

Final Statement

Towards a trade union strategy for combating racial discrimination and xenophobia

The representatives of trade union organisations meeting in Geneva from 4 to 7 December 2007 for the first ITUC seminar focusing on the issue “*Towards a trade union strategy for combating racial discrimination and xenophobia*”:

Note that:

- millions of workers around the world are suffering from discrimination based on colour, religious differences and ethnic or national origin, and as a result are prey to racism, xenophobia, intolerance and ethnic and religious conflicts, both in the world of work and in society generally. This is despite the fact that a large majority of governments have ratified ILO Conventions 100 and 111, thereby reflecting a universal condemnation of discrimination in employment and providing proof that a political will does exist to eradicate these discriminations.
- despite the legislative progress we have secured on equity issues, real equality is still absent in our workplaces and elsewhere.
- economic globalisation is tending to aggravate unemployment and poverty, thereby leading to polarisation and marginalisation in societies.
- global events, such as 11 September or the current conflicts in the Middle East, are being used to justify the implementation of anti-terrorist legislation, strengthened security measures, and increasingly stringent asylum and immigration policies, which are provoking widespread feelings of insecurity, facilitating the development of an anti-Islamic phobia, and leading to lack of respect for the law and human rights, which encourage the racism and xenophobia that are dividing workers and undermining all solidarity.
- these discriminatory tendencies are also reflected in the building of walls, such as those in the West Bank and in North America.
- the greatest failure of the global economy, as we know it, is its inability to create sufficient jobs where people live. On the contrary, the rising unemployment rate and economic inequalities are forcing millions of people to make the unpleasant choice of emigrating in order to look for decent work that will enable them to live in dignity.
- this form of discrimination has become insidious and changeable, and as such is hard to quantify and to oppose. Owing to the moral and legal prohibition of discrimination based on race, colour or ethnic origin, discrimination has taken on hidden and inexplicit forms, which are not easy to detect. Traditional racist attitudes, centred on a hierarchy of population groups established on the basis of biological differences, has been replaced in many cases by a “cultural” form of racism.

- This cultural racism is producing more subtle forms of discrimination, and a more diffuse type of racism, which is sustained by the notion that the cultural differences of certain groups make them less capable of adapting to the dominant culture.
- given the inability of politicians to meet the aspirations of the weakest members of society, and the absence of trade unions in this area of work, we are experiencing institutionalised racism, which is embodied by the major advances of extreme right-wing parties in the parliamentary elections in many countries.

Maintain that:

- the tensions that exist around the world and in our societies have nothing to do with a potential incompatibility between cultures but are rather the product of poverty, unemployment, injustice and lack of freedom.
- racism and xenophobia constitute a major threat, not just to social stability and peace but also to the sound operation of the economy, and that the only effective remedy against racism and discriminatory practices are comprehensive, dynamic and courageous policies (covering employment, education, living conditions, the public services, and other areas).
- the unions are opposed, as a matter of principle, to racism and xenophobia and that their *raison d'être* is to defend and promote the rights of all, irrespective of skin colour or ethnic or religious identity, and to end exploitation.
- as agents of social transformation the unions must take up wholeheartedly their task of defending and protecting the rights of those people affected by direct or indirect racism and xenophobia and must adopt a specific, clear, direct and determined approach to fighting racism and xenophobia.
- the principles of liberty, solidarity, justice and social cohesion underpin the fight we will need to lead against the racism and discrimination that are affecting millions of workers in employment, housing, education, training and other areas.
- the issue of migration presents us with some complex questions and difficult decisions, which we shall need to answer if we are to avoid leaving the ground free to racists and xenophobes, who would be quick to exploit workers' personal worries regarding job insecurity, wages, access to public services, and other matters.
- racism can be used by employers as a means of attacking solidarity, which is the essence of trade union action, and thereby weakening trade unions.
- through the action plan we have adopted, the international trade unions want to build a world free of discrimination, in which diversity is valued as a positive strength to rely on, rather than devalued, negatively, as a threat.
- in the huge amount of work we will need to do in raising awareness and dismantling the structures underlying racism, we need to emphasise the fact that

having people from different cultures in a society is a very positive thing that should be highly valued.

Stress:

- the need to establish inclusive policies geared to integrating members from ethnic minorities.
- the need for the ITUC to provide coordination, to facilitate exchanges and to disseminate information and good practices in this area.
- the need for the ITUC to set up a campaign aimed at mobilising the largest possible number of affiliated organisations worldwide, so as to ensure that priority is given in their countries and in their day-to-day work to issues related to discrimination based on race or ethnic identity.
- the need for the ITUC to facilitate cooperation with the relevant international bodies such as the ILO, UNESCO, the UN, NGOs, and others.

Undertake:

- in their capacity as agents of social transformation, to play a leading role in defending and protecting the rights of those affected by direct or indirect racism and xenophobia and to adopt a specific, clear, direct and determined approach to the struggle against racism and xenophobia.
- to implement a large awareness-raising programme for union leaders and officials aimed at preparing them for ACTION on combating racial discrimination and xenophobia.
- actively to promote a major trade union programme for combating racism and xenophobia involving all its affiliated organisations, both cross-sectoral and sector-based, from the company level right up to the local, national and international levels.
- to choose an approach based on rights and equal treatment, not just because that is the correct one, but also as a strategic way of opposing competition between different groups of workers and exploitation of the weakest groups by employers.
- to preserve solidarity between all workers, since it is the essence of trade union action.
- to intensify efforts to prevent racial discrimination and to oppose it with all the instruments at our disposal, in particular the international conventions.
- to organise and mobilise our members (workers and union leaders) to take action and force employers to make our workplaces racism-free areas.
- to negotiate the inclusion in collective agreements of clauses aimed at ending all discrimination and guaranteeing equal opportunities to coloured workers, migrant

workers, and workers belonging to indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, through changing the terms of access to training (including language provision), establishing positive action policies, recognising religious and cultural specificities and providing multi- and intercultural training for staff, etc.

- to establish a body for monitoring the achievement of the action plan adopted at this seminar and to ensure its follow-up and evaluation at the national, regional and international levels.
- to strengthen exchanges of experience and information through the development of a network.
- to revise and evaluate the implementation at national level of the undertakings made at the UN Durban Conference of 2001.

Diversity is our strength – let's unite against racism!