

ADDRESS BY JIM BAKER, Director, ILO/ACTRAV

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I would like to express appreciation to UNEP for having hosted this assembly. It clearly shows their recognition of the importance of the trade union movement in terms of education and action on sustainable development.

It is a pleasure to be in Kenya, the home of the Central Organisation of Trade Unions. COTU is a strong and independent trade union organization ably led by Francis Atwole and represented in this meeting by Deputy General Secretary George Muchai. COTU is never afraid to express its views and represent its members.

The ILO is present at this assembly with a small team. It is small, but it is, nevertheless, a good team. It shows the continuing commitment of the ILO to work with UNEP. This is not, however, a new relationship. The ILO and UNEP signed a memorandum of understanding already in 1977. That does not mean that there is not much more to do. Our cooperation needs to be expanded and intensified.

What does the ILO bring to the table in this partnership? We bring, primarily, the related value of Tripartism, with representation of workers' and employers' organizations as well as governments with international labour standards. And, those standards come with what is undoubtedly the finest system of supervision that exists at the international level.

The relevant ILO standards are not only those that might appear at first glance to be those most relevant to the mandate of UNEP, for example, the standards related to the working environment and employment. There are also the crucial enabling rights of freedom of association and the right to organize and the right to collective bargaining.

It is, in fact, freedom of association that gives workers the possibility of being actors rather than simply victims. It is that right that allows trade unions to combine the force of their argument with the argument of their force. It is what makes trade unions a powerful tool for workers. And, freedom of association forms the basis for any real democracy and for moving society forward.

The three pillars of sustainable development can only advance if they advance together. Trade unions are part of industry, but, at the same time, form part of civil society. They, in fact, both bridge and bring together the three pillars.

Our trade union struggle can and must bring together social justice, economic progress, and respect for the environment. The trade union movement, including the organizations represented in this room today, with their millions of members, can develop, working with UNEP and others, a greater capacity to mobilize for results.

Best wishes for the success of this important meeting. It will certainly develop a further series of strategies for action to for sustainable development in all of its aspects in order to make a unique trade union contribution to saving our planet.

Thank you.