

## DEBT NETWORK LAUNCHED

A regional organization known as the Economic Community of West African States Network on Debt and Development (ECONDAD) was launched at a conference held 26-28 August in Djeregebe (Benin). The network, which will represent civil society in 16 West African countries, will focus on debt and development issues; disseminate information to members through campaigns, lobbying and advocacy; and encourage NGOs to promote conversion of debts in their respective countries to enhance development. The secretariat of the network will be hosted by the African Network for Economic and Environmental Justice (ANEJ) office in Benin City (Nigeria).

Participants at the conference requested the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to review the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative with a view to making it more "development-friendly and to actually tackle poverty." Among other things, participants said:

- human development should take priority over debt payments;
- the concept of sustainability should be broadened to embrace human development and the basic needs approach and take account of resource requirements for meeting basic needs, such as education and health, in calculating sustainability or the ability to serve debt;
- more genuine ownership by debtor countries and participation of civil society in reform policy design and implementation is needed to ensure compliance with conditionalities; and
- regular monitoring and evaluation of use of the funds available from debt relief could be made more efficient if members of "civil society, especially genuine NGOs, are made use of. This would not only be less costly, it would also avoid 'window dressing' by government officials when they know a [monitoring or evaluation] team is about to visit a country."

The conference was organized by ANEJ in collaboration with the Pan African Centre for Social Prospects and the European Network on Debt and Development (EURODAD), with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Oxfam-UK.

Contact: David Ugolor, Coordinator, ECONDAD, c/o ANEJ Secretariat, 61 2nd Cementry Road, PO Box 301, Uzebu Quarters, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, telephone +234-52/258748, fax +234-52/250668, e-mail <anej@rd.nig.com>.

*A Centre for Social Partnership has opened in Moscow to promote cooperation between city government and non-governmental organizations on a variety of social problems. The centre, part of a pilot project supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), will also invite members of the business community to share their ideas and help mobilize financial support for programmes.*