

Conference to highlight occupational health and safety issues in the workplace



FNU Acting VC Professor Mohini Singh (3rd from right), with Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports, Parveen Bala, ILO Pacific Director Donglin Li, key stakeholders and participants at FNU's 2nd National Conference on Occupational Health and Safety.

Organisations must be prepared to anticipate new and emerging work-related safety and health risks with the advancement in technology, shifting demographics and the rise of new challenges due to extreme weather patterns and a result of climate change.

Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports, Honourable Parveen Kumar Bala, highlighted this whilst delivering his keynote address at the Fiji National University's (FNU), National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC) 2nd National Conference on Occupational Health and Safety today.

The conference is organised by NTPC in collaboration with the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and the International Labour Organization (ILO). More than 200 representatives from various business and stakeholder organisations are participants at the conference, which is held at the Novotel Convention Centre in Lami.

The conference focuses on the theme 'Safety and Health at the Heart of the Future of Work'.

The Honourable Minister said that workplace injuries and illnesses could only be prevented if all stakeholders understood the hazards and work proactively, rather than reactively, to address and prevent it.

"Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) audits prove that workplaces where there are active health and safety committees and proactive OHS management systems, are healthier, safer and more productive," said Minister Bala.

"A national OHS culture is one in which the right to a safe and healthy working environment is respected at all levels."

"Today's conference will provide delegates an interactive platform to explore, share and discuss concepts and issues related to concerns in OHS in Fiji. And the focus will be on the emerging OHS issues and risks that will result from the changing trends in the types of jobs, working conditions and work environment of the future."

The Minister said Government is committed to ensuring that organisations complied to OHS policies to establish a safe and healthy working environment.

"No job, now or in the future, should take away your safety, health and wellbeing, or your life," said the Minister.

FNU's Acting Vice Chancellor Professor Mohini Singh emphasised that health and safety at work is a human right and a basic requirement for sustainable growth and productivity.

"Academic institutions, especially universities, take a proactive approach to prevent OHS risks by implementing stringent OHS policies at their workplace

and making their workers, students and graduates aware of OHS risks and hazards that can take place," Professor Singh said.

"FNU offers OHS courses through the College of Engineering, Science and Technology (CEST) and NTPC and there is a growing demand for our in-house courses due to its practical and hands-on nature and flexible delivery options."

"This conference is targeted to OHS practitioners in the Fijian workforce as they play an important role in the working environment."

Professor Singh said the conference also coincided with ILO's World Day for Safety and Health Work, which is marked globally on 28 April.

ILO Pacific Director Donglin Li said that work-related accidents and ill-health can be prevented with the implementation of policies, better education and trainings and active participation from all stakeholders.

"Globalisation and technological change are creating new paths to prosperity but are also disrupting existing work arrangements and affecting OHS in the work place," Li said.

"We remain committed to working together to shape a future we all want, a world of social justice and decent work for all, with safety and health at the heart of it all."

The conference concludes today with the inaugural National Safety Awards for Excellence in Occupational Health and Safety that recognises organisations that promote a culture of OHS in the workplace.



Employment Minister Parveen Kumar Bala delivers his speech as Chief Guest at FNU's 2nd National Conference on Occupational Health and Safety.