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Statements

Swifter action needed as workplace dangers grow: BCFED statement on the National Day of Mourning

The most important right workers have is the right to come home at the end of the working day as safe and healthy as when they left. Yet so very often, that isn't the case.

In the past year, there were 195 worker deaths reported. We must ask: why does that number remain so high year after year? Why are there so many more workers whose lives are devastatingly altered by illness or injury? And what will we do about it?

Those questions are even more urgent as we recognize the growing, evolving array of workplace dangers workers face: the drug poisoning crisis; climate-related threats like heat, smoke, flooding and wildfires; the epidemic of workplace violence; and threats to workers' psychological health and safety.

While we've made progress — changes to workers' compensation, protections for workers handling asbestos, and trades certification and paid sick leave that make for safer workplaces — it feels lately like that progress is stalling.

We must and we will push harder. We need real accountability for employers, with improved prevention and enforcement, and penalties that see the act of endangering workers for what it really is: a betrayal of an employer's first and overriding responsibility.

We need laws and protections that respond to our changing climate, and do more to prevent workplace violence. And we need a fundamental shift in workplace laws and culture, so we treat psychological injury with every bit as much dignity and care as we do physical injury.

Today is about grief and remembrance, but it’s also about action and solidarity. As a province, we must offer more than just comfort and tears to the bereaved: we must deliver concrete change, and we must deliver justice.

We must never accept that workers’ lives are part of the cost of doing business and earning a living in British Columbia, or anywhere else.

We remember the dead. And we fight every day, with everything we have, for the living.

This year’s Day of Mourning takes place as we grieve the victims of Saturday evening’s attack on the Lapu-Lapu Day Block Party. We can only imagine the anguish this has brought to the families of those who were killed and injured, and to the Filipino community here and around the world. BC’s unions stand with them all.

We are deeply grateful to the multitude of first responders, frontline workers, community workers and health care workers — many of them members of the Filipino community — who answered the call to help without hesitation. They have worked long hours to save lives and heal injuries, to comfort families and support and protect a grieving community.

That work can take a heavy toll, and they deserve every support our community can provide. To all the workers who have responded with such professionalism and compassion in this time of crisis, we offer our solidarity and our very deepest thanks.