

The WSSD Outcome: WHAT IT WAS & WHAT IT HERALDS.

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Since the conclusion of the WSSD a month ago, TUAC and the ICFTU with their affiliates have carried out assessments of the outcome of the Summit and what happens next. One is first of all struck by the different perceptions of the summit depending on whether they come from those who were present in Johannesburg or those who were not. That presence (or lack of it) largely explains the divergent opinions on the Summit and its outcomes. Those 400 or so trade unionists who took part by and large felt that the process was valuable and in any case necessary. But the vast majority of our members who were not there and thus followed events through the media see only the failures. Needless to say, Johannesburg succeeded in some ways and failed in others, so it is our task to clear up current misperceptions, to analyze and redress the failures, and to examine and encourage the successes.

Almost inevitably the Summit disappointed the hopes of some in that it did not produce more ambitious targets for sustainable development in areas other than in water and sanitation. This was no surprise, given the fact that some leading governments threw doubt on the summit's likely outcome even before it took place. Also, many doubts remain about government commitments to the Rio agreements; indeed, those doubts have increased. It is necessary however to analyse the reasons behind the failure to implement even existing commitments. The lack of political support is basically caused by the fact that the social dimension of sustainable development has been neglected or taken lightly in the years since Rio. Development that does not reduce poverty is hardly worthy of the name 'development' at all but that is what too many of the world's population have had over the last ten years and hence the G77 remained suspicious about signing up to more ambitious environmental targets. More work therefore must be done to demonstrate the links between human rights, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development. Furthermore, the malaise of job insecurity and increasing income disparity in industrialized countries has not been properly addressed over the last ten years. Unless Sustainable Development can be shown to mean Sustainable Employment – many working people who are threatened by change will not support government action to achieve it.

In Johannesburg there was also an important but confused debate on corporate social responsibility, accountability and public-private partnerships. Corporate social responsibility is a fine enough idea in itself, but at times it suffers a fatal flaw in that it tries to make the private sector do what the public sector should do, i.e. regulate and implement for the greater good. There has to be more clarity on the boundary conditions on these different notions. The protection and enforcement of civil, human, and labour rights is a domain in which governments remain the primary and most legitimate actor.

So what was the significance of the WSSD for the trade union movement? First and foremost, by coming from all over the world to take part in the Summit, the four hundred trade union representatives present demonstrated their support and commitment, and their readiness to work for change at all levels: international, national, and at the workplace. The union

conference held on the eve of the summit with, among others, the UNEP and ILO leadership, broke new ground. Secondly, the Summit led to a commitment by governments to achieve a greater integration of the three pillars of sustainable development. Thirdly, the ILO was targeted in the implementation document as an agency that now has to be fully involved in the debate and in return has to play an active role in Sustainable Development. The ILO's World Commission on the Social Dimension on globalisation, if successful, will become the body which sets the agenda for action under the social pillar of Sustainable Development. Fourthly, the workplace took on a new significance as a site for commitment, negotiation, and change: a place where new partnerships might arise. The move by the Global Union Federations to conclude over 20 framework agreements at the international level with companies is one example of this. Crucial to the issue of corporate accountability is the effective regulation and implementation of agreements reached between governments, business, and labour. Implementation raises the issue of governance, since too often governments have been either unable, or worse, unwilling, to uphold their resolutions and agreements. Indeed, many are failing at the moment to implement effectively their commitments under the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises. Finally, the Summit raised the issue of governance of the multilateral system – the relationship between different institutions and objectives – which despite all of the problems was at least being addressed in Johannesburg. That discussion must continue and cannot wait another ten years for further debate.

What next? Unions are already focussing on several follow-up issues:

- The Summit opened a path in terms of workplace partnerships, laying the groundwork for further commitment among governments, unions, and firms in which the social dimension of development may progress. To be able to commit ourselves, however, we have to enjoy real protection of labour and human rights;
- We will be using the WSSD language on employment and income security to promote our plans for “just transition” in sectors and companies;
- We will be extending our advocacy role to campaign for the fulfilment of commitments on development assistance and poverty reduction;
- We will be seeking to conclude more agreements at the international level between companies and Global Union Federations and UNEP Sector Reviews should include them in their action points;
- In TUAC we will particularly continue to press for governments to live up to their commitments in implementing the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises;

But of course the scope for action must be much wider and we will campaign for an effective governance structure for Sustainable Development across all international institutions.