

Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting (IPM)
17th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development
Africa – 26th February 2009

Statement on behalf of the Workers and Trade Unions Major Group

Thank you Chair.

Chair, I would like to convey you with some of the conclusions and calls for action coming from the first African Trade Union Conference on Labour and the Environment. In this conference, 24 national trade union centers agreed on some measures for advancing sustainable development in Africa.

In Africa, poverty and environmental damage appear on different sides of a common coin. Drought, deforestation, desertification, water, soil and air pollution, all have negative impacts on the lives of workers, their families and communities, with serious consequences for employment, food security and for occupational or public health.

In the Conference, trade unions pledge for and ask governments for

- Promoting Decent Work, including social protection for all African citizens.
- Making the fundamental rights of workers and their unions a central feature of sustainable development strategies.
- Ensuring gender equity and women worker issues as indicators of environmental and social sustainability and integrate such indicators into sustainable development strategies for designing and implementing change.
- Guaranteeing the participation of trade unions and other civil society groups in decision-making. Promote tripartite dialogue, collective bargaining and other democratic processes.

In addition, unions called on governments to:

- assume their roles in properly regulating companies and world markets, especially as it relates to the provision for goods and services, sanitation, health, water, energy, housing, education, public transportation and social security.
- increase their investments for environmental policies and their implementation, for example in research & development that eliminate risks and environmental pollution.
- Strengthen training for unions and workers, as a political strategy for building common labour-sustainable development actions.
- Call for "just transition" programmes to ensure that workers, negatively affected by restructuring, obtain Decent Work provisions, in the process towards sustainable production and consumption.
- Call on governments to reject the "double standards" of some multinational enterprises that "export" environmental, social and production methods to Africa, which are not allowed in the countries of origin.
- Implement the 2002 Johannesburg plan of implementation, with respect to chemicals, where the onus for chemical safety for workers, consumers and communities rests with industry.
- Promote social dialogue on national climate change policies when addressing vulnerability issues and in adaptation and mitigation plans.
- Call for a complete global ban on asbestos use, for its proper handling and disposal in accordance with the decisions of the Parties to the Basel Convention and for its inclusion in the Rotterdam Convention.

And finally Chair, call on governments to promote integrated and workplace-based approaches to fight HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases.