

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU)

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World Social Forum: Trade unions and civil society outline basis for fair globalisation

Porto Alegre, 31th January 2005 (ICFTU Online): At the closing of a 4-day event at the World Social Forum, the international trade union movement and civil society organizations outlined their vision of how a social dimension can properly be instilled into globalisation. The series of debates and workshops, which opened on 27th January in Porto Alegre, attracted in excess of 1,200 representatives of trade unions and civil society organizations. Organised by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) in conjunction with Global Progressive Forum, Solidar and Social Alert, participants examined a cross-section of issues ranging from migration and outsourcing to the impact of trade rules on globalization.

The WCL and the ICFTU, who this year organised a series of events together during the forum, showcased a new era for the labour Movement in Porto Alegre, with a planned unification of the two organisations with other democratic and independent trade unions. This will involve greater consolidation of workers' representation to increase worker protection and to achieve more and better jobs and rights at work, as defined in the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) 1998 Declaration, to ensure fairer globalisation.

"Poverty and social disparity are testaments to the serious failings of globalization" said the international trade union organisations. "We fear that this will only worsen in a climate in which governments are being forced to compete on the price of labour to attract foreign investors. This downside of globalisation needs to be addressed before it leads to damaging consequences such as social unrest" they said. "We realize that globalisation has the power to provide real benefits for our members but this requires a fundamental change in its functioning. It needs to be governed in a transparent way which is democratically accountable to the outside world."

To mark the conclusion of debates, the international trade union movement and civil society organisations today published a statement which heralds an important step in the development of a common programme of priorities. In the document, the organisations reaffirmed their support for the implementation of the recommendations in the report of the ILO's World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation.

They also called on governments to honour their commitments including increasing levels of development cooperation to 0.7% of GDP. The organisations underlined that governments and international institutions would however need to go further than this to improve the circumstances of millions of people condemned to a life of abject poverty.

"There can be no question about it - decent work must be at the heart of social and economic policy. This needs to be accompanied by social protection and equality between women and men as it is the only method for ensuring a stable and sustainable break from poverty" said Giampiero Alhadoff of Solidar.

The organisations backed fully the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) which was launched in Porto Alegre earlier in the week at a ceremony addressed by Guy Ryder, ICFTU General Secretary and President Lula da Silva of Brazil. The campaign calls for trade justice, more and better aid and debt cancellation so that developing countries can invest in jobs, education and health. The ICFTU and its Global Unions partners are making the GCAP a major focus of their work in 2005.

Following participation in a series of events and meetings at the World Social Forum, ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder and World Confederation of Labour General Secretary Willy Thys travelled on to Davos to spread the trade union message, focusing on fundamental worker' rights and the GCAP, at the World Economic Forum. A special GCAP press conference (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221150&Language=EN>) at the Davos Forum brought ICFTU President Sharan Burrow, rock stars Bono and Youssou N'Dour, GCAP spokesperson Kumi Naidoo and OXFAM President and former UN Human Rights High Commissioner Mary Robinson together with British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown and French Finance Minister Herve Gaymard. Brown and Gaymard set out their respective proposals to tackle global poverty, and encouraged the GCAP partners to maintain pressure on governments worldwide to take decisive action for global development.

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 233 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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