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7th ASEM Summit: A step in the right direction

Brussels, 27 October 2008 (ITUC OnLine): Leaders of 43 Asian and European countries met last Friday in Beijing for the 7th ASEM Summit. They issued two important declarations, the first on sustainable development and the second on the international financial situation.

The Declaration on sustainable development includes a number of important commitments on development, climate change and social issues. The one on the financial situation calls for an effective and comprehensive reform of the international monetary and financial systems. An unfortunate aspect, however, is that all these areas are not really inter-related. "There are huge challenges in front of us. Climate change is one of them which cannot be seen in isolation from achieving progress on other key issues such as the creation of decent work or meeting the U.N Millennium Development Goals. The food, finance and energy crisis we are now facing illustrate the failure of a model. The time has come to define a new model where people and planet will be more important than profit," said Guy Ryder, ITUC general secretary.

While the Declaration on the international financial situation does not refer to social or employment issues, the one on sustainable development contains significant references to core labour standards and the recent Bali and Brussels meetings of ASEM Labour Ministers and of Social Partners. Specifically, the statement recognizes that full respect and effective implementation of core labour standards contribute positively to inclusive economic and more cohesive societies. The Declaration further states that "the promotion of full and productive employment and decent work for all is crucial to safeguard and improve people's livelihood, realize effective social cohesion and achieve MDGs."

The Leaders also underlined the key role that good industrial relations and effective social dialogue can play for sustainable development and management of change. They further welcomed and supported the activities and projects recommended in the Bali Declaration on "More and Better Jobs - Strategic Cooperation and Partnership to promote decent work and global labour markets" adopted at the 2nd ASEM Labour and Employment Ministerial Meeting held in Indonesia in October 2008.

On a less positive note, the role of the social partners is not recognized in the sections on development and climate changes. This is unfortunate, as the objectives set out in the Declaration won't be met unless trade unions and other civil society actors are fully associated.

An interesting point of the Declaration, however, is the reiteration of the international commitment of 0.7% of GNP for official development assistance but only by 2015 and to "substantive progress to be made for

international cooperation on development financing" at the Doha Financing for Development Conference.

Read the full declarations at: <http://www.asem7.cn/>

Read the ITUC Statement to ASEM VII at:

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/FINAL_statement_Bali_Oct_2008.8_Oct.final.pdf

Read the ASEM Labour Ministers' Statement at:

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/20081023092315-Microsoft_Word_-_BALI_DECLARATION_ASEM_AELMC2_FINAL.pdf

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For more information please contact the ITUC Press Department on +32 2 224 0204 or +32 476 621 018.

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