

CSD-13/IPM
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On Trade Unions Involvement

Trade Union Statement CSD IPM 04/03/2005

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Challenge to CSD 13 Involve Workers and unions in meeting the MDGs

The trade union positions are premised on the fact that the best way out of poverty is a decent job. The private sector generates most jobs. But the private sector depends on solid public infrastructure, including WSS. Unfortunately, it has become evident over the last decade that the private sector can't (and won't) build equitable public infrastructure, especially not in poor countries. So, it is back to the governments to assume their role in providing quality public services, and the international community must help. Our purpose here is to develop mechanisms for helping this process.

One aspect that receives much attention is the fundamental role of human resources in all of these sectors. Without the right mix of skills and dedication of people on the ground, no amount of money will solve the problems. We are eager to integrate the social pillar of the MDGS. Given the centrality of human resources, the trade unions are fairly astounded that the international community has not called on us to help, has not challenged the trade unions to become part of the solution.

This is a big challenge. As most of you know, trade unions are organisations built by, workers, financed by workers, to help workers defend their rights and improve their conditions of work. Unions exist at the workplace, at the national level, and at the global level. For example, the federation I represent, Public Services International, was built 100 years ago, and now consists of more than 650 unions representing 20 million public service workers in 150 countries. These workers have each committed a portion of their salaries to build our global federation.

So, what can the workers and their unions do to help meet the MDGS? First of all, we know a lot about the operations of our utilities, and if a serious reform effort is needed, we have much to contribute. In PSI, we have built serious gender equity programmes, including within the unions, at the workplace and in our communities. We also have a lot of experience in south-south cooperation.

And in the broader productive and service industries, we can point to practical measures to reduce the environmental footprint. But we won't do this if our rights are not respected, or if reform processes are blindly looking to cut our jobs. I don't pretend that working with the unions is easy. But we do know our jobs, and we do know about negotiations and about change processes.

So I want to challenge this body and the chair to take a hard look at the potential offered by the trade unions in working with management, with government, with the UN and with our communities to this common effort of meeting the MDGS.

We will need the policy recognition here, in the chair's text and in the final CSD13 document in April. And to those governments that don't like unions, I say to you, don't block this opportunity for others. We all need to take some bold risks; we all need to work to build trust and cooperation, if we are to meet the MDGs.

The strength of the labour movement lies in our membership, our knowledge of the workplace, and our role as community leaders. It regrettably does not lie in our financial muscle. So, if I am to take back proposals to our national unions that we get involved in the MDGS, I am sure the treasurers of the unions will ask with whose money? We are ready to work in partnership to build up the competencies required for quality public services. We call on the international community, national and local actors to work with us to identify mechanisms, including financial, to unlock the potential that clearly exists.