



INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU)

UN High-level Panel on UN System-Wide Coherence In the areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Environment

Consultation with Civil Society Organisations

Geneva, 2 July, 2006

1. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) welcomes the opportunity to provide its views for improving and revitalising UN system-wide coherence as it relates to the themes of **sustainable development, human rights and gender**, as well as to strengthening of ECOSOC. It is imperative that this process serves to reinforce the UN as a universal multilateral framework for promoting democratic decision-making with respect to these themes, and to this end, civil society organisations, including trade unions, can contribute invaluable energy, expertise and direction.

Topic I – Improving UN system-wide coherence: opportunities and challenges

2. There must be clarity that the overall objective in seeking coherence is to fulfil UN commitments to integrate the three pillars of sustainable development whilst streamlining effectiveness of implementation across a number of themes. Coherence must begin at the national level and energised, active civil society organisations, including strong worker organisations, are a key to achieving this goal.

3. Groundwork for system-wide coherence at the United Nations has already been provided by a number of meetings, foremost amongst which was the 2005 UN World Summit 14–16 September 2005 which pointed the way to integrated action in such key areas as decent work, health care, human rights, democracy and rule of law.

4. One route to a coherent approach by the UN to development lies in strengthening ties with the *International Labour Organisation (ILO)*, the competent agency in the UN family with primary responsibility for social issues, and in particular, for engaging workplace actors in decision-making with governments. In this regard, account should be taken of the findings of the *World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation* and the work of the ILO linked to the activities of the UNDP, UNICEF and other bodies that address social issues.

5. The United Nations must renew its commitment to the primacy of standard-setting and enforcement at the national level as a means of implementing policies and measures. The role of voluntary measures must be placed within a standard-setting framework and current trends at the UN to promote voluntary approaches, linked to concrete application of authoritative instruments and measures to oversee and evaluate them. International standards established by the ILO and the OECD must be promoted as the key to coherence in this regard, and must form the basis for national rules for all issues subject to this *Panel's* review. Moreover current programmes to promote the promotion and ratification of UN Instruments through technical cooperation and financial assistance need to be given higher priority.

6. Since the UN's influence for directing change in a coherent manner is derived through the ratification by its members of its Conventions, instruments and measures, international processes and institutions, including international financial flows, aid and other global funds or investment schemes should serve to promote respect for observance of these measures. Regional development banks, bilateral aid and the activities of the international economic institutions must assist to promote these purposes in a direct fashion, and with direct implications for agencies such as the international financial institutions.

7. Given the increasingly important role of international trade, more direct linkage between UN agencies and the activities of the WTO has become imperative. Its policies must be consistent with the MDG's and broader development goals, particularly as its actions have an impact on vital human services.

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8. The various causes of current incoherencies between governmental actions in different UN fora must be analysed and addressed separately, with particular attention to the role of national governments which project their own lack of coherence at the international level. Examples of such incoherencies abound, with governments at certain UN meetings apparently abandoning agreements they have adopted in other fora. One solution to national incoherence lies in enhanced engagement of relevant actors and oversight at the national level, particularly with the involvement of Major Groups in *National Sustainable Development Strategies* (NSDS), linked to poverty reduction. National governments should be encouraged to set up national frameworks for sustainable development, all of which contribute to a single process (see Topic IV discussion) as a platform for improving coherence in international decision-making, as well as with domestic implementation.

9. Structural and policy issues in the UN itself may contribute to such lack of coherence. Streamlining and placing a higher priority on the target-setting, monitoring and reporting obligations of governments could be a first step toward addressing this problem, as it would serve to identify duplication, inconsistencies and contradictions. Policy development within these settings must inter-relate with such processes; for example, reporting on public health indicators by a government to the CSD should be consistent with its reports to the WHO or UNEP on similar issues. Similarly, ILO compliance reporting on chemicals should be consistent for both UNEP or FAO requirements, and should, moreover, serve to provide measurable criteria for policy debates and decisions.

10. A key challenge to a coherent role for the UN at the country level is to link implementation of international and national sustainable development goals with the activities at the local level, as linked to local production and consumption patterns. There can be no coherence without concrete linkage to the workplace, the world of work and the joint involvement in implementing change by workers and their employers, through joint target-setting, monitoring and reporting. As such, the focus of this Review must be on both substantive and process issues. Workplaces must not only be recognised as prime areas of development, with the ideal of decent work incorporated in all development discussions; as well, workers and their representative organisations have to be involved in policy-making and implementation.

11. Strengthening of connections to the world of work must serve as a guiding principle for a coherent approach to both sustainable development and to the development of more effective coherence at the UN itself. Workplace approaches to environmental protection, for example, can improve the use of resources, deal with environmental pollution and improve the quality of life for communities, by linking occupational and public health. They can also play a significant role in addressing social distributional issues, since the world of work brings into scope the promotion of *Decent Work*¹, as the key to meeting MDG and poverty goals. Strengthening the capacity of workers to contribute through their representative organisations remains a basic imperative, especially with respect to the implementation of MEA's and other instruments relating to sustainable development, including environmental protection and social standards. In this regard, the special role of the ILO as the only UN body engaged in formal tripartite (government, employers and trade unions) decision-making must be recognised and strengthened. This *Panel* should constitute a significant step in placing decent work for all at the centre of global governance, as a universal goal throughout the UN system, including the IMF and the World Bank, and other international institutions such as the WTO.

12. The UN Economic and Social Council provides a potential coordinating point for improved coherence and cooperation, with the authority to guide both UN agencies and institutions such as the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank on the issue. This would take a reformed and strengthened UN – not least a stronger ECOSOC – with greater financial resources and an enhanced ability to address questions of economic and social concern. Ideally, ECOSOC should therefore be transformed into an Economic, Social and Environmental Security Council, which would have the highest international authority on economic and social issues.

¹ **Decent work is essential.** Decent work is defined by rights, employment, social protection and social dialogue. The 2005 UN World Summit strongly endorsed (para. 47) the promotion of decent work by all governments. The 2003 Report to the International Labour Conference, *Working Out of Poverty*, concluded that decent work is both an end in itself, and a means to achieving the goal of poverty reduction. To break the cycle of poverty, there is a need to address the root causes of social injustice which lie in policies and rules that fail to distribute wealth fairly. What is needed is a “fair globalisation” with robust wealth and income distributive mechanisms. The decent work agenda provides a set of such mechanisms because it focuses not just on economic growth but on employment and pro-poor growth, and on resource transfers to the poor through social protections and promotion of basic rights, including collective bargaining that can enable the poor to attain adequate incomes. Therefore, a much enhanced focus is needed on the strategies, targets and indicators needed to implement the decent work agenda.

In general ECOSOC's capacity to coordinate global policies in the economic and social fields should be strengthened, among other ways by upgrading its level of representation. The UN General Assembly should proclaim a Decade for Full Employment and Decent Work for All, in order to focus international and national efforts on achieving this objective in policies and in programmes.

Topic II – Gender Equality: mainstreaming and institutional architecture

13. There is widespread agreement on the need for a more strategic approach to country level efforts to achieve gender equality. However, policy and implementation suffer from a lack of overall UN coherence, as noted above. Furthermore, it must be recognised that many of the roots of gender inequality and discrimination can be found in the world of work, and efforts must therefore begin with a focus on working environments that not only prohibit discrimination but furthermore promote positive equity measures in employment and other aspects of life.

14. The trade union movement fully supports the Declaration adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session stating that “*the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is essential to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration*”. We welcome paragraphs 20-21 of the draft Outcome Document which reaffirm the Beijing Platform for Action as the policy framework for achieving gender equality, including equal access to labour markets.

15. This *Panel* should seek to strengthen implementation of the goals of the *Beijing Declaration* and recommend that current UN Instruments be promoted toward their fulfilment, i.e. the UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination and the ILO Convention for Maternity Protection (No. 163), ILO Convention for Equal Remuneration (No. 100), and the UN Protocol for Human Trafficking. The direct ties which these instruments have to the world of work and therefore to the goals of Decent Work must be recognised.

16. The UN reform must place a high priority on setting political and resource strategies to turn the tide on the position of women, with respect to human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender-specific distributional effects must be linked to economic policy and standard-setting for sustainable development. It is well-documented that gender mainstreaming within the UN itself has not been achieved or implemented systematically and effectively². Gender mainstreaming processes are not adequately resourced, current leadership has not been held accountable and those charged with mainstreaming do not exercise sufficient authority to implement the policies or engage in proper training. The UN system must therefore take leadership in this regard by committing to an effective gender mainstreaming strategy to provide for gender equity in the UN.

17. Strong, woman-specific machinery in all operational and policy-making spheres overseen by the UN requires a major up-scaling of influence, authority, and resources dedicated to women's human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment. There is a need to for this *Panel* to discuss how the UN can best do this³.

Topic III – Human Rights: Coherence, mainstreaming, effectiveness

18. Human rights and principles must be seen as a basic element of the UN review process, of which an essential sub-set is worker and trade union rights. Towards this end, cooperation should be sought from the ILO in view of its recognised competence for capacity-building in the area of industrial relations. Machinery on special rapporteurs in the human rights field should be strengthened, including for human rights defenders who can address issues arising in the world of work. In this respect, trade unionists should be recognised

² **UNIFEM Assessment:** A/60/62 – E2005/10; UNDP Evaluation of Gender mainstreaming, available at http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/EO_GenderMainstreaming.pdf.

³ Currently, several under-resourced agencies focus exclusively on women's issues dominate the scene: the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Gender Issues (OSAGI), and the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)). Other larger agencies, including UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNESCO, the High Commissioners for human rights and refugees and others do important work on gender equality but it is only a part of their mandate, and often receives low priority. Proposals to merge women's agencies (UNIFEM, INSTRAW, DAW and OSAGI) are viewed as further marginalizing women's concerns. Proposals for creating an autonomous body charged with a mandate for mainstreaming gender issues have resource implications but show great potential.

as human rights defenders and come under human rights protection programmes as recommended by the special rapporteur, particularly in countries with records of gross violations of human and trade union rights.

19. Coherence requires the treatment of worker and trade union rights by this *Panel* to take place within a framework which seeks to promote a strong and sustainable democracy, as freedom of association constitutes a defense and a building-block for the maintenance of respect for human rights in general. In similar fashion, there is need for increased ratification and application of the international labour conventions of the ILO, as highlighted by the 2005 UN Summit, with particular priority to the ILO core labour standards.

20. The new Human Rights Council should be made to promote the mainstreaming of human and trade union rights throughout the UN system. It should build upon the work of the Human Rights Commission, including through the special procedures, rapporteurs and sub-commissions. Current arrangements for representation of civil society organisations in the work of the Human Rights Commission should be strengthened and formalised.

21. Towards this end, human rights must be seen as referring to more than political rights, and requires the integration of social-economic-cultural rights, as established in the 1966 *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, which were further elaborated in the 18 *Limburg Principles on the Implementation of the 1987 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. Coherence and effectiveness in this area requires that workers' rights not be regarded as a separate and distinct stream of 'human rights', in order to develop a coherent and integrated approach towards life, decent work, food, lodging, water, sanitation, health care, etc.

22. Finally, for the purposes of this *Panel's* work, human and trade union rights must be understood as falling within the social pillar of sustainable development. This relates to social and individual justice issues, but also has practical benefits, in that it is the medium through which the participation of workers and trade unions for implementing sustainable development will be fostered and protected, especially in the world's workplaces.

Topic IV – Mainstreaming sustainable development in the UN System through an institutional framework that provides normative to operational links

23. In previous Sections we discussed sustainable development issues as applied to overall UN issues or to specific themes. Here we address sustainable development as a particular focus. For this purpose, we draw attention to the importance of incorporating and integrating sustainable development in the *Panel's* work as a holistic concept embodying the economic, environmental and social dimension, as noted in Topic I.

24. Towards this end, we draw attention to the first world *Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment*, organised in Kenya in January 2006 with the ILO, UNEP and WHO, which was attended by 168 delegates from all parts of the world⁴. The Assembly provided the basis for a new and broader platform for action by the global trade union movement on the environment and sustainable development, which has direct implications for this UN Review. Participants agreed on the need:

“To strengthen the link between poverty reduction, environmental protection and decent work. Decent and secure jobs are essential for people to have a sustainable livelihood. Creating decent and secure jobs is only possible, however, if environmental sustainability is attained: hence the need to embrace the poverty reduction and sustainable development goals contained in the Millennium Declaration and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation through the promotion of decent employment and environmental responsibility. This must also include the mainstreaming of gender issues.”

25. The Review should take note of the manner in which the Trade Union Assembly brought together labour and environmental concerns in favour of sustainable development and promoted a common platform between the ILO, WHO and UNEP. It provides a model for this Panel to place priority in better integrating the

⁴ **The Resolution of the Trade Union Assembly is available at:**

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.EN.pdf

Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.FR.pdf

Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.SP.pdf

activities of the ILO, WHO and UNEP, with respect to the full implementation of the three pillars of sustainable development.

26. A United Nations system which mainstreams sustainable development will provide effective frameworks for democratic governance which reinforce the role of national public authorities, establishes rules necessary to govern global markets and enterprises, and ensures accountability and compliance to law, regulation and public policy. Such frameworks must also promote corporate accountability along the lines expressed in the ILO Declaration of Principles Concerning MNE's and Social Policy and seek to translate such policy in tangible ways, through the development and strengthening of effective tools, such as the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.

27. Environmental issues must be addressed by this *Panel* within a sustainable development framework, avoiding the temptation to deal with it as a separate area. Moreover, it must seek to clarify existing UN measures that relate to each dimension of sustainable development; e.g., current discussions about MEA's that rarely incorporate the ILO environment-relevant measures,⁵ or discussions about the social dimension that omit ILO measures and instruments⁶. A complete inventory of UN measures is required to facilitate their grouping and linkages to sustainable development. Such an inventory could be a basis for streamlining the target setting discussed in paragraph # 9, and would provide concrete tools for bringing coherence into overall policy discussions.

28. A mainstreaming of sustainable development in the UN would necessitate concrete change at the national level through the identification of policy synergies and avoidance of contradictory practices, both within and across national boundaries. Towards this end, trade unions have developed country-by-country profiles on sustainable development that could feed into such a process⁷.

29. Comparable national processes from one country to the next (not necessarily institutional entities) are required to provide the oversight that is a prerequisite to coherence and effective implementation of international agreements and an effective UN system. We believe that the CSD's National *Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS)*, which currently serve a limited purpose, could provide the basis from which to extract the necessary elements that could serve such a purpose.

30. At the same time, a number of other measures could form part of such national processes and also serve the objectives of the UN Review:

- Feedback to national governments about sustainable development implementation,
- Ensure stakeholder consultation on a broad range of implementation issues, including national policy,
- Strengthen the link between the UN and national activities,
- Ensure policy and action relating to gender equality and to pro-poor implementation of programmes,
- Create channels between norms and policy settings and operational activities to monitor environmental, social and labour impacts of these activities,

⁵ **ILO measures of relevance to the environment:** Convention 174 Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents, Convention 139 Occupational Cancer, Convention 148 Hazards due to Air Pollution, Convention 155 Occupational Health, Convention 161 Occupational Health Services, Convention 162 Safety In the Use of Asbestos, Convention 167 Safety and Health in Construction, Convention 170 On Chemicals and Convention 184 Safety and Health in Agriculture.

⁶ **ILO measures of particular relevance to development:** Convention 29 Forced Labour, Convention 87 Freedom of Association, Convention 98 Right to Organise, Convention 100 Equal Remuneration, Convention 111 Employment Discrimination, Convention 121 Employment Injury, Convention 122 Employment Policy, Convention 132 Maternal Protection, Convention 138 Minimum Age, Convention 182 Worst Forms of Child Labour, and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

⁷ The most recent version of the trade union country by country profiles were prepared for the 2005 UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and are available at:

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_1e.EN.pdf

French: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_1e.FR.pdf

Spanish: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_1e.SP.pdf

- Create synergies among National Adaptation Programmes on Climate Change, National Poverty Reduction Plans and others such as the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and capacity building and promoting south-south cooperation,
- Integration of Sustainable Development criteria such as respect to core labour standards and environmental protection into the recommendations and economic models utilised by the Bretton Woods institutions.

31. The vital role of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) within the current system could make it an effective linking agency between the UN and national governments for the purposes of mainstreaming sustainable development. This would require a radical transformation of the current Commission into one that could guide national action, at the same time as it ensures coherence within the UN system and in its relations with national governments.

32. Trade unions recognise and appreciate the role that UNEP plays in the area of environmental protection and promotion and believe that this role must be strengthened to allow it to contribute to a coherent system in which sustainable development is mainstreamed. In general, we favour environmental policy implementation at the international level through one single environmental authority, which may require the creation of a new environmental agency. We would therefore support the consolidation of environmental implementation, within the context of sustainable development, through one agency that would avoid duplication and promote harmony.

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