



AIDS campaign launched at UNEP Governing Council meeting in Nairobi Unions Press Environment Ministers for G8 Action on AIDS

Nairobi, Kenya, Friday 9 February 2007

When he hand-delivered a Global Union letter to the Kenyan Environment Minister Kivutha Kibwana earlier this week, General Secretary Francis Atwoli of the Congress of Trade Unions in Kenya (COTU) set off a four-month Global Union campaign to engage Environment, Health and Labour Ministers of all countries in their efforts to convince next June's G8 Summit to create a high-level working group on HIV/AIDS.



Kenyan Environment and Natural Resources Minister Kivutha Kibwana, along with Environment Ministers from around the world, were attending the annual meeting of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi. At this event, a team of trade unionists delivered a similar letter to every government delegation, initiating a process that will be repeated at other global meetings of Health and Labour Ministers.

In the letter, Alan Leather, Chair of the Global Unions' AIDS Steering Committee, provided a number of key environmental reasons why G8 First Ministers should support the creation of such a working group when they meet next March to prepare for the German-hosted Summit in June. Later this spring, trade unions and NGOs will deliver similar messages to German embassies in nearly 40 countries of the South, following up on a recent agreement between Global Unions and the World AIDS Campaign to work together to persuade Environment and other Ministries to join their cause.

“Not only is HIV/AIDS an unparalleled human tragedy, particularly in Africa and other Southern countries,” said Leather. “It also poses a major barrier to environmental protection, as it is totally unrealistic to expect people who are coping with high rates of illness and death from AIDS to attend to environmental threats such as climate change - a vicious circle that includes a lack of environmental protection, as environmental deterioration makes people even more vulnerable to infection,” he said.

“The 2006 Summit in Russia committed the G8 to tangible steps towards surveillance of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, with timely reporting and information-sharing. However, we have heard such promises in previous years; we continue to believe that a G8 working group is the only sure way to ensure concrete action on HIV/AIDS, and to address the erosion of the human capacity to protect the environment of the workplace and community.”

“We are not asking for a new institution, only a working or ‘experts group’ of the G8. Technical support should be made available to existing bodies such as UNAIDS and its co-sponsors, who already have monitoring mechanisms that can be utilized to make the G8 countries commitments possible.”

“Today, UNAIDS and its co-sponsors undertake the most effective measures of performance by any group or government towards their commitments on HIV/AIDS. A monitoring mechanism mainstreamed into the G8 process would yield a coherent reporting framework for such assessments.”

“The Global Union letter to the Environmental Ministers identifies HIV/AIDS as a cross-cutting issue, as defined by the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), because it links environment and public health, as well as energy and environment policy. As the pandemic deepens, skilled workers are lost to AIDS and others migrate, thereby crippling many countries’ environment and energy services.”

“At the same time, climate change and natural disasters are displacing increasingly large segments of the world’s populations from their homes and places of work,” said Leather. “It is well-documented that HIV spreads along the transportation routes that coincide with migration patterns, subjecting these displaced persons to increased risk.”

Global Unions believe that a full and integrated response to HIV/AIDS is crucial to the management of sustainable workplaces, particularly as a key component in strategies to maintain the capacity of workers and employers to take action on social issues, including environmental protection.

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Editor’s Note: ‘Global Unions’ refers to the world body that bring together all sector & geographically-based international trade union organizations. The G8 actions are part of an overall Global Unions strategy led by the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC) to influence G8 outcomes on its overall themes.

Additional Information:

1. For a copy of the letter delivered to Environment Ministers attending the UNEP meeting in Nairobi.

See: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpT_9Ba.EN.pdf

2. For ‘Country-by-Country’ profiles on the Environment, Energy and HIV/AIDS are available. See the T.Union Sustainable Development Unit:

<http://www.tradeunionsdunit.org/profiles/profiles.php?ID=0&Lang=ENG>

3. For a PDF version of the above release See http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpT_9Bb.EN.pdf