goal of the highest priority for everyone concerned.

On the part of the government, we are always ready to do all that is necessary to improve the quality of safety and health in workplaces in Malaysia. I am pleased to note that the Ministry of Human resources is taking various initiatives towards this end, not the least of which is its focus on behavior-based safety initiatives to help create a positive, safe and healthy work culture.

The theme for the conference is therefore most apt. There can never be a complete discussion of workplace safety without a detailed look into human behavior. If accidents that happen because of mechanical failure or natural occurrences cannot be helped, at least we can reduce the number of accidents that are caused by negligence, ineptitude and carelessness.

This focus on the human aspect entails monitoring the workers' behavior at work and the promotion of OSH programs aimed at getting workers to change or improve their behavior so that they will emphasize OSH in all areas of their work. It also involves the emphasis on open communication between employees and employers on safety issues and it empowers employees to act whenever their safety is being neglected.

Although accidents can and do happen, there are various measures that we can adopt to limit their occurrence. Accidents can be reduced if we make prudent and cautious work practices part of our culture. Meticulousness about safety must be a core value for all our workers. We must always remember that even if we have the most perfect systems in place, the best and most modern equipment and the most sophisticated tools, it will all be meaningless

in combating disasters in the work place, if human behaviour is not altered and changed for the better. Every person is vulnerable and can potentially be involved in accidents, unless they apply high standards of safety to themselves in their work ethics and in their practices. This reality must be driven into the minds of every person in every workplace, so that negligence is not tolerated and safety is never compromised.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It has been ten years since the introduction of OSHA 1994. I am glad that The Human Resources Ministry NIOSH, the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) and SOCSO, have made great strides in ensuring a better safer and more conducive working environment for Malaysian workers. I hope this kind of synergy and cooperation can be not only continued, but also strengthened and enhanced so that all issues and problems relating to OSH can effectively addressed for the benefit of all Malaysian workers.

There are about 11 million employees serving the nation in various capacities, every working hour of every working day. At any given time, accidents can occur and lives can be affected or be irreparably damaged. Where it is within our power to do so, we must prevent such accidents from happening. This is our collective responsibility. A responsibility that is not just the sole burden of the government but one that must also be shared by organizations, companies and individuals.

I hope this conference reflects the commitment of everyone here to this good cause of reducing or even eliminating accidents in the workplace and I am optimistic that the convergence of ideas at this forum will result in good, concrete and practicable measures that can make our country a shining example of a nation that cares for the well-being of her people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate NIOSH for successfully convening this conference and on behalf of the government, may I express our thanks to all of you here for your contributions towards making this

conference a success. With your co-operation and contribution, I am confident that we can achieve our vision to make Malaysia a nation renowned for its best practices in occupational safety and health. I wish you all the best in your deliberations and discussions.

On that note, it is now with great pleasure that I declare NIOSH 7th Annual Conference on Occupational Safety and Health 2004, officially opened.
Thank you.