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Agenda item 10

ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES, THE PRIVATE SECTOR,
PARLIAMENTARIANS, NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND OTHER
PARTNERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HABITAT AGENDA

Report of Committee II

Addendum

Hearings involving representatives of the Labour Unions Forum

1. At its 8th meeting, on 7 June 1996, Committee II held hearings involving representatives of the Labour Unions Forum.
2. Presentations were made by Mrs. Seyhan Erdogan and Mr. Mathew Oliphant.
3. After the presentations, a dialogue/discussion took place between the partners and the representatives of Barbados, the Netherlands, Tunisia, the Philippines, South Africa, Chile, Uganda, Nepal, Nigeria, Ghana, Burundi and Sierra Leone.
4. The Chairman's summary of the hearings is set out below:

Global action for shelter and employment

The representatives of the Labour Unions Forum presented a statement entitled "Global action for shelter and employment", which had been prepared during their Forum meeting in Istanbul on 31 May 1996. The Forum was held to discuss specific contributions to the process of urban development, to adopt a joint position on the Habitat global plan of action and to ensure that the Habitat Agenda fully recognizes the role and rights of workers and their organizations.

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The Forum representatives restated the right to housing and the right to employment as affirmed by the United Nations. They called for improvement of the working and living conditions of workers and asked Governments to take action to ensure that the International Labour Organization Conventions are respected. Labour unions will endeavour to remain in partnership with Governments, local authorities and the private sector and work together for comprehensive shelter and infrastructure programmes.

To facilitate the full commitment and contribution of trade unions, Governments will have to pay more attention to urban and human settlements development and to the failure of market forces to support the efforts of the majority of working people to improve their housing. Consequently, urgent and long-term plans by Governments at central and local levels are required to provide for the social and cultural infrastructural needs, such as housing and urban renewal, efficient public transport, energy, water, medical and health care, and employment opportunities.

They went on to state that the untapped potential of the construction industry, which is a major stimulus for economic growth and employment, must be used in the development of infrastructures for training workers for housing development, city reconstruction and maintenance, and environmental management activities. Governments are called upon to establish social protection and labour standards in the informal sector similar to those in the formal sector and to guarantee the social protection of the unemployed. Governments are also called upon to ensure the maximum utilization of locally available and renewable building materials and natural resources as well as appropriate technologies in the construction industry. The elimination of gender discrimination and social inequality and the empowerment of women to enable them to access employment opportunities, information and resources are advocated.

The labour union representatives argued that the decrease in development assistance to developing countries has had a negative impact on social development. Governments have to find alternative resources to fund social programmes. More resources could be found through the reduction of military expenditures, which are quite high in many developing countries, and utilizing these resources in providing basic and social infrastructure, including the creation of employment opportunities.

Delegates supported the presentation and particularly underlined the need to increase respect for the international conventions on the rights of workers, including freedom of association, protection of migrant workers, improvement of working and living conditions in rural areas, improvement of the status of women workers and provisions concerning child labour. They called for equal treatment of both local and expatriate workers and of men and women doing the same jobs. The involvement of non-governmental organizations and local authorities in partnership with labour unions was advocated by delegations in support of the international conventions on workers' rights and working conditions.

The discussion recalled the responsibility of the private sector as employer in contributing to the "social wage" and access to appropriate housing, property tenure and infrastructure for workers. Investment in the development of human capital and improvement of working conditions were advocated by the delegations, who also stated that such provisions should not lead to de-unionization.

The international labour union community called for a new era of action by Governments and multilateral organizations, with commitment to human rights, including "human security", which implies the right to work, to food and nutrition, to education, to health and shelter, to the exercise of social, cultural and political rights and to protection from crime.
