

Closing Comments by Global Unions  
Trade Union Major Group – CSD 11, New York  
9 May, 2003, United Nations, New York

By Eric Frumin - UNITE  
Union of Needletrades, Industrial & Textile Employees

Thank you Chair,

My name is Eric Frumin and I come from the Union of Needletrades, Industrial & Textile Employees, here in the United States, which is affiliated to the AFL-CIO and to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

I speak on behalf of Global Unions that represent workers and trade unions around the world. I have been a proud member of trade union delegations at the CSD since 1996. I am pleased to see evidence at CSD11 that some of the concerns we have been voicing over the years are now bearing fruit, in terms of follow up.

Mr. Chair, Delegates: As you know, Global Unions have been advancing a world agenda of “Workplace Assessments” for some time. They brought it here, to CSD 11, as their centerpiece strategy for implementing agreements that were reached at the WSSD last year.

Workplace Assessments provide the framework for workers and employers to jointly evaluate their workplaces using mutually acceptable indicators and checklists, develop targets for implementation, and then monitor and report progress. Not only can they provide for joint action at every step of the way, but they also guide the workplace parties to address all three pillars of sustainable development, including basic worker security issues and other aspects of the social dimension. An active workplace focus would be the best way to guarantee employer accountability over a broad range of issues, in the long term.

The term ‘basic security’ refers to that body of issues which relates to a worker’s feelings of confidence about the future with respect to his/her livelihood, participation in decision-making and to being connected meaningfully to a community both at work and at home. Basic security very much depends upon the existence of social and employment transition programs to care for those who will be vulnerable to change. Common action on all three pillars is key to winning the support of both workers and communities. Addressing key livelihood issues in tandem with environment and economic targets will be the only way to effectively address poverty, plus generate a new spirit of political support for sustainable development, world-wide.

At WSSD, we promised to initiate a process for Workplace Assessments that would take us to the end of 2004. We engaged with other stakeholders here at CSD11, through the Partnership Fair and side events, to explore the frameworks that have to be developed at the local level with community organizations and local authorities, in order to make workplace assessments possible.

Much of our evaluation of the text adopted at CSD11, Mr. Chairman, is therefore based on our view of the extent to which it will promote and facilitate what we believe could

ultimately become one of the most significant grassroots endeavors to implement WSSD outcomes - Workplace Assessments.

We believe that CSD11 has given us much of what we need – on paper, at least. A most important point about Workplace Assessments is this - they can only flourish in an atmosphere of true partnership, one in which the parties, in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect, are truly committed to the process, to its priorities and to its design, development and implementation.

We are grateful for the support that ILO and UNEP have shown thus far. Governments, public institutions and other stakeholders will also have to demonstrate their readiness to work with us. Whether or not we receive this indication depends much more on political will than it does on adopted text! Your support to guide this will is crucial to us.

The text you have adopted here at CSD11 contains another important point. Historical obstacles to worker participation and involvement will have to be overcome if ‘Workplace Assessments’ are to proceed. In the follow-up to CSD11, Governments can help us to achieve this by supporting the workers’ right to participate as well as the other fundamental freedoms in ILO Conventions and instruments – decisively and on a continuing basis.

We are also asking you to support capacity building as indicated in your adopted text, through training and education of workers at the shop floor level. Financial support of trade unions to participate in meetings and engage in worker education is a must if they are to play a role in preparing the regional and sub-regional processes that the CSD is planning.

We are pleased that there is now sufficiently clear reference in the adopted text to the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development, especially for poverty eradication and the Millennium Development goals. This reflects more clearly the will of the CSD now than was the case a few days ago, and as such, creates a policy framework in which Global Unions are in a better position to integrate basic security issues with WEHAB priorities within our ‘Workplace Assessment’ programme.

Trade unions feel that the final text adopted by the CSD will facilitate the initial development of Workplace Assessments. They also feel that Workplace Assessments can eventually be integrated into production/consumption and national or other reporting processes, including the preparations of the UN Secretary General’s reports on implementation.

We are also encouraged by the role that has been assigned to UN intergovernmental bodies to coordinate and facilitate implementation within their areas of expertise. In particular, Global Unions continue to emphasize a leading role for the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and its World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation which must play a key role in addressing one of the major obstacles to change facing workers everywhere - their well-founded fear that change will mean loss of jobs and livelihood. The involvement of the ILO - as agreed by the WSSD - is crucial to the development of effective social and employment transition programmes as the basis for implementation of WEHAB priorities.

Finally, the text you have adopted means that Global Unions can pursue the programme of work described in our Yellow Booklet circulated during this Session. Your text gives us some of the encouragement and support we need to take our ideas about partnership clusters one

step further - to link CSD outcomes with our work on Workplace Assessments. To summarize, we propose to work on partnerships to address:

- \*\*Research and Analysis for social integration and employment assessments of climate impacts;
- \*\*Poverty eradication, equality, access and employment partnerships;
- \*\*Child protection, youth and gender equality;
- \*\*Employer accountability;
- \*\*HIV/AIDS;
- \*\*Transport & Oceans;
- \*\*Partnerships for occupational and public health;
- \*\*Linkage partnerships for production and consumption;
- \*\*Globalisation, trade and investment partnerships; and
- \*\*Public Awareness partnerships.

In closing, allow me to make a few practical suggestions relating to the format of future CSD sessions, in which Global Unions support other Major Groups. I will highlight only a few of these:

Firstly, we are concerned about obscure references to the use of Experts in the CSD process. In particular, we hope that this language does not serve to exclude or short-circuit the role of the Major Groups, as contemplated in Agenda 21 and the WSSD outcomes. Experts are free to participate through the proposed CSD structure as outlined in the Chair's draft, but if any "expert" meetings are added, criteria should include participation by major groups balanced according to region and sub-region.

Secondly, we agree that regional and sub-regional forums can serve as important venues for policy and review discussions. However, by their nature, they require considerable attention, including financial support, to ensure that participation by Major Groups from the regional, sub-regional, and local levels is not lost and that this process be directly linked to CSD and not be allowed to go off on its own.

We also support more diverse participation by sub-groups in civil society, including the elderly, educators, disabled, consumers, and others; however, this must be done through the framework of existing Major Groups. Civil society, furthermore, should be encouraged to participate in all aspects of CSD, and under no circumstances should this process be restricted to the participation of 'elite' representatives or be allowed to undermine the status of Major Groups in Agenda 21.

Finally, in drawing attention to the Bali Principles on partnerships, we re-emphasize the need to establish core criteria for partnerships, an overall mechanism for screening and monitoring,

and most importantly, mandatory reporting. Private sector participation can add important capacity to our efforts. However – and I wish to stress this point - CSD-sanctioned partnerships must never be allowed to become channels for corporate or private activity. Sustainable development must always remain the goal.

On behalf of Global Unions and working people around the world, I thank you for your attention.