

## PLENARY 1: LABOUR AND ENVIRONMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sunday 15th January



Under the chairmanship of Arab Hoballah of the UNEP Division of Technology, Industry, and Economics, Plenary 1 started with keynote presentations by ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder, Sustainlabour Chairman Joaquin Nieto, and UNEP's Hilary French.

A constructive dialogue followed with participants from Trade Union organisations from a variety of countries. Guy Ryder said the presence of so many Trade Union representatives from such a diversity of countries was a testimony to the importance of this Assembly to the international trade union movement. He raised the question of whether this was going to be a historic meeting, which would depend on what the Assembly would do here, and how Trade Unions would follow up. Guy Ryder noted that the Assembly was a point of departure for a new stage of Trade Union work on the environment. One part of responding to this challenge is at the international level, building a meaningful and practical partnership between the Labour movement and UNEP and the ILO. Mr. Ryder reminded the Assembly that they were not starting from zero. Since Rio in 1992, when the three pillars of sustainable development were explicitly recognized, (and even before) Trade Unions have been involved. There was then a major step-up in Trade Union participation in Johannesburg at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. Making reference to the fact that, in November 2006, the unification of the international Trade Union movement is due to take place with the creation of a new international organisation made up of the affiliates of the ICFTU, the WCL and other democratic and independent trade union organisations, Mr. Ryder said that the environment must become a priority for this new organisation.

Joaquin Nieto, Chairman of the Sustainlabour Foundation made a keynote presentation on the participation of workers and Trade Unions in the workplace and in environmental policy at the local, national and international levels. He said that without social participation there cannot be democracy, nor social justice, nor environmental sustainability. Democracy is also about the right of civil society to participate actively and every day in all issues of interest to citizens. He said that it was perhaps not a coincidence that both workers' organisations and environmental NGOs had contributed so much to the concept of participatory democracy, because Trade Unions bring with them one-and-a-half centuries of experience, and environmental organisations bring a new vision of the relation between society and nature, and new proposals for social change. Referring to several key unsustainable economic activities, in the energy and agriculture sectors for example, Mr. Nieto expressed his views on the steps needed to profile a socially just and environmentally responsible transition to sustainability.



On behalf of UNEP, Hilary French emphasised that today's global economy is environmentally a threat to the economy itself and to employment. For example, India is losing more than US \$10 billion annually (4.5% of its GDP) to environmental decline. Human-induced land degradation alone causes annual losses of around US \$ 2.4 billion. The global economic impact of marine pollution, human disease and ill health, may be running as high as US \$ 13 billion annually. Losses from natural disasters (often linked with environmental decline)



this situation, Hilary French said that it was time to lay to rest the Jobs versus the Environment dichotomy, and that in fact, the truth was just the opposite. For example, in 1999, there were an estimated 86,000 jobs worldwide in manufacturing and installing wind turbines, a number that has doubled in the last two years, and by 2020 wind power may employ some 1.7 million people; the worldwide recycling industry now employs more than 1.5 million people; and in the US remanufacturing of products is already a US \$53 billion per-year business and employs some 480,000 people directly (double the number of jobs in the US steel industry). Ms. French concluded that given the growing understanding of the shared interest for the environment, the Labour movement can be a strong partner and political ally to the environmental movement in pushing for policy changes that are urgently needed to foster the transition to an environmentally sustainable global economy, overcoming some of the political divides of the past.