

Making the environment a focus of trade union action

One year after the Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment/WILL 2006, the United Nations Environment Programme presented the publication *Labour and the Environment: A Natural Synergy* during a side event on the occasion of the 24th Session of the UNEP Governing Council and Global Environmental Ministerial Forum on 5th February 2007.

Labour and the Environment: A Natural Synergy is a joint publication by UNEP, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), workers and trade unions through the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC), and the International Labour Foundation for Sustainable Development (Sustainlabour).

The publication pictures examples of the application of technical expertise, of workplace participation, and of tools that promote workers' health and safety to problems that extend beyond the workplace into areas such as environmental protection, public health and the accountability of employers. Examples are cited of the incorporation of environmental matters in collective bargaining and in agreements at the workplace, nationally and internationally.

One key message of the publication is that broad evaluation of development alternatives and integrated policies is of fundamental importance if we are to avoid perpetuating traditional trade-offs between social, environmental and economic objectives. It is clear that environmentally related changes (such as those resulting from or responding to climate change, and the necessary transformations of production and consumption patterns) will have socio-economic impacts on labour. Protecting the environment and ecosystem services, and ensuring decent jobs and just transition, must be treated as common sustainable development policy objectives. Workers and trade unions need to support and contribute to the necessary shift in post-modern industrialization and its models.

Beyond new employment opportunities, moving towards a more environmentally friendly and sustainable global economical model represents an opportunity to contribute to poverty reduction and to tackle related issues, such as how the benefits of free trade are distributed. What is required, trade unions say, is a shift to participatory management of change, which values worker innovation, empowerment and responsibility, and an acceptance of fundamental rights and freedoms.

UNEP, ILO, WHO, ITUC, and Sustainlabour seized the opportunities to outline areas of cooperation for further implementing the Resolution of the Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment / WILL 2006. Partners agreed to jointly implement a project proposal on "Strengthening trade union participation in international environmental processes." The overall objective of the project will be to improve engagement of workers and trade unions in the development and implementation of environmental policy, e.g. at UNEP, MEAs, and other UN constituencies, with a view to improve environmental and sustainable development policies.

The project will focus on Africa, Asia Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, and on capacity building - looking to other areas of mutual interest including training

and educating on the latest developments in international environmental law in areas such as the newly adopted chemicals treaties; awareness raising; and adaptation/replication of selected case studies presented at the Assembly

In addition further areas of research such as “Green jobs, employment and environment: Environment and employment opportunities” were identified.

Additional information can be found at http://www.unep.org/labour_environment/ and the publication is also available at <http://www.earthprint.com>

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