

enterprises in the 21st century. They also explored ways in which enterprises can, and in some cases already are, contributing to solving key social development issues.

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#### ILO SYMPOSIUM ON INFORMAL SECTOR

Representatives of national trade unions, trade union centres and international trade secretariats met to develop strategies for organizing informal sector workers at a symposium held by the International Labour Office (ILO) from 18-22 October 1999.

The "informal sector," which refers to a broad swathe of small, usually irregular and often makeshift jobs, now absorbs as much as 60% of the labour force in cities and towns of the developing world. In many countries it is the only part of the economy creating any new jobs, according to the ILO. However low productivity and income combined with the absence of social protection, training or social services is a harsh burden on many of the most vulnerable groups in society including women, children and migrants, who are disproportionately concentrated in the informal sector.

"The informal sector reflects the survival strategy of the poor, those without steady jobs or incomes and without any form of social insurance," said Manuel Simon, Director of ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities. "It is often the only recourse for workers left to fend for themselves."

Among other things, participants discussed ways of organizing this large and potentially powerful workforce, which unions have traditionally overlooked. The symposium also explored ways in which governments and policy-makers can put into practice the promises they have made to upgrade the quality of jobs in the sector. These include areas such as labour standards and labour legislation, macro-economic and employment policy, training and human capital development, social protection and small enterprise development.

Participants said the informal sector includes a vast range of activities in which workers operate in oppressive and unsafe conditions, often with incomes at or below the poverty line and with little or no access to state-provided social protection, training and social services. They agreed that trade union recruitment efforts should focus on "own-account" workers such as street vendors, and those engaged in full-time or casual employment such as homeworkers and paid domestic workers.

Their recommendations to trade unions and international trade union centres for developing strategies to organize informal sector workers include:

- introduce measures to accommodate the needs of informal workers in order to persuade them to join trade unions, such as facilitating their access to cheap credit and literacy classes;

- find ways to encourage women, young people and former union members who have been pushed into the informal sector to help organize their co-workers;
- establish alliances with civil society organizations in contacting and helping workers in the informal sector; and
- promote the implementation of codes of conduct, framework agreements, and labelling schemes aimed at extending appropriate labour standards to the informal sector.

Participants said policy-makers, both at the national and international level, must be willing to create institutional and economic environments conducive to upgrading the quality of jobs and life in the informal sector. Their recommendations emphasize the need to implement economic policies leading to transformation of informal sector activities into more highly productive and socially responsible enterprises that provide protection to workers and respect trade union rights. Participants also proposed ways in which the ILO and governments could foster the application of labour standards to all workers.

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#### UNIDO INDUSTRIAL PARTNERSHIPS MEETING

Some 500 people participated in the Conference on Industrial Partnerships and Investment, held in Dakar (Senegal) on 20-23 October 1999. The event, which aimed to address critical problems of industrial development in Africa, was organized by the United Nations Industrial Organization (UNIDO), Organization of African Unity (OAU), Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Alliance for Africa's Industrialization (AAI) and the African Development Bank.

"Today's broad message is that, after decades of investment decline and neglect by foreign investors, things are looking up for African countries," said Carlos Magariños, Director-General of UNIDO. "The region is now enjoying recovery and a healthy economic growth. More than a dozen countries grew faster than 5% annually in recent years....Increased per capita income throughout the region is accompanied by strong growth in export earnings overall."

He said that as a result of a first generation of reforms—devoted to macro-economic stabilization—the African region is already being drawn into the globalization process. "A new generation of managers and entrepreneurs is making an impact," he added. "They are ready for partnership arrangements, and their business demands on Africa's governments are exactly the same as those of foreign investors—good governance and effective institutional support."

The conference consisted of three inter-related components:

- business meetings between African private sector representatives and foreign entrepreneurs;

*The Third International Rubber Agreement, established in 1980 under the auspices of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), was terminated in October 1999, two years before its expiration date. Countries pulling out of the Malaysia-based International Natural Rubber Organization (INRO), which administers the world's last consumer-producer commodity agreement, include Thailand, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. All three countries said they were disappointed with the organization's performance and were ending their membership.*

*INRO's governing council has proposed creating an open-ended working group, including INRO members and other interested countries, in order to keep the organization alive.*