Why is the timely adoption of the ILO Declaration a matter of high priority.

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Occupational health and safety management systems
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Many of us across the occupational safety and health (OH&S) community warmly welcomed the International Labour Organization's declaration in 2022 that a safe and healthy working environment is a fundamental principle and right at work. The timing seemed significant given the way that the COVID-19 pandemic had increased the profile of OH&S as an aspect of organizational performance. But perhaps the timing is even more important when we consider the OH&S challenges that organizations are likely to face over the coming decade:

- **New OH&S risks associated with climate change** need to be addressed. The effects of climate change are now being widely seen across the globe and OH&S risks to many workers are being affected by extreme weather events. But the impacts of climate change go far beyond extreme weather events, as they include long term effects on biodiversity, food and water supplies, the resilience required of our infrastructure, and the means by which we produce our energy. The steps needed both to reduce emissions and to adapt our world to the changes that are already inevitable, will bring new technologies, new jobs and new ways of working, all with their own hazards and risks.

- **Workplace demographic changes** are set to accelerate in the coming years. Some countries are experiencing shrinking populations; many more are experiencing ageing populations. Countries elsewhere in the world, particularly in Africa, have growing, and predominantly young, populations. In many countries, we are likely to see more people working into old age, more female workers, and more use of migrant or immigrant workers who may have varying levels of competence in the working language of the organisation. We will have a greater age range within the workforce than ever before, with more divergence in people’s learning styles, literacy levels, and ways of consuming information. From an OH&S perspective, these changes will require organizations to pay more attention to the diversity within the workforce and to people’s individual needs, for example in the ways they induct, train, develop and communicate with people.

- **Workers psychological health and wellbeing** will continue to present both a challenge and an opportunity. The issue has received a great deal of publicity, and a variety of guidance is now available including ISO 45003: 2021 which has been widely welcomed. However, it is not clear how many organizations have yet taken measures to effectively address the potential for workers’ psychological health and wellbeing being harmed, despite the evidence that effective measures can result in better physical and mental health, improved job satisfaction and increased productivity.
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- **Advances in technology bring OH&S risks and opportunities.** They may also add new capabilities which help us better manage OH&S. There may be new or increased risks where humans must interact with machines and robots whose actions evolve over time through machine learning. Conversely, the opportunity to deploy drones and robots in place of humans in hazardous environments will enable us to reduce risks, provided any risks arising from hacking or malfunction can be addressed. Meanwhile, smart PPE, wearables and other monitoring technologies will provide workers with additional physical protection, making the worker and the work environment part of a real-time connected network.

Many of these OH&S challenges are global in nature. In addressing these challenges there is benefit from international collaboration and the sharing of experience and good practice. Standards development provides a powerful mechanism for collaboration and for the sharing of experience, with almost 100 countries currently involved in the work of ISO/TC 283. Deliverables such as ISO/PAS 45005 published in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic provide a means to rapidly share recommendations and good practice, to sit alongside regulation in countries where this exists, and to fill the gap in countries where regulation may be lacking.

So, while there are many long-established and respected sources of OH&S advice and guidance at national and international level, I believe that ISO is making its own distinctive contribution through collaboration and the building of international consensus around its OH&S standards and other guidance documents to help organizations address the many OH&S challenges that the coming decade will bring.

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