



**International Commission on Occupational Health - ICOH**  
**Commission Internationale de la Santé au Travail - CIST**  
*Founded in 1906 as Permanent Commission*



Helsinki 20 October 2006

Mr. Sven-Otto Littorin,  
Minister of Employment  
[registrator@industry.ministry.se](mailto:registrator@industry.ministry.se)

Honourable Mr. Minister,

The International Commission on Occupational Health, ICOH, is a scientific and professional organisation with over 100-year history in the development of occupational health, safety and working life in more than 100 countries. During its history ICOH has accumulated experience and perspectives from very different trends in working life from the era of early industrialization to the present ages of new global economies and rapid development of technologies.

Sweden has for decades been known as a country with a high reputation and responsible policies in the development of working life, based on sound scientific evidence and combined with visionary social and economic objectives (so called Nordic Model). With such history Sweden has served as a model for other highly developed countries as well as for the developing countries and countries in transition. The UN Inter-Governmental Organizations, particularly ILO and WHO have always got support from the Swedish Expert Institutions in the design of strategies and programmes for occupational health and in their implementation in practice. It is also a well-known fact that many leading Swedish products have a good image thanks to the high reputation of the Country in health, safety and working conditions including, for example, ergonomics.

ICOH has recently learned from media and the Internet that the Swedish National Institute for Working Life, NIWL, is proposed to be closed down from 1 July 2007 on.

Recognizing the wide international concern on the proposed action, the ICOH, on the basis of long experience and continuously updated global analysis, wishes most respectfully to present the following information to the responsible decision-makers:

1) Occupational health and safety research provides the knowledge basis for the development of working life and health and safety at work. Such research is particularly needed in our times to ensure safe and healthful conditions of work in the rapidly changing global economies. Good working conditions are an important factor for well-being of citizens – an objective which has a high priority for every Good Government.

2) According to our international experience, every country needs a National Centre of Excellence (in most countries the Institute of Occupational Health and Safety) for research and development of working conditions, health and safety. Our experience speaks strongly for a well-organised National Institute, which can produce, collect, process and synthesize the knowledge and implement programmes needed for systematic and continuous development of rapidly changing working life. Support to occupational health and safety practices, collaboration with universities and other research institutions as well as with enterprises, authorities and social partners constitute a natural part of activities of such Institute.

3) Getting a leadership or coordinator role in the large EU and other international research programmes also requires a National Body having an international status, the necessary critical mass and multidisciplinary competence, needed in such leadership tasks.

4) There is a growing body of scientific evidence showing that occupational safety and health research has a positive impact not only on health but also on quality and usability of products and services, work motivation, innovation and productivity. The positive impact is achieved through several mechanisms; by increasing knowledge on occupational health and safety which also radiates into the product design, by preventing unnecessary losses from accidents, diseases, sickness absenteeism and disturbances of working processes and by promoting good work organization, work atmosphere job satisfaction, work ability and employability.

*On the basis of the aspects presented above the ICOH – with all respect to the authority of the Swedish Government – wishes to encourage the responsible decision-making to reconsider the proposal for closing down the National Institute for Working Life and to find innovative ways to develop the Institute further, enabling it to give the most valuable contribution for the development of conditions of work nationally and internationally. We are fully convinced that such a solution would be most fortunate for the Nation and for the International Communities.*

Honourable Mr. Minister,

Please accept our sincere consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Jorma Rantanen, MD, PhD, PhDon  
President of ICOH