

WELCOME ADDRESS (GEISCon 2018 TAKORADI) – Ato Van-Ess (STCCI CHAIRMAN)

The Convener of GEISCon, Dr. Toni Aubynn

Nananom,

Hon. Minister of Employment And Labour Relations, Hon. Ignatius Baffour Awuah

The Keynote Speaker, Mr. Michael Tesch Sanz

The ILO SCORE Coordinator, Mr. Kwamina Amoasi-Andoh

Sponsors and Partners of GEISCon 2018,

Hon. Members of Parliament,

Right Hon. Presiding Member of STMA

Hon. Assembly Members,

Metropolitan Chief Executive of STMA,

District Chief Executives,

Representatives of MMDAs,

Members of the Media,

Members of the Business Fraternity,

Distinguished Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Members, Council, Executives and Staff of Sekondi-Takoradi Chamber of Commerce & Industry, I wish to welcome you to the 4th Edition of the Ghana Extractive Industry Safety Conference (GEISCon), GEISCon 2018.

With GEISCon's increasingly high status as the biggest conversation for Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) awareness and competence building in Ghana, STCCI is pleased to celebrate with you the ushering in of Ghana Industry Safety Conference (GHISCON). Being the

maiden edition of the new era, we wish to welcome Industry Ghana into the field of efforts to safeguard the lives of humans, assets and the environment.

Hon. Minister, though the suffering caused by accidents and illnesses to workers and their families is incalculable, economically, the ILO has estimated that more than 4% of the world's annual GDP is lost as a consequence of occupational accidents and diseases. Employers and companies continue to face costly early retirements, loss of skilled staff, absenteeism, loss of valuable properties and high insurance premiums due to work-related accidents and diseases.

Further ILO specific conventions (Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981. No.155 and Promotional Framework for OSH Convention, 2006. No. 187) provide for the adoption of a coherent national occupational safety and health policy. These conventions also call for actions to be taken by governments and enterprises to promote occupational safety and health and improve working conditions.

All stakeholders need to work with government to develop policies by taking into consideration national conditions and practices. There are too many conditions and accidents that have happened recently in Ghana that call for collective action immediately. Sadly, many of these tragedies are preventable through the implementation of sound prevention, inspection and reporting practices.

Hon Minister, recalling from the first edition of GEISCon, GEISCon 2015, we stated that Ghana had no comprehensive national occupational health, safety and environment policy, which provide standards for adherence by industry. Three years down the line, there still exists pieces of scattered legislations and regulations such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Act (Act 490) and Factories, Offices and Shops Act, LI 328.

In my welcome address in 2017, I indicated that Regulatory Agencies in Ghana are woefully under resourced to carry out their respective mandates. The inability of these agencies to perform their oversight responsibilities and strictly enforce compliance at their respective sectors have brought untold hardships, pain, suffering and in some cases death to some employees.

Owners of capital have, also, lost millions of Ghana Cedis in assets and the damage to our environment, which cannot be estimated.

Hon. Minister, STCCI is fully aware of the efforts your Ministry is putting in to establish a national OHS framework. During GEISCon 2017, we called for the establishment of a Safety and Health Commission. We wish to revise our request and this time around, call for the establishment of a Safety and Health Authority.

Hon. Minister, one of the recommendations of GEISCon 2016 is the creation of an SME HSE Fund to support SMEs. We believe that the SME HSE Fund, among other benefits, will be the platform to build a sustainable OHS culture and management system in SMEs in Ghana. Based on the preparatory work we have done since the GEISCon 2016, we can assure you that Industry is willing and ready to support the setting up of the Fund. STCCI can, also, assure you that we are set to implement the initiative. We need government's support and analyzing your vision for your Ministry, we believe you and your Ministry are well prepared and well positioned to take leadership of this initiative.

Hon. Minister and Nananom, most large companies have the attitude of doing it alone. But building a safety culture is a collective responsibility requiring cooperation, collaboration, sharing of knowledge and resources and supporting initiatives such as this conference. That is the driving reason for accepting the Hon. Minister of ELR's recommendation that this Conference is widened to include the entire Ghana Industry. Particularly, Mining and Oil & Gas companies must share their superior safety and health knowledge and experiences with SMEs and Contractors who are their suppliers.

Distinguished participants, we wish to reiterate once again that, if our developmental agenda is to be realized as a country, then we need to build a safety culture paradigm that is proactive and holistic in nature. This could be achieved through;

1. Advocacy to ensure appropriate policies for occupational health and safety
2. Enforcement of OHS policies with the whip.
3. OHS Education,

4. Encouragement by motivating employers and employees to pursue safety, re-engineering of processes and modifying them to suit peoples' culture and also meet the local content laws.

As we gather this year under the theme: "Handling of Dangerous Goods: Global Standards and Existing Practices in Ghana," we hope this will be the platform and turning point in the history of Ghana to take concrete and significant steps to take care and safeguard the lives of Ghanaians, protect Shareholders' investment and protect our environment.

STCCI is humbled by the immense interests and support exhibited by sponsors and partners of GEISCon 2018. We are very grateful for the interest by all stakeholders to build a safety culture in Ghana. This conference is unique in the sense that it gathers all minds and expertise to provide the needed ingredients to advice and advocate for the right policies to be adopted by labour, employers, agencies and government to promote a preventative safety and health culture and progressively achieve a safe and healthy working environment. However, there is a lot to be done after every year's event that should not be left to STCCI alone. STCCI will continue to lead the way and expect all to support in diverse ways to promote Occupational Health and Safety in Ghana.

To paraphrase another ILO representative in South Africa, "There is a better life for all Ghanaians where the cost is not in blood or tears."

I wish all fruitful discussions, networking, business relationship creation and entertainment.

Once again, you are most welcome and thank you very much for your participation.