

**Séance académique pour les 20 ans du rapport Brundtland
17 octobre, 2007 – Brussels, Belgium**

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Thank you, Chair.

Your Royal Highness, Madam Secretary of State, Madam Governor, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased and honoured to be here today, not only because of the subject you are discussing but also because I am proud to participate on behalf of ITUC, representing 168 million workers in 153 countries, in a setting where a government such as Belgium has played such a historic role in the evolution of sustainable development as the world now understands it.

I also know that in the last 15 years our representatives at various international fora have been strongly impressed and influenced by the top quality work of Nadine Gouzee and her team. We have also been greatly inspired by the many top-notch examples put forward by the Belgian Council for Sustainable Development, which have helped us build sustainable development frameworks in other countries.

Also, we and the government of Belgium have shared common perspectives on social justice and on how sustainable development should be made to serve the common people, no matter what their origin, gender or economic setting.

For this reason I deeply appreciate today's reflections and sharing of ideas about our common challenges for the future.

Looking back 20 years, brings us to when trade unions and the ILO were struggling to draft Chapter 29 of Agenda 21 for "Strengthening The Role of Workers and Their Trade Unions" and in being involved in the preparatory process for the 1992 Rio Summit.

Like so many others at that time we shared a rather narrow perspective on sustainable development, mainly to mean "environmental protection" and its consequences for workers and trade unions.

I would say that the first decade after the Rio Summit especially served to clarify, for ourselves, how environmental protection was intimately connected to social justice and economic planning but most importantly how these needed to be integrated with one another in policy and in concrete practice.

In many ways workers and trade unions were the only grouping to have been deeply entrenched in sustainable development issues, since the industrial revolution.

From the very beginning we engaged in organising workers, defending trade union and human rights, promoting public and occupational health and defending, at the early stages, the rights of workers to a sustainable livelihood and helping create community defences against unconscionable employers and governments.

What is different now, is that we see these separate activities within a context of sustainable development, where our actions become linked together and linked also to the actions of other actors.

If one looks closely at the evolution of our policies as expressed each year at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development you will notice the slow clarifying of our own integration of issues, but especially of the social dimension.

We also saw in our historic mission, the convincing of the international community to integrate the principles social justice, employment & poverty, equality and social cohesion. So much so, that by the 2002 World Summit, over 400 trade unionists went to Johannesburg to defend these linkages.

I must say now, for the most part –judging from what was adopted on paper- we and other actors – including certain friendly governments- obtained operational definitions of sustainable development, placing at their core the notion of “Integration” and “production-consumption” frameworks.

Since 2002, we have ceaselessly reminded other actors of the 2002 agreements and we have shifted our gaze from that of clarifying definitions to, NOW, engaging in actions to implement these very same principles. And we have done so in concrete ways:

We have begun to develop workplace models and tools for implementing sustainable development, through ‘workplace audits’, ‘workplace assessments’ and in joint workplace committee with employers;

We have Created the Trade Union Sustainable Development Unit, which now develops a country by country body of indicators and data for analysing issues and as a framework for trade unions –at the national level- to identify their own priorities and to engage with their governments and other actors for change.

After the WSSD we created the SustainLabour Foundation, an international foundation dedicated to training and education of workers around sustainable development issues.

We have also developed common partnerships with the ILO, WHO, UNAIDS and UNEP which have translated into continentally-based work programmes – mostly for training, education and advocacy.

Finally, we have engaged in various forms of dialogue with employers, mostly at the OECD and the ILO and UNEP; although admittedly our work with employers on sustainable development remains a challenge.

With these as a backdrop, we have chosen to implement sustainable development within a triangle of issue clusters, which are:

- Climate Change & Energy
- Banning of Asbestos & strengthening our Involvement in Chemicals, overall, and
- Addressing HIV/AIDS & Public Health

I pause for a moment on the question of climate change to stress the importance for governments to adopt strong Green House Gas emission targets – at least up to the levels recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change for 80% by 2050.

As a follow up we feel that it would be important for each national government to convene the joint efforts of trade unions, employers and other representative groups to shape the oversight and implementation of targets; perhaps along the lines of the model used by the Spanish government, which I will come back to in a moment. In this context the Belgian model of promoting worker participation, ILO standards and the OECD guidelines through such tools as Kyoto’s ‘Clean Development Mechanism’, must be boosted as a way forward by more countries.

But, going back to our triangle of clusters for climate, asbestos and HIV/AIDS, I think it is important to say that in each of these clusters we make concrete efforts to strengthening the following linkages:

- Between Occupational and public health
- Between trade union rights, worker participation and national action
- Between livelihood, poverty and employment transition issues, and
- Between workplace action and training & education.

I turn now to the issue of the short and long term challenges for political leaders, from our point of view.

I would begin with the need for strong national frameworks of actions for sustainable development. These would include:

Firstly, a proper industrial relations context where trade unions and employers are not only allowed to negotiate freely but are encouraged to do so, as social partners. It is important for governments to set clear sustainable development targets and to engage the social partners in dialogue and in negotiating agreements to implement them. In addition, I would also say that specific programmes of work should be considered in this context, for example:

- the greening of workplaces and the promotion of energy and resources conservation
- linking of occupational health & safety to the promotion of stronger health systems, also
- and the coordination of environment, health, labour and social ministries in a common workplace-based programme of action for sustainable development.

A second element for a national framework would be the development of effective dialogue with employers. So far, I can only point to the current agreement between the Spanish Government and the Trade union and Employer organisations to collectively evaluate and act upon the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol in that country. I would say there is a terrible gap in most other countries of this type of format for dialogue and oversight. Many other so-called dialogue formats have taken place for sustainable development but the outcomes consistently remain vague with little follow up possible.

In addition I would say that a national framework should include the involvement of trade unions within national structures to develop sustainable objectives, targets and the means of reporting them, over time. I know that Belgium has been on the leading edge of developing what has become known as the 'National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS)' and therefore I would say that Belgium is well placed to further promote international policy for our involvement within such structures, in other countries. By '*involvement*' of course, I don't just mean being invited to this or that meeting but also to address capacity-building issues, through the identification of resources for training and education that would seek, for example, to create gender balance, etc.

A national framework should also include the development of effective planning with other Agenda 21 partners: currently the international landscape is cluttered with joint government funded-NGO-based workshops or consultations on various aspects of sustainable development. Others seek to promote multi-stakeholder dialogues. However, so far very few are set up at the national level for Civil Society to actually engage in common projects that meet jointly-agreed targets.

In addition there is a need for national frameworks to include research cooperation for employment and social transition. Currently there is no single government or agency that has focused on this as a priority on an ongoing basis. It is especially important to encourage research and development cooperation for this with the European Union, ILO, OECD and UNEP. I know also that Belgium has joined other governments in undertaking the climate change and employment study, orchestrated by the European Trade Union Confederation and others. And we hope this could become a springboard for longer term work by many more in the future.

Furthermore, more government partnerships with trade unions would be needed as a national framework. As a matter of priority, we would invite the Belgian government to consider developing concrete programmes of work, centred on any of the following:

- Training and education of workers and trade unions for sustainable development – especially in developing countries and particularly for developing and implementing national plans of action
- Support for the Trade Union Sustainable Development Unit to further its national analyses of issues, for the purpose of identifying, tracking and reporting on progress of various issues.
- Supporting the participation of developing country trade unionists in international processes, such as for climate change and other issues. At the international setting we continue to be surrounded by government-funded NGO and other participants, while our own resources do not allow for equal participation from other countries. I must say that in the last 15 years Belgium has been the only country to have facilitated such participation on any significant scale.

Finally, I turn to what political leaders can do within the international setting to support our involvement and the implementation of sustainable development as we see it. I would say by agreeing on these various recommendations:

- At the ILO to support the development of sustainable development within ILO Decent Work Country Programmes
- At the WHO, support our work in helping to implement the Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health and Safety and engaging other countries to ban asbestos and promote workplace programmes for HIV/AIDS
- At the UNEP, work with other countries such as Spain in supporting training and education programmes for workers in Latin America, Africa and Asian regions
- At the UN CSD, help support developing country participants in joining our delegations.
- At the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, support the development of Green Jobs and for climate change transition measures that will address poverty and social concerns.

On this final point about Green Jobs, perhaps I can emphasise how this focus is relevant for all of our work on sustainable development. It seems we have succeeded in galvanising some political momentum on this with UNEP, the ILO and others because of the immediate climate change crisis facing us.

What is very important here, is that we want to combine our work to better understand and address the negative impacts of change with a positive 'Green Jobs' programme. We know that this can become the engine to make employment transition real for so many workers who will be displaced by future change, not just climate change.

Again, Belgium became a model for other countries, when it decided to emulate the German example 'Wise Investments' to establish an energy conservation fund for the housing sector aimed to help households invest in energy efficiency - with possible hugely positive spin-offs on the employment side. This type of Green Job planning must become a portend of things to come.

I make all these suggestions knowing that Belgium is far ahead of other countries in supporting workers and trade unions and so much of what I am saying is aimed at encouraging what your government and political leaders can do within the international setting to encourage other governments in adopting a similar pathway toward sustainable development.

However, now I come full circle in time to focus briefly on where we are relative to the recommendations of the Brundtland Commission in 1987.

- The Commission realized a main problem to be insufficient employment opportunities and that increased **work** opportunities would be needed in many countries to combat widespread unemployment. It also identified job opportunities in agriculture, housing and forestry
- The Brundtland Commission also suggested that we aim towards attacking the sources and not just the effects of environmental degradation
- The Commission dedicated a focus on livelihood issues for the labour force.

I would say that on these three counts, the world has only taken a few first steps and that we have a long way to go.

However I am hoping that the trade union movement and others will be able to turn these first steps into springboards of action in the next decade to come.

Thank you for your attention.