

New York - WSSD Information Exchange

ILO LAUNCHES WSSD AGENDA AT PREPCOM III SIDE EVENT IN NEW YORK:

- International Labour Organisation (ILO) To Focus on Social & Employment Issues

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has provided a much-needed boost to efforts to draw attention to the social dimension of sustainable development by announcing plans to become actively involved in the planning process for the WSSD and the implementation of its conclusions.

At a Prepcom III Side Event on Thursday, March 28, top ILO officials told representatives of business, trade unions, NGO's, governments, and UN agencies that planning for the WSSD is now a priority for the tripartite organisation, and outlined concrete commitments to put employment and related social issues squarely on the agenda of the WSSD, when it meets in South Africa this summer.

Allan Larsson, Special Envoy to ILO Director General Juan Somavia, stated that the WSSD Preparatory process has reached a crisis stage, and called on Chairman Salim to give Prepcom III a new start by introducing text to identify employment and investment as primary elements in its agenda. He was joined by John Longmore from the ILO's New York Office, who chaired the Session, and Larry Kohler, Special Advisor for Sustainable Development, who described the ILO's Global Employment Agenda and other ILO programmes that can be employed a basis for the WSSD to move forward on the social dimension.

PREPCOM TEXT IS LACKING: Notably absent from current Prepcom text, said Larsson, is a forceful message on employment, more and better jobs, and decent work, elements that must be present if any progress is to be made on the main focus of the WSSD, the eradication of poverty. He called on the Prepcom Chairman to make a strong case to delegates for a review and re-orienting of past policies, in favour of a full employment policy as the way to couple economic growth with social progress in a sustainable development framework.

Referring to the 'Global Employment Agenda' that was recently released by the ILO, he said that the current world employment situation rules out 'business as usual' as an option. An ILO document circulated to the Side Event said that, first and foremost, "employment in the form of more and better jobs must be identified as one of the main factors to eradicate poverty and be made the centrepiece of the WSSD poverty eradication strategy.

ILO WELCOMED AS A WSSD PARTNER: A broad cross-section of those attending the workshop, including the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Government of Switzerland, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the Trade Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC) and several others, offered their support for the ILO initiative. Several of the stakeholders echoed the sentiment expressed by Jack Whelan (ICC), who hoped that special efforts would be made in the WSSD process to bring business, trade unions and governments to the table to finally make the breakthrough on economic and social issues that is so badly needed.

"Over the next decade, the potential for economic growth is huge," it goes on to say. "To begin with, there are over 500 million working poor in the developing countries to be mobilized for more productive work - and more decent working and living conditions. In the next ten years, there will be an additional 500 million more people in the world's labour force, mainly young people with better education and training, 97 % of them in the developing world. The integration of all these people in more productive employment is the big challenge for national governments, for the social partners, for civil society, and for the UN agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions."

GAPS NEED TO BE BRIDGED: Also lacking from the current Prepcom text are the means for bridging the gaps between the three 'pillars' of sustainable development, said Larsson. Technology and investment, if properly paired, could provide such a bridge, as every investment decision involves a

choice between more or less sustainable technologies.

GOOD NEWS ON INVESTMENT ISSUES: "The good news is that when you look at sustainable development as an investment strategy, you find the key to integration among economic, social and environmental concerns," he said. "The transformation of the economy requires the involvement of economic and social actors - business, entrepreneurs, employers, workers, are the main decision-makers; they represent the 'make or break' of the process."

ILO proposals unveiled at Thursday's event clarify the role that these economic and social actors can play on a sector-by-sector approach, particularly within agriculture, energy, transport, industry, forestry, fishery and tourism. Specifically, the ILO offered to contribute to mechanisms and resources to effectively mobilise these actors to draft and follow-up on practical strategies for implementation of policies for full, productive and freely chosen employment as the basis for action in what they define as 'main economic sectors of importance for sustainable development'; i.e. the ones that threaten main life support systems on earth.

STRATEGIC ALLIANCES ARE CALLED FOR: The WSSD will be encouraged to build on the goals of the ILO 'Decent Work Agenda', for example, to provide an integrated approach to employment, social protection, standards, rights at work, and social dialogue as driving forces for poverty eradication and sustainable development. Strategic global alliances to strengthen employment and thereby combat poverty would be based on the model provided by the Youth Employment Network, initiated by the Secretary-General of the UN, the Director General of the ILO and the President of the World Bank. As well, the ILO's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and core labour standards should be recognised as providing essential support to governance for sustainable development at all levels.

The ILO Director-General will act directly to move the sectoral process forward, said Larsson, by making a long term commitment to the WSSD to organise a series of Round Tables, including employers, workers and governments, and others, to find ways to translate WSSD outcomes in which the social dimension is particularly significant into integrated sustainable development strategies for change. Other UN agencies will also be invited to bring their expertise to the table.

ILO WILL CONTRIBUTE THROUGH TRIPARTITE APPROACHES: The ILO already has already developed tripartite processes for all of these critical sectors. The announcement means, however, that the principle of joint planning by business, labour and government will now become an important feature of the WSSD process, and the basis for new partnerships. It also means that efforts by the WSSD to address globalisation can effectively utilise the ILO's World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, and Jobs for Africa programme.

For further information call:

Lucien Royer
ICFTU/TUAC
26 av. De La Grande Armeé
75017 Paris

(331) 5537 3737 general tel
(331) 5537 3734 direct tel
(331) 4754 9828 fax
LRoyer@Compuserve.com