

## ADDRESS BY HILARY FRENCH, UNEP

15 January 2006



### I. Introduction and thanks

Thanks to the organizing committee for the opportunity to present some brief remarks on behalf of UNEP.

We are very encouraged by the presentations by Mr. Guy Ryder and Mr. Joaquin Nieto, representing the perspective of labour unions, and by the strong turn-out and active participation of all of the trade union members in attendance. We welcome the strong interest being expressed by the labour movement in taking action to

address global environmental problems and threats.

I've been asked to give a perspective from the environmental community.

### II. The situation is urgent: Today's global economy is environmentally unsustainable, and this poses a threat to the economy and to employment.

According to UNEP's GEO 3 Report:

The planet is at a crucial cross-roads with the choices made today critical for the forests, oceans, rivers, mountains, wildlife and other life support systems upon which current and future generations depend—and current and future employment as well.

For example,

- India is losing more than US\$ 10 billion annually or 4.5 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) due to environmental decline, with human-induced land degradation alone causing productivity losses of around US\$ 2.4 billion.
- The global economic impact of marine contamination, in terms of human disease and ill health, may be running as high as US\$ 13 billion.
- Global financial losses from natural disasters (often linked with environmental decline) were estimated to cost over US\$ 100 billion in 2004. (With the Katrina and other natural and unnatural disasters the figure for 2005 is likely to be much higher).

### III. In light of this situation, it is time to lay to rest the Jobs versus the Environment dichotomy. In fact, the truth is just the opposite:

They are mutually dependent: Good jobs depend on a sound environment, and sound environmental policy is reliant on the support and involvement of workers.

Studies demonstrate that job loss due to environmental regulations has been limited, but on the other hand the transition to an environmentally sustainable global economy is a major source of new job creation.

According to estimates by the Worldwatch Institute, creating an environmentally sustainable economy has already generated an estimated 14 million jobs worldwide, with the promise of millions more in coming decades.

For example:

- In 1999, an estimated 86,000 people worldwide were employed in manufacturing and installing wind turbines, a number that has doubled in the last two years. By 2020, wind power may employ some 1.7 million people.

- The global recycling industry now employs more than 1.5 million people.
- In the United States, remanufacturing of products is already a \$53 billion per-year business and employs some 480,000 people directly--double the number of jobs in the U.S. steel industry.

#### **IV. In Conclusion....**

Given the growing understanding of the shared interests between the environmental and the labour communities, the Labour Movement can be a strong partner and political ally of the environmental movement in pushing for the 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.

Technical knowledge important, as well as political support.

By working together, we can create sustainable jobs that are good for both the health of the planet and the health of the people who inhabit it.

UNEP is very pleased to be contributing to the process of forging new alliances between the labor and environmental movements by hosting this meeting, and we look forward to an exciting and productive few days ahead.

Thanks very much.