

**OUTCOME OF THE SEA ISLAND G8 SUMMIT  
8-10 June 2004**

**EVALUATION  
BY THE TUAC SECRETARIAT**

The 2004 Sea Island Summit of the G8 heads of state, hosted by US President Bush set several new precedents. For the first time in 27 years the host broke with tradition and refused to meet with leaders of the international labour movement. In contrast to previous Summits the host and his officials also took a partisan line as regards the agenda and social issues are not featured except on the Middle East. In addition there was no final political declaration. Instead, a series of statements and initiatives were presented, themselves subject to controversy and interpretation among the G8 leaders and also the Middle-Eastern and African country leaders invited to attend side meetings. The absence of several key heads of state from Middle-Eastern states further cast doubt on the durability of some of the regional initiatives. As expected, the Summit took place against a background of unprecedented security, leaving more the impression of fear than confidence.

In line with predictions most of the press headlines focused on the divisions between President Bush and President Chirac over the war in Iraq, and its future direction. Attempts to bridge that divide distracted from any real discussion on the state of the global economy, and the only statements on economic issues as such focused on trade and debt. The trade text failed to build upon the momentum concerning a social dimension reached at last year's G8 Employment Ministers' meeting in Stuttgart. Although the leaders agreed to extend the current Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) programme for two years beyond the scheduled expiration date of end 2004, but otherwise no decision was taken to expand the initiative, in spite of support for 100 percent debt cancellation for eligible countries from some G8 members. The final G8 communiqué includes the vague commitment to "consider measures that can further help the poorest countries address the sustainability of their debt" at a later point. Meanwhile the US-led Secure and Facilitated International Transport Initiative (SAFTI) appears to have fallen short of the sponsor's rhetoric although there is some movement on facilitating travel for visa holders.

As regards the Middle-East, and notwithstanding the controversy surrounding the declaration on a new "Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa", the international labour movement will seek to ensure that governments live up to their commitment that its values will indeed be "universal", as reflected in the "Universal Declaration on Human Rights". Similarly, we look forward to Global Unions' discussions with governments on the contents of the associated Forum for the Future. The Forum will be built upon a multi-ministerial framework, and one stated aim is to support efforts to strengthen the role of all components of civil society, including by providing support for among others, trade unions. The specific reference to assisting labour unions in the "Plan of Support for Reform" in the Middle East is welcome. More broadly, the

Forum will be accompanied by a civil society to civil society dialogue to provide an input on reform efforts and implementation.

The overall outcome of the Sea Island G8 Summit may best be characterized as a few modest steps but a wasted opportunity in key areas. Little was achieved as regards the much needed task of re-building multilateralism to serve the needs of the people, especially the world's poorest and most marginalized. The international labour movement will look to shape those initiatives where we will have an influence, but our energies will focus more on the preparations for the 2005 G8 Summit to be hosted by the British Government.