

Trade Union Submission to UNED Multi-Stakeholder Session, September 23, 2001

(Summary of presentation delivered by Winston Gereluk, Public Services International on behalf of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD)

1. We begin with the observation that the trade union delegation is able to agree in principle with virtually all of the points in the Synthesis Paper compiled by the Forum. The broad agreement revealed in this Paper indicates that Major Group (stakeholders) could be doing much more to support each other in the process leading to South Africa, as well as in other events related to sustainable development.
2. Each major group will continue to contribute to the joint effort according to its special interest or competence. In this regard, the trade union's focus is the Social Dimension, in particular, Poverty and related Employment issues. We appeal to other Groups to work more closely together to support each others' positions whenever possible, noting gaps revealed in the Synthesis Paper. (WWF position paper employed as an example).

The Place of Workplaces, Workers and Unions

3. A reminder that trade unions have developed a position on Social Dimension issues through a historical process that has combined direct action with theoretical discussion; i.e., we have not relied on persuasion alone. In the process, we have developed practical models for tackling some of the issues that all groups should be able to agree upon.
4. If direct action is required to correct current unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, the workplace must be accepted as a most important venue or 'focal point'. Workplaces are, after all, centres of world production, as well as major consumers in their own right, and they possesses enormous potential for changing consumption patterns in the other major focal point for changing patterns; i.e., in the community.
5. If the work place and process are to be changed fundamentally, as demanded by sustainable development, it follows that workers and their organizations – primarily trade unions – must be centrally involved.

Trade Union Approaches to the Social Dimension

Our position on social issues is integrally related to our history of action. To illustrate:

6. It is accepted that *Action on Poverty* is crucial to achieving sustainable development. As a matter of fact, this objective has been a major focus (or *raison d'être*) for unions from their inception. Unions went beyond discussions concerning injustice, and the need to redistribute wealth by taking direct and ongoing action to change society, beginning at the workplace. As a result, in every country or sector where trade unions are active, a significant gap separates the wages, benefits, security, occupational health & safety and other terms and conditions enjoyed by unionised workers from those of their non-unionised counterparts.

7. Our position on *Social Cohesion* has likewise been informed and supported by concrete action. With respect to governance issues, trade unions are responsible for significant gains in democratic or shared decision-making in both the workplaces and community, with related implications for transparency, accountability, etc. In the course of this struggle, they have demonstrated that social democracy is impossible without industrial democracy – unfortunately, the latter is virtually non-existent without strong unions.

8. Our position on the *Environment* itself is closely integrated with our history of action/analysis. For example, we have developed models for occupational health & safety that are now broadly-accepted as standards around the world. These are currently being adapted by trade unionists to advance the environmental pillar of sustainable development, as are the processes for workplace assessments and implementation that we have developed jointly with employers.

Our Appeal to Other Major Groups

Based on the centrality of workplaces to any strategy for sustainability, and the above observations on concrete actions workers and trade unions have initiated (and are prepared to continue) to advance the Social Dimension, we are asking other groups to note our priorities in their positions wherever possible, especially in the multistakeholder aspect of the WSSD process. Trade unions are prepared to reciprocate, of course. As a minimum, we are asking Major Groups to:

9. Recognise the pivotal role that workplaces, workers and trade unions must play in any strategy for sustainable development. In particular, please note the Employment and Industrial Relations implications of any recommendations or positions you are advancing (e.g., note the employment implications of measures to combat Climate Change);

10. Comment on the efficacy of workplace-based actions for achieving sustainable development objectives, *especially those related to the Social Dimension*. In particular, in your reports and recommendations, incorporate references to the joint workplace assessments, target-setting, implementation, monitoring and reporting tools that are currently currently utilised by joint workplace committees around the world; and

11. Recognise the impact which existing patterns of unsustainable development have on workers and their communities. Likewise, recognise the effects which recommendations for change are also certain to have, and employ these observations as the basis for insisting on Just Transition Programmes, as these are the key to winning acceptance and worker participation in any national, local or industrial strategies for change. The trade union demand for Just Transition is the key to our whole position, and illustrates why attention to all three pillars of sustainable development is so necessary.

We would be pleased to supply information relating to any of the above.

Winston Gereluk

Trade Union Presentation to Europe/North American WSSD Prepcom (ECE/CEE ENHS Meetings), September 24, 2001

(A summary of the presentation delivered by Winston Gereluk, Public Services International on behalf of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD)

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Delegates, Valued Colleagues in Major Groups, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am indeed honoured to make this presentation on behalf of the international trade union movement, specifically the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD. I represent the Public Services International, the international trade union body which includes many of the people who work for your governments.

Firstly, I want to report to this assembly that we have noticed a sharp increase in awareness amongst our trade union membership about the environment, and a heightened sense of urgency that something must be done to reverse the downward spiral in which this planet finds itself.

Workers around the world have experienced so much tragedy and suffering because of unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. However, if Assessments and reports concerning our future are at all valid, then it appears that nothing we have experienced can prepare us for the disasters and hardships that await our children – and our children’s children, and their children after that – if the World Summit on Sustainable Development fails to come up with solutions to the problems outlined ten years ago at Rio.

There is clearly a need for a New Deal, a new way of conducting business and relating to each other locally and globally. Our members are counting on you to find the answers.

The labour movement has developed an integrated position on sustainable development since Rio. This afternoon, however, I would like to draw your attention to a few sections of the Ministerial Paper you received this morning.

1. We are generally pleased with the wording and intent of Paragraph 17, which refers to the Global Compact, core labour standards, and the need for partnerships on workplace-based actions. Trade unions have always insisted that the workplace should be the focus – a starting point for action. If sustainable development is about changing patterns of consumption and production, it makes a great deal of sense. Workplaces are, after all, centres of production, and they are certainly major consumers in their own right, as well as influencing much of the consumption in the rest of society. Section 17 sends a signal to us, and to the whole world, that workplaces will receive the attention they deserve during the discussions that take place in South Africa next fall.

2. If workplaces are to be a focus of change, then it follows that worker must be involved. In this regard, unions have a unique capacity to assist this involvement – and especially to promote the Social Dimension of sustainable development.

Anyone who has worked with unions will know that we are capable as anyone else of generating rhetoric – but, what is more important, we have demonstrated that we are also capable of action to make our talk ‘come true’. We have developed a unique capacity for achieving results in the workplace and the community where our members live. In particular, we have proven this capacity in the areas of occupational health & safety, issues of social equality and cohesion, well-being and security.

3. We are likewise pleased with the references in the Ministerial Statement to the Aarhus Conference, with its emphasis on public involvement. We believe that broad-based decision-making, with its implications for transparency and accountability, must play a central role in a New Deal for Sustainable Development.

Unfortunately, in the vast majority of cases, involvement and participation in decision-making stops at the workplace door. This must change. Participation of workers is key to changing the patterns of consumption and production at the workplace, and to ensuring ‘spill-over’ effects in the surrounding community. It is also the key to winning acceptance for the huge financial commitments and shifts in public policy that will have to occur if we are to begin living in a sustainable manner.

4. We also endorse the references to the 1996 Social Summit in Section 7. However, for this Report to fulfill its purposes, it should spell out the aims of social cohesion, job security – and most importantly, poverty eradication – in more specific terms. The Social Summit provided us with a direction, but workers need to know, with a high degree of confidence, that specific programmes are in place to ensure that workers and communities affected by the transition to sustainable development – or by the failure to make the necessary changes - are fully protected. Only through Just Transition can you ensure that people who might be otherwise opposed to change, will want to become part of the process.

5.

Honoured delegates. So much rests upon the decisions you make here. So much of our future depends on the discussions that will take place in South Africa next Fall.

There is a growing sense in the workplace and the community that far too little progress has been made in the last ten years, and that the time for action has now grown very short.

Major Groups are coming together as never before, in response to the frustration with this lack of action. We are beginning to understand what we can accomplish if we act together.

However, we will continue to look to you for leadership. We expect it. Show us this leadership, and you can count on us for assistance and support.

Trade unions exist because workers always have the hope of a better tomorrow. For this reason, we will do our best to make sure that this WSSD process succeeds.

We wish you all the best.

Respectfully submitted,

Winston Gereluk