

**ADDRESS BY CLIFTON CURTIS, Director, Global Toxics Programme,  
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It is an honour to be part of this global gathering, along with the more than 150 Trade Union representatives here who are shining the spotlight on important labour and environment issues.

I've been asked to speak on behalf of NGOs – a very big tent, indeed, comprised of many actors and stakeholders. I only feel comfortable speaking on behalf of the public interest NGOs, of which I've been a part since the mid-1970s. More

specifically, I'm here as a voice for environmental and public health NGOs, on whose behalf I've worked over the past 3 decades.

When asked to make a few remarks, I found myself revisiting those occasions where my work involved interactions with Trade Union heroes. Two stand out as being especially memorable.

In November 1993, the parties to the International Maritime Organization's London Convention on dumping of wastes and other matter agreed to a global ban on ocean dumping of radioactive waste at sea. That ban would almost assuredly never have occurred but for the hard work and direct involvement of Jim Slater and the UK's National Union of Seamen (NUS).

In the early 1980s, while with a public interest law firm in Washington, D.C., I had the opportunity to assist Greenpeace International with its campaign to ban radioactive waste dumping at sea. Greenpeace was urging governments to adopt a moratorium pending the results of a more detailed review of the merits of such dumping, and a few governments, most notably the UK, questioned the need for the moratorium. Jim, as General-Secretary of the NUS, and his brothers and sisters, announced a blacklisting of the handling of any radioactive waste materials in UK ports prior to a critical vote on the moratorium in 1983. Doing so forced Her Royal Majesty's Government to reconsider its position and to abstain, rather than oppose, the moratorium. The impact of that action was huge, providing tremendous momentum for anti-dumping governments, led by Spain and several others, to stand strong in support of the moratorium, and the eventual ban 9 years later.

Jim Slater passed away a few years after the moratorium was agreed. One of his last wishes was to have his ashes spread at sea, from a Greenpeace vessel, with family and friends onboard. I was unable to attend, but I was told by several who were there that it was an incredibly moving occasion. His spirit and commitment to the ban was ever-present force throughout the campaign, in the runup to and during the final vote on 12 November 1993, when victory was achieved.

More briefly noted, in the 1980s, while I was running a U.S.-based NGO, The Oceanic Society, I had the privilege of having on my board of directors, for a time, one of the major forces in the American labor movement, Harry Bridges. An Australian by birth, Harry spent much of his life in the San Francisco Bay area, where he was the leader for many years of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union. He was passionate about the seas, and respectful of the environment more broadly - beliefs and views that informed and benefited and were warmly received by my organization.

As a director of WWF's "Toxics" program, which addresses chemicals management issues, internationally, I've been involved in the recent review and refinement of our organization's mission statement. In that respect, WWF and the Trade Unions share significant, mutually reinforcing goals and visions.

The core of WWF's mission statement is "to stop the degradation of the planet's natural

environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature." This Assembly, with its focus on how to achieve that "harmony," from the perspective of humans sharing this planet with other living species and the natural world, has enriched my appreciation for the human dimension.

As part of WWF's core mission, we also have several 2050 "vision" statements, one in particular which meshes well with Trade Union interests, to wit: "By 2050, we will have established social and economic development patterns that assure the sustainable and equitable provision of natural goods and services, improving livelihoods and quality of life for current and future generations." In working toward that vision, WWF is grappling with and facing the challenge of effectively addressing poverty alleviation, charting and fostering ways to help ensure that conservation initiatives contribute to improved quality of life for workers and other people everywhere on this precious planet we call Earth.

During this Assembly, it has been rewarding to be part of your chemicals workgroup, where the participants have examined and improved a set of actions needing special attention. That group also directed recommendations to various stakeholders. For those directed to the Major Groups, they are well stated. As one wearing an environmental NGO hat, there is a corollary need for NGOs to mirror the Trade Union recommendations. NGOs, as much if not more than Trade Union reps, need to strengthen opportunities for collaboration and joint actions with the Unions, to look for opportunities to share information, sponsor joint reports and joint press releases, or otherwise reinforce each other's engagement with issues of mutual concern.

We, as environmental and public health-centered NGOs, have a lot to learn from the Trade Unions - from your struggles for human rights in the workplace, and from your commitment to standing together, united, for causes you believe in, among other noteworthy traits. NGOs stand to benefit from improved communications and shared strategies with key Unions and your workers, on issues like the EU chemicals policy legislative initiative known as REACH. As others have said during this Assembly, NGOs and Trade Unions don't and won't have the same agendas on all issues, but there are critically important ones involving labour and the environment where we can, should and must stand together.

I am deeply impressed by the dedication and commitment of everyone here in seeking more effective ways to address critical issues of labour and the environment. I will share the results of this gathering - the speeches, action points, and recommendations for various stakeholders - within WWF, as well as with other NGO colleagues around the world.

Best wishes to all of us, collectively, in implementing the important agenda for action agreed here these past three days. God's speed!