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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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5th June - World Environment Day: A Change of Paradigm Is Needed to Protect Workers and the Environment

Statement from the ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder

Brussels, 5 June 2009 (ITUC OnLine): 2008 and 2009 will remain in our memories as the years of multiple crises. Food, markets, the real economy and job crises have pushed those who were already the most vulnerable into deeper poverty. They provide graphic evidence of the failure of the economic and production model promoted over the last decades.

It is the same economic model which puts our ecosystems under pressure, making it increasingly difficult to provide adequate water services, or resulting in increasing exposures to chemical substances; putting further pressure on poor communities as a consequence of extreme weather events; exacerbating deforestation and thus the capacity of forest-dependant communities to make a decent living, and the list goes on.

To believe that cosmetic changes to the system will solve the problem is not only naïve but dangerously irresponsible. Over the last months, trade unions from all over the world have sent out a clear message: it is only through ambitious measures that we will be able to coherently tackle the many challenges that lie ahead.

This message is at the heart of the International Trade Union Confederation's policies - including those regarding the environment: responsibility and coherence are crucial.

On this World Environment Day, trade unions from all over the world make a clear call to stop dealing with social and environmental issues in isolation. Social protection, workers' rights and union involvement are key for enabling societies to move towards a more sustainable model; we all need a healthy environment and the protection of the earth's resource base in order to fulfill the needs of the future generations. We need to make the case for integrating social and environmental challenges at all decision-making levels.

This year, ITUC efforts are oriented towards promoting an ambitious and fair deal on climate change in Copenhagen, to achieving a sustainable economy that respects workers, their communities and the environment and to enabling trade unions to analyse and respond to the challenges and opportunities offered by the transition towards more sustainable patterns of development.

More than ever in 2009, trade unions are taking concrete steps in order to be actors of sustainable social and environmental change. Political will from governments is now needed to provide unions with the opportunity to be part of the solution.

The ITUC represents 170 million workers in 312 affiliated national organisations from 157 countries.
<http://www.ituc-csi.org> <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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