



**INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU)  
EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ETUC)  
ICFTU ASIAN AND PACIFIC REGIONAL ORGANISATION (ICFTU-APRO)**

---

**CREATING A SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP IN ASEM:  
TRADE UNION STATEMENT<sup>1</sup> ON THE AGENDA FOR  
THE 5<sup>TH</sup> SUMMIT OF THE ASIA-EUROPE MEETING (ASEM)**

**Hanoi, 8-9 October 2004**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. The low and inequitably distributed growth of the global economy over recent years has been shown not to resolve but to worsen economic problems around the world and, in the worst cases, to threaten survival and human dignity. ASEM Leaders must state clearly that their primary commitment is to improve peoples' lives and their economic and social security, rather to maximise profits for business and political elites by further promoting unregulated markets. Cooperation must be strengthened particularly in re-building global governance to overcome global problems such as conflicts, terrorism, poverty, infectious diseases, environmental disruption and human rights violations, to increase economic growth and to revitalise the global economy in order to improve the quality of life for all, including workers and their families.

2. ASEM provides a unique opportunity for world leaders to promote an inter-regional dialogue to address not primarily the promotion of trade and investment but the strengthening of political and cultural cooperation. However, social and employment issues have been given inadequate attention even though these are urgent, crucial problems in both Asia and Europe. Decent work concepts based on full application of the core labour standards of the International Labour Organisation (ILO)<sup>2</sup> need to be incorporated into all public policies at national and global levels. If ASEM is to work more visibly and successfully, its Leaders must determine concrete measures to strengthen the social dimension of ASEM and, to this end, commit themselves to promoting real and meaningful social dialogue and partnership within the ASEM process. As immediate points for action the international trade union movement calls on ASEM Leaders to:-

- a) Endorse an ASEM trade union consultative mechanism;
- b) Hold an ASEM Labour and Social Ministers' Meeting, with full involvement of social partners;
- c) Develop effective global economic governance including respect for the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises;
- d) Establish a large-scale social policy work programme within the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), with involvement of trade unions;

---

<sup>1</sup> This statement was prepared by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the ICFTU Asia Pacific Regional Organisation (ICFTU-APRO).

<sup>2</sup> Core labour standards are internationally-agreed fundamental human rights for all workers, irrespective of countries' level of development, that are defined by the ILO conventions that cover freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining (ILO Conventions 87 and 98); the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation (ILO Conventions 100 and 111); the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour (ILO Conventions 29 and 105); and the effective abolition of child labour, including its worst forms (ILO Conventions 138 and 182).

- e) Redirect the ASEM Trust Fund (ATF) to support socially oriented programmes;
- f) Adopt practical measures to promote representation of trade unions and other civil society representatives in the ASEM process;
- g) Promote core labour standards throughout all multilateral and bilateral institutions;
- h) Develop necessary measures to promote non-discrimination policies particularly for women and migrant workers;
- i) Postpone a decision on the application of Burma (Myanmar) to join ASEM;
- j) Take appropriate follow-up measures to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

### **MAKING WORKERS' VOICES HEARD IN THE ASEM PROCESS**

3. ASEM has promoted dialogue with business through its established relationship with the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF). However, it has so far failed to achieve legitimacy with working people in ASEM countries, workers who have contributed the most to the growth of ASEM and have been affected the most adversely by change. Leaders must adopt practical measures to reflect the views of workers and their trade unions in the whole ASEM process, through a real and meaningful social dialogue. Trade unions should be given a formal consultative status comparable with the arrangements for access by the AEBF and representation of trade unions in ASEM meetings should be promoted. A Social Forum for consultation with trade unions and representative civil society organisations should be set up.

### **INTEGRATING DECENT WORK INTO THE ASEM AGENDA**

4. Work is central to people's lives. Their lives can only be made secure through decent work that can generate the necessary income for people to overcome poverty and ensure human dignity. ASEM Leaders must recognise that decent work deficits will further widen income gaps and undermine universal values, and that successful participation in the structural economic change and development process requires the recognition of workers and their trade unions as partners. Therefore, they must give the highest policy priority to maintaining and creating decent work based on the respect of core labour standards, including freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.

#### *ASEM Labour and Social Ministers' Meeting*

5. Social concerns such as poverty reduction, job creation, human resource development and social security must be integrated throughout the whole of the ASEM agenda. In this context, the international trade union movement welcomes the endorsement by ASEM Leaders of an initiative on the Future of Employment and the Quality of Labour. ASEM Leaders must ensure that the initiative be a step towards an ASEM Labour and Social Ministers' meeting, with full involvement of social partners – both business and trade unions. As ASEM Economic Ministers have already recognised human resource development (HRD) as an area of cooperation<sup>3</sup>, interaction should be increased between Economic Ministers and Labour Ministers on HRD and other relevant issues to implement comprehensive, employment-oriented growth policies.

---

<sup>3</sup> Chair's Statement, Fifth ASEM Economic Ministers' Meeting, Dailen, China, 23-24 July 2003.

*Global Governance for the Global Economy*

6. ASEM Leaders must work together in developing effective global economic governance, including a rule-based multilateral trading system, adequate regulation of the private sector, and a strong, transparent international financial architecture, based on universally accepted social and environmental standards. The ASEM Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP) and the Investment Promotion Action Plan (IPAP) must aim at developing a social model of globalisation, rather than merely seeking to increase trade and investment through business-driven regulatory reforms.

*Achieving Respect for the Social Responsibilities of Multinational Enterprises*

7. As part of the work of IPAP, in 1999 ASEM produced a list of Most Effective Measures (MEM) contributing to inward investment flows, which included the absence of strikes as an effective investment incentive. Yet the right of workers to go on strike is a universal human right which has been recognised in the ILO's fundamental conventions. The IPAP should be rewritten to include social concerns, including respect of core labour standards, with reference to the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. ASEM Leaders must recommend that an initiative be taken to promote and monitor respect for social and environmental standards by multinational enterprises, and should promote the effective implementation of the OECD Guidelines including making National Contact Points assume their responsibilities.

*Establishing a Social Policy Work Programme within the ASEF*

8. ASEM Leaders must recommend that a formal social policy work programme be established within the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), through systematic efforts to involve trade unions in its management and activities. The programme would cover:

- a) Effective industrial relations based on respect for fundamental workers' rights
- b) Human resource development
- c) Gender equality
- d) Migrant workers' rights
- e) The elimination of child labour
- f) Good governance
- g) Participatory development
- h) Occupational health and safety and environmental protection
- i) Social safety nets
- j) Information and communication technology (ICT)

*Making the ATF Benefit Workers and Their Families*

9. The ASEM Asian Financial Crisis Trust Fund (ATF) has implemented a large number of technical assistance programmes throughout its Phases I and II with the objective of supporting the reform of the financial and corporate sectors and social policies and institutions. Such reform should be aimed in the long run at realising economic and social stability and improving living conditions and labour standards, and in the short run must be accompanied by the necessary measures to minimise its negative impacts and provide an adequate social safety net for the workers affected. ASEM Leaders must direct the World Bank, as the executing agency of the ATF, to promote the consideration and discussion of social development and core labour standards in all

ATF-funded activities, in full consultation with relevant trade unions at the planning, implementing and monitoring stages.

10. There is a continuing need for ASEM technical assistance to achieve socially acceptable reform programmes. The highest priority should be given to alleviating poverty, improving social infrastructures and promoting working conditions and rights of workers. As the EU calls for integrating all four core labour standards into its technical cooperation policy,<sup>4</sup> a commitment by the applicant government to observe these standards should be a condition for receiving financing from the ATF. The European Union and the Asian ASEM governments should assume direct control of the ATF through a joint advisory board, rather than allow the World Bank to run it.

## **PROMOTING FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS**

### *Core Labour Standards*

11. The international trade union movement appreciates the efforts of ASEM to promote a dialogue on human rights issues through the Informal ASEM Seminars on Human Rights. However, such dialogue should take place in a formal way within the ASEM structure, with a view to establishing effective rules to ensure broad adherence to human rights including workers' rights. All ASEM governments should respect, promote and realise core labour standards enshrined in the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Therefore, Leaders must recommend that core labour standards be applied as a system wide standard throughout all multilateral institutions and bilateral agreements. Effective dialogue should be developed between the ILO and the IMF, the World Bank Group, the WTO and ASEM to ensure that their actions are consistent with observing core labour standards.

### *Gender Equality*

12. ASEM Leaders must commit themselves fully to eliminate any form of discrimination. Special attention should be given to women. Their right to equal opportunities and treatment needs to be ensured by better legal protection and effective implementation of the principles contained in the Beijing Platform of Action, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and ILO Conventions applying to women. ASEM Leaders must promote a dialogue on gender issues in the ASEM process with the full involvement of trade unions and instruct their governments to develop adequate measures to promote the proper implementation of non-discriminatory policies in individual ASEM countries.

### *Migrant Workers' Rights*

13. Although ASEM Ministers in charge of managing migratory flows agreed to promote rights of migrant workers<sup>5</sup>, few ASEM governments have ratified either the relevant ILO Conventions Nos. 97<sup>6</sup> and 143<sup>7</sup> or the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families<sup>8</sup>. These conventions should be ratified,

---

<sup>4</sup> European Council Conclusions on "Promoting Core Labour Standards", Brussels, 17 July 2003.

<sup>5</sup> ASEM Ministerial Conference on Cooperation for the Management of Migratory Flows between Europe and Asia, Lanzarote, Spain, 4-5 April 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), ratified by 42 countries, including Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom among ASEM countries.

<sup>7</sup> Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), ratified by 18 countries, including Italy, Portugal and Sweden.

<sup>8</sup> The Convention, adopted by the UN General Assembly resolution 45/158 of 18 December 1990, only came into force on 1 July 2003 after ratification by the 20<sup>th</sup> country. It has been ratified by the Philippines alone among ASEM countries.

and the rights of migrant workers protected, by all ASEM countries. ASEM Leaders must recommend that the promotion of migrants' rights be included in its work programme and instruct their governments to develop necessary measures to protect migrant workers and their families from any form of discrimination, exploitation and maltreatment, including human trafficking on the basis of the principles enshrined in these Conventions.

*Assisting Democracy and Fundamental Workers' Rights in Burma*

14. We appreciate ASEM Foreign Ministers' call of July 2003 to the Government of Burma (Myanmar) to resume its efforts toward national reconciliation and democracy and to ensure Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other NLD members have freedom to undertake political activities<sup>9</sup>. As the application of Burma to join ASEM will be taken up at the Hanoi Meeting, ASEM Leaders must make a decision which they believe is coherent with the position of the international community, including the Resolution on the widespread use of forced labour in Burma adopted at the 87<sup>th</sup> sessions of the International Labour Conference in 1999 under article 33 of the ILO Constitution, the lack of progress in implementing the Joint Plan of Action agreed between the ILO and the Government of Burma in May 2003 and the EU's withdrawal of its Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) benefits to Burma since 1997 due to practice of forced labour in the country. Accordingly, on the basis of the current situation in Burma, ASEM should not admit the country as a member of ASEM but must instruct the government that the decision has to be postponed until such time as Burma respects basic values of democracy and human rights, including workers' rights.

**ACTING ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

15. Decent jobs and clean and safe workplaces are the key to the future of sustainable development. As follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), ASEM Leaders must recommend that an initiative be taken to integrate the three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – into comprehensive policies and effective work programmes of ASEM. Debt relief, a substantial increase in official development assistance, democracy, environmental protection, poverty eradication and decent work must simultaneously be achieved as part of the overall agenda of sustainable development.

**CONCLUSIONS**

16. ASEM Leaders have a responsibility to strengthen its social dimension as a counterbalance to their efforts to promote trade and investment between ASEM countries so as to contribute in a real sense to social progress in the ASEM region as well as in the rest of the world. In order to transform the Asia-Europe partnership into a real power to achieve this objective, they must take a genuinely inclusive approach to integrating the voices of a wider range of ASEM's stakeholders, including workers and their trade unions, into the ASEM process. Otherwise, ASEM will lose public support and will become the target of growing popular concern at the negative aspects of globalisation. Trade unions in ASEM countries are ready to cooperate and work together achieve the highest credibility and transparency for the future of ASEM, provided ASEM makes the necessary changes outlined in this Statement.

\* \* \* \* \*

---

<sup>9</sup> Chair's Statement of the fifth ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Bali, Indonesia, 23-24 July 2003.

**The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)** consists of 233 national centres of independent and democratic trade unions in 152 countries and territories with a total membership of over 151 million working men and women. Further information on the ICFTU is available on request at the following address: -

Mr. Guy Ryder,  
General Secretary  
ICFTU  
Boulevard du Roi Albert II, 5,  
B-1210 Brussels, Belgium

Tel (32 2) 224 0211  
Fax (32 2) 201 5815  
E-mail [internetpo@icftu.org](mailto:internetpo@icftu.org)  
Web site: <http://www.icftu.org>

**The ICFTU Asian and Pacific Regional Organisation (ICFTU-APRO)** consists of ICFTU affiliates in 29 countries of the region with a total membership of 30 million. For further information contact:

Mr. Noriyuki Suzuki  
General Secretary  
ICFTU-APRO  
9th Floor NTUC Centre, One Marina Boulevard  
Singapore 018989

Tel (65) 222 6294  
Fax (65) 221 7380  
E-mail: [gs@icftu-apro.org](mailto:gs@icftu-apro.org)  
Web-site: <http://www.icftu-apro.org>

**The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)** groups 77 national union centres in 35 European countries with a total membership of 60 million workers. For further information contact: -

Mr John Monks  
General Secretary  
ETUC  
Boulevard du Roi Albert II, 5,  
B-1210 Brussels, Belgium

Tel (32 2) 224 0411  
Fax (32 2) 224 0454  
E-mail [etuc@etuc.org](mailto:etuc@etuc.org)  
Web-site <http://www.etuc.org>