



Trade Unions Set Umbrella Over UN Sustainable Development Debate

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Speaking as a representative of Workers and Trade Unions at a UN Multistakeholder Dialogue Session, Tim Secord, Legislative Director for the United Transportation Union in Canada, said the theme of industrial development should be seen as an ‘umbrella’ for all other issues being discussed at the UN Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) in New York.

If there are holes or deficiencies in a country’s industrial policy or behaviour, the resulting ‘leaks in the umbrella’ will tend to deteriorate or otherwise undermine any good intentions we may have in dealing with climate change, energy efficiency or pollution, said Secord.

“Government ministries for economic or industrial planning all too often push for growth and resource management, as unconnected to the work of other ministries for environment, health or social issues,” he said. “This lack of coherence within governments must be the subject of review by the CSD and should be corrected as a fundamental principle.”

“Workers and trade unions see the social dimension, including good industrial relations, as key to sustainable industrial development. If the working relationships between workers and employers at the point of production is not participatory or harmonious, then success in implementing CSD goals at the workplace will continue to be limited.”

“Unless worker involvement is fostered, the changes we expect from them in production and consumption will remain at a low level. Cooperation between workers and their employer must lead to joint target-setting and monitoring and bring about change – whether it relates to CO2 reduction, elimination of waste of water, or enforcement of government standards for pollution control or occupational health & Safety.”

Secord pointed out that almost every country represented at the CSD has agreed to the ILO’s “Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work” which include provisions for worker participation. Unfortunately, far too many environment and sustainable development ministries continue to act as though workers don’t exist, a fact that must be reviewed and changed.

“People must have a job and a livelihood in order to be in a position to care about the decisions of the CSD. Decent work constitutes the ‘handle and stem of the umbrella of industrial

development; without it, equality in the access to resources and services will continue to be an insoluble problem, especially for women, youth and the working poor.”

“The link between decent work, poverty and participation in decision making should be high on the agenda of this review session. As well, the impact of CSD decisions on jobs must be better understood and addressed before change takes place; in other words, a ‘just’ social and employment transition process must be a hallmark of this CSD.

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