

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

ICFTU OnLine...

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Will 2006: Environment is a trade union priority

BRUSSELS, 16 January 2006 (ICFTU Online): The World Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment was officially opened on Sunday 15 January in Nairobi, at the head office of UNEP. Trade unions from all over the world are debating the best ways to engage in concrete action in the struggle for a sustainable environment.

This meeting - a joint initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Sustainlabour and the Varda group - brings together more than 160 trade unionists from all over the world. Non-government organisations and employer representatives have also been invited to take part. The primary objective of the meeting is to ensure more effective trade union action on the environment. Three working days have been set aside to review concrete case studies of practical initiatives in the sixty-odd countries represented in Nairobi.

The debates cover a range of topics such as corporate social responsibility, health and safety at work and trade union action for equitable and sustainable access to resources and services, along with climate change and energy policies, their mitigation and adaptation measures and their consequences on labour. Campaign action on asbestos and AIDS also features on the agenda. The conclusions of this extensive programme is expected to result, on Tuesday morning, in a series of recommendations and concrete trade union actions.

According to Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of UNEP, the environment is an essential factor in the pursuit of sustainable development, but the social dimension must not be forgotten. The partnership with trade unions is therefore of prime importance, and trade unions need to become to become prominent stakeholders in this struggle.

"This structured relation between UNEP and the trade unions brings us to the front line of the struggle for sustainable development", stated WCL Secretary General Willy Thys, adding that "there is a collective responsibility of the international institutions, the IMF, the World Bank and the trade union movement".

"The results of the meeting will depend on the will of trade unions to make the environment a priority in their plans of action", stated ICFTU Secretary General Guy Ryder. "It is essential to create an international partnership between the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNEP, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the international trade union movement", he went on to say.

The new international trade union organisation which will be created this year on the basis of the member organisations of ICFTU and WCL and of other democratic and independent trade union organisations, is expected to give priority consideration to environmental issues.

<http://www.will2006.org>

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 236 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. The ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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