

AFRICAN PREPARATORY  
CONFERENCE FOR THE WORLD  
SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT

*Nairobi, Kenya, 15-16 October 2001*

## Trade Union's Statement

### 1. Introduction

Trade Unions have been represented in international discussions on sustainable development by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) which represents over 155 million members in 148 countries. The ICFTU has been assisted in this work by the International Trade Secretariats which union members in specific sectors. Since the Earth Summit in Rio 1992 trade unions have been designated as major group in Chapter 29 of Agenda 21 and has been taking part in sessions at the CSD, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)

Recognising that :

1. On viewing issues of sustainable development at global level The North and South divide should always be noted. For the North the main problem is over-consumption as the cause of environmental degradation, while poverty is the cause of environmental degradation in the South. For the North it is about choice of consumption for the south it about survival. Different sustainable development strategies must be emphasized in relation to the North and South (no one size fits all), whatever the strategy it also must be implementable.
2. Workers have a major role in sustainable development.
  - a. workers, their families and communities are amongst the first to suffer the effect of unsustainable development.
  - b. The world's workplace are both centres of production and consumption, and should therefore be the focus of effort to achieve sustainable patterns of production and consumption.
  - c. Workers and trade unions are major agents of change, in both the workplace and within the community.

Workers and trade unions are asking for:

1. Integration of the three 'pillar' of sustainable development, with focus on the social dimension (poverty eradication including food security, decent employment, creation of employment including focus on just transition, advances on public control and management of land, water, energy and vital utilities.
- 2.
3. A focus on workers and workplace-based strategies for sustainable development (decent employment, creation of quality and durable employment, workplace and worker participation, workplace

agreements that build on occupational health and safety models, recognition of links between public health and workplace health and safety). There must be commitment by governments to ratify and implementation of ILO core labour standards and other international agreements as a means to facilitating this process.

4. Attention to employment and social transition programme (social protection)
5. Implementation of Agenda 21 particularly Chapters 14, 19 and 29
5. Review of economic and social policies in consultation with workers as one of the major and most affected stakeholder.

In summary we call governments to

- Ensure that environmental policies also look at community pollution as well as health conditions at work. This in turn requires a significant expansion in the public sector in order to provide infrastructure to the poor. Experience worldwide demonstrates that private providers will not provide adequate quality services for those who cannot pay. The result is waste and poor quality. In KwaZulu Natal, charges for piped water led directly to a cholera outbreak.
- Ensure that environmental policies incorporate the principle of “just transition” – that is, the costs of new measures to improve the environment must be borne by those who can best afford it. This can be achieved in part by establishing open and consultative processes, ensuring that labour and poor communities have a voice in decision-making. It also requires the development of regulations to protect workers’ interests in these situations including retraining, and other social plan measures. Industrialised countries must contribute to the development of less polluting forms of production and consumption. At the core of unsustainable development lies inequality in **power relation between capital and labour/working class both at a global level as well as at local level, huge unemployment rates and poverty.**
- Ensure that strong environmental policies are linked to coherent and effective measures to address unemployment. Otherwise communities and workers may feel they have no choice but to protect any jobs they can get.
- Have clear and strict policies concerning Export Processing Zones to avoid cheaply manufactured goods from finding their way into the local markets thus contributing to the closure of local industries. To ensure that workers work under human conditions and this can be achieved by opening the zones to trade unions.
- Ensure that workers and communities have access to the information they need to make informed judgements about the trade offs around pollution. We need much more coherent research into the nature of environmental

degradation in Africa, and campaigns to ensure that workers understand the implications.

- Ensure that we develop a more balanced approach, which will raise living standards for the poor directly as well as enhancing the environment. That means defining the main environmental issues from the standpoint of working class and wider communities.