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*Photo L to R: Dr. Mohammed Azman bin Aziz Mohammed, Senior General Manager of Operations, SOCSO; Dr. Abu Hasan Samad, Medical Advisor & Country Occupational Health Manager, Exxon Mobil, Malaysia; Mr. Hans-Horst Konkolewsky, Secretary General, International Social Security Association (ISSA), Geneva; Dr. Kenji Kuno, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA); Mr. K. Selvarajah, Chief Executive Officer of Social Security Organization (SOCSO); Mr. Wolfgang Zimmermann, Executive Director, NIDMAR; Ms. Eva-Marie Hoffer, Head of International Social Law / European Law Division, DGUV, Germany; Assoc. Prof. Dr. Retneswari Masilamani, Society of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Malaysian Medical Association; Dr. Friedrich Mehrhoff, head of the Central Department for Rehabilitation Strategies and Principals, DGUV, Germany; Dr. Rameezan Begam binti Abd. Rahim, Rehab Physician*

## RTW Conference in Malaysia Attracts Major Audience



**The first Return to Work Conference hosted by the Social Security Organisation (SOCSO) of Malaysia, held July 26 and 27 in Kuala Lumpur, was a resounding success reports NIDMAR Executive Director Wolfgang Zimmermann, who presented a keynote address along with other major presenters as seen in the photo above to an audience of more than 1,200.**

In the wake of the conference, Edmund Cheong, Administrative Officer, Medical and Rehabilitation Section of SOCSO, provides more insight into Malaysia's committed approach to disability management.

SOCSO's Return To Work (RTW) Program was launched on January 15, 2007. The RTW Program is a multidisciplinary rehabilitation program, which as an integral part of any injury management system, is offered as one of SOCSO's benefits to insured persons with injuries or diseases. The program helps an injured or disabled worker remain at work or return to appropriate duties, and integrates components like physical and vocational rehabilitation that can assist these workers to return to their normal lives and continue to be productive.

The return to work program is a vital component for a dynamic social security system that provides a "total replacement of income" rather than compensation alone. SOCSO's Return to Work Program focuses on the concept of disability management, which is deemed essential in this era of economic and social globalization. During this challenging economic time, employees or human capital should be seen as an asset and be given priority. One of the key themes of the Return to Work Program is "engaging stakeholders." It is SOCSO's position that organizations from across the public and private sectors should be committed to delivering a healthier future for the workforce. To that end, employers are encouraged to start looking at the abilities of these workers, and not their disabilities, and continue to support the government in achieving a better non-discriminatory working environment for all Malaysians.

With this program, SOCSO hopes to achieve the following objectives: to realize the aspiration of people with disabilities to be integrated and sustain a meaningful employment; to support employers in achieving productive and stable workforces; and to educate human resource, workers' compensation and disability specialists on successful techniques to enhance the social security system through the RTW Program.

The global demography is dynamic and both employers and employees must be vibrant in adapting to these changes. All employees are important to the organization; hence employees who have become victims of workplace hazards should be rehabilitated and be given the opportunity to return to their workplace.

With such a program in place, we are able to realize the aspiration of having decent work in Malaysia; a continuous and sustainable social system; the "inclusion" and not "isolation" of disabled workers within the working environment; and to achieve the Prime Minister's vision of "people first, performance now." This program will contribute immeasurably to improving working lives and will underpin the Ministry of Human Resources' Decent Work Agenda by offering free and impartial advice to employers in Malaysia on disability management and return to work issues.

The Decent Work Agenda is not just for the government. There are responsibilities for all the stakeholders, including employers, individual workers and the medical fraternity, with SOCSO as the catalyst for this project. The Decent Work Agenda starts from the premise that, overall, work is good for you, but that regrettably, work is often perceived as an activity that can damage health. But the workplace can also be a place where we can help to improve overall health, reduce health inequalities and offer improved life opportunities.

With this conference, SOCSO hopes that all employers and organization representatives who attended this event will be ready to incorporate disability management within their organizational practices. With an effective and efficient case management process in place, Malaysia will be looking at a higher rate of recovery where the injured worker will be able to retain their work or to return to the labour market, and achieve independence, financial security and contribute towards the social and economic development of our country.

To achieve the vision, we need everyone involved to recognize the importance of the relationship between work and health, families, communities, organizations, employers, unions and society as a whole. It is a team effort, and a change of mindset is needed to break away from the traditional ways and approach of social security, which has been to depend solely on compensation.

Social security is not only about compensating for the loss of income, but to provide a "total replacement of income" through rehabilitation and return to work strategies. With this system in place, the Malaysian social security system will continue to remain sustainable and affordable to enable our country to compete in this competitive environment.

