

WELCOME SPEECH BY THE NHLS CHAIRPERSON OF THE
BOARD, PROF ERIC BUCH, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH COVID-19
CENTENARY WEBINAR

Dr Ivan Ivanov, **Head: Occupational & Workplace Health, WHO**

Prof Salim Abdool Karim, **CAPRISA Director: CAPRISA Professor of Global Health, Columbia University; Vice-President for Outreach and Engagement of the International Science Council**

Dr Barry Kistnasamy, **National Department of Health National COVID-19 OHS Work Stream**

Ms Aggy Moiloa, **Inspector General: Department of Employment & Labour**

Dr David Msiza, **Chief Inspector: Department of Mineral Resources**

Ms Chimwemwe Chamdimba, **New Partnership for Africa's Development**

Prof Koleka Mlisana (**NHLS Executive Manager: Academic Affairs, Research & Quality Assurance**)

Prof Daan Kocks, **South African Society of Occupational Medicine**

Ms Denise Minnie, **South African Society of Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners**

Prof Cas Badenhorst, **Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene**

Ms Lisa Seftel, **National Economic Development and Labour Council**

Mr Cas Coovadia, **Business Representative**

Mr Matthew Parks, **Labour Representative**

Dr Christy Adeola Braham, **Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing**

Prof Mohamed Jeebhay, **Head: Division of Occupational Medicine, School of Public Health Medicine, UCT**

Prof Rajen Naidoo, **Head: Discipline of Occupational and Environmental Health, School of Nursing and Public Health, UKZN**

All NHLS Colleagues & esteemed guests present

It gives me great honour to welcome you to our National Institute for Occupational Health COVID-19 Centenary Webinar.

The NIOH is one of the divisions of the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) that plays a significant role in the provision of occupational health and safety services to workplaces - both in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. The NIOH works together with other subsidiaries of the NHLS including the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) which includes National Cancer Registry, and the newly integrated Forensic Chemistry Laboratories.

As we celebrate this milestone - the 100th training session under the theme: SARS-CoV-2/COVID19: **Strengthening Occupational Health Resilience for National Emergency Epidemic Response for South African Workplaces** - please allow me to reflect on and acknowledge the suffering and grief, the myriad disruptions to lives and livelihoods and business operations that we have felt as a country over the past two years. But in what is perhaps a hopeful sign, we are now rebuilding our way back to normalcy as infection rates are at an all-time low.

As the NHLS, we worked together with the National Department of Health from the onset of the outbreak and participated in all planning, advisory and decision-making committees. During the initial phase of the pandemic, testing for SARS-CoV-2 was done by the NICD thereafter, working together, the NHLS rapidly decentralised testing to its laboratories as COVID-19 case numbers started to increase.

The NHLS continues to play a pivotal role in providing testing for COVID-19 in the public sector and has been instrumental in researching about the SARS-CoV-

2 virus while also providing advisory services to the National Department of Health and other stakeholders.

The pandemic, as we have witnessed, impacted workplaces across the globe and the NHLS certainly was no different. The NIOH provided substantial advice and guidance to the NHLS Board and Executive Management in drafting mitigating strategies and updating Health and Safety policies. The Institute took the lead in creating awareness and advising workplaces, both in the public and private sector, in assuaging and preventing the spread of the pandemic.

In collaboration with academia and experts from numerous National Government Departments, the NIOH contributed to COVID-19 regulations, directions and guidelines related to workers and workplaces. Webinars and other training events were used to equip the industry with the tools required to protect and promote workers' health and safety, including the safe return to work during the pandemic.

Today, I am pleased therefore to celebrate with you this milestone – the 100th training webinar - with over 53 481 participants being trained on COVID-19-related topics to date.

Our collective action, responsiveness and relevance as an organisation has demonstrated how we could contribute to the national agenda in a time of a pandemic.

I hope this day of reflection allows us to foster existing partnerships and establish new ones as we continue to build upon the foundations of unity and cooperation that have already been laid.

I wish to acknowledge and thank the NIOH staff and the NHLS community for their steadfast commitment and dedication as well as the many stakeholders and partners here with us today that have provided support to the NIOH in its outbreak response.