Programme director, ILO representatives, invited guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Programme director, this is indeed a proud moment for all South Africans, particularly the working masses of this country whose blood, sweat and tears went into the making of the near developed South Africa we see today. Today we are not here to lament the fact that these ‘great unwashed’ received neither recognition nor praise for the role they played and continue to play in making South Africa a better country to live in. Today we have come to say never again shall the workers be exposed to hazardous working conditions and be left to fend for themselves. South African workers who are exposed to dust and who are suffering from Silicosis must know that government, together with its social partners and our friends the world over are doing something to eliminate Silicosis.

Programme director, let me be the first to declare with pride and joy that from now on as part of the global world, this country is joining the rest of the world in a programme that will improve working conditions and reduce the global burden of occupational diseases.

Work is indispensable for individuals, for society and for the development of nations. Unfortunately work processes and operations are often associated with exposure to harmful agents and stressors. As a matter of social justice, human suffering related to work is highly unacceptable.

Just as we fought tooth and nail to depose South Africa of the evil rulers of apartheid, this government is determined to embark on the new struggle to eliminate poor safety conditions at the workplace and free our workers from the death traps of hazardous working environments with the same vigour and spirit.

Programme director, our condemnation of worker subjection to unsafe and unhealthy working conditions goes beyond the emotional empathy that we as human beings owe to our fellow human beings in the event of pain; but could also cause harm even to those who inflict the pain itself.

An unhealthy workplace could have far reaching negative influence on production and the quality of products. Consequently, this could lead to appreciable financial losses which impede development and stress our social security systems such as the Compensation Fund and the public health system; which could further lead to hardship for workers and their families.

These adverse consequences, which are economically costly to both employers and society, are preventable through measures which have been known for a long time, and which are often of relatively low cost.

The key factor in the battle to eliminate Silicosis will be for employers and workers to collaborate with each other and State agencies in tandem with occupational health professionals, to control Silica dust effectively.

The employer needs to systematically assess the workplace to see whether there is any exposure to Silica dust, and in general terms what could be done to prevent risk. Advice from competent professionals should be sought. This is quite essential, especially when dealing with complicated situations such as those posed by exposure to Silica dust. The level of training of the workforce must be improved and employers must be seen to be favouring work practices that are known to reduce or eliminate risk.

Workers on the other hand need to perform their task in a manner that does not appreciably increase exposure. This means that workers need to be trained in ‘good work practices’ and be helped to practice what they have been trained to do. Because these workers are often the ones having the fullest knowledge of what happens during work processes, their views should be sought on what leads to exposure and the effectiveness of the control measures.

The State agencies, including inspectors (Labour and Mine Inspectors) need to be able to identify dusty workplaces by inspection and measurement, suggest practical solutions and have sufficient confidence to take any appropriate action against persistent offenders, including recommending prosecution. Consequently inspectors need additional training in dust measurement and dust control solutions to develop knowledge and confidence.

My Department, together with the Departments of Minerals and Energy, Health, and Environmental Affairs and Tourism and indeed government, take prevention of occupational diseases very seriously and that is why we have prioritised Silicosis and want to see to it that new cases are eliminated by the year 2030 in line with the mission of the ILO/WHO Global Programme for the Elimination of Silicosis.

To this end, my Department as a lead agent in occupational health and safety in collaboration with other government departments and with the guidance of the ILO/WHO decided to develop a National Programme for the Elimination of Silicosis. Honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to launch this Programme.

Those people there are my inspectors who have received
specialised training to work with and to help employers and workers to anticipate, recognise, identify, evaluate, monitor and control exposure to Silica dust with a view to preventing and eliminating Silicosis.

Cooperation with them will not only ensure success of the Programme but will also ensure that workplaces are healthier, safer and more productive.

My Department and indeed government as a whole would like to see a close working relationship between employers and workers. We want to see employers and workers taking responsibility for health and safety in their workplace, thus giving credence to the concepts of ‘Co-regulation’. Those workers who have been nominated or elected by co-workers to be health and safety representatives are major allies in the fight against health and safety risks and hazards in the workplace.

Employers and workers will need to pro-actively identify hazards and develop control measures to make the workplace safe. The Occupational Health and Safety Act has given Health and Safety Representatives the right to inspect the workplace regularly and report findings to the Health and Safety Committee, which in turn may make recommendations to improve health and safety conditions to the employer. The will to eliminate Silicosis will never be realised unless co-regulation is effectively implemented in the workplace and I would like to take this opportunity to urge employers that are here with us today to involve workers from the beginning in their endeavour to implement this Programme in their enterprises. That will make your work a lot easier.

The Programme we are launching today was developed through consultation and many people contributed to it and we want to say “thank you so much” for the work well done.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Programme is not cast in stone, it is evolving and from time to time you will be asked for your advice and support to further develop it. A Working Group has been established to work with you to develop the Programme and to support the implementation of a Plan of activities. Please engage with the Working Group drawn from our social partners – organised labour, organised business and other government departments to monitor, evaluate and update the Programme.

To all of you and to the Working Group, I want to say this is not the end but the beginning of a long road to the year 2030. So gear yourself for a long and bumpy ride and when you reach your destination you will look back and say: “How glad am I that I managed to hang in there”.

To the rest of the delegates, I wish you well and those of you who will be travelling to far away places, we say: “Have a safe journey back home”.

I thank you all.

THE INTERNATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL HYGIENE ASSOCIATION (IOHA) 6TH INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE (IOHA 2005), PILANESBERG, 19–23 SEPTEMBER 2005

The IOHA 6th International Scientific Conference takes place in the Pilanesberg National Park, North West Province, South Africa in September 2005. This is organised by IOHA, the Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH) and the Mine Ventilation Society of South Africa (MVS).

The Organising Committee for IOHA 2005 is pleased to invite you to submit papers for Oral or Poster Presentation at this Conference and to promote the Call for Papers. Information on the Key-notes, Scientific Sessions/Papers and Professional Development Courses (PODs) are available in the Call for Papers and Registration Form printed booklet and PDF copy.

For Email distribution to promote the Call for Papers is available on the IOHA 2005 website, www.saioh.org/ioha2005 together with a web page for copying and forwarding as an HTML Email. Where your Email list does not render HTML properly please use the Email Text.

IOHA 2005 includes a meeting of the WHO Network of Collaborating Centres in Occupational Health and the 3rd International Control Banding Workshop (3ICBW). The Control Banding approach uses information readily available from the suppliers of chemicals and takes users through a series of simple steps allowing them to choose practical control solutions that should reduce exposures to levels which present no danger to health.

In line with the conference theme ‘Promoting Occupational Hygiene in Africa and Globally’ the Organising Committee for IOHA 2005 seeks sponsorship to bring potential occupational hygienists in African countries to South Africa for a one-week ‘Fundamentals of Occupational Hygiene’ course prior to attending IOHA 2005. On returning to their respective countries they will help promote occupational hygiene in Africa. Your valued attendance and support for IOHA 2005 will assist in achieving this ideal.

Please give consideration within your own African operations if there are any staff that should attend the fundamentals course and IOHA 2005.

To secure the conference facilities and ensure accommodation for delegates in or near the Pilanesberg in 2005, accommodation Sunday 18th September 2005 to Thursday 22nd September 2005 has been block booked. If you wish to have accommodation at IOHA 2005 before 18th September 2005 or after Thursday 22nd September 2005 please let us know ASAP.

Please register very early to ensure your accommodation in this very popular tourist area and help us finance IOHA 2005. Substantial financial deposits for the conference facilities and your accommodation have to be paid for by the voluntary Organising Committee several months prior to IOHA 2005. Please where possible, budget to stay in the Kwa Maritane or Bakubung, as to obtain the conference facilities we have take the bulk of the accommodation at the Bush Lodges. If you can register early in 2005 or even in 2004 please do so.

We believe we have put together very interesting scientific sessions and an attractive social programme. The conference provides an excellent opportunity to make contacts, discuss issues, gain and exchange knowledge and help the promotion of occupational hygiene in Africa and globally. This is the first IOHA Scientific Conference in Africa and it is unlikely there will be another in South Africa within the next half century.

We look forward to your support.

David W. Stanton
For IOHA 2005
Conference President and Organising Chair