Address by Jim Baker, Director of ACTRAV
ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities

Sisters and Brothers,

Congratulations to the newly elected and re-elected officers and Executive Board members.

I want to single out Fred, somebody I have worked with for more than 20 years. He has become a friend as well as a rich source of ideas, inspiration and leadership in the trade union movement and in the global community.

But, it is also important to thank those who are leaving, those who have contributed so much. Mary is among them. You are a very good chair, and that makes a difference, but you also set the tone (in opening of congress) for a rich discussion based on deep, democratic values. But, I will come back to values.

First, I would like to present the Bureau for Workers' Activities, ACTRAV. ACTRAV works with EI, including on ILO standards like child labour. And, we want to have more intense co-operation.

But, we also work for you inside the ILO with our colleagues like Bill Ratteree, who is participating in this Congress. ACTRAV has a team of dedicated and capable trade unionists in Geneva and in every region and sub-region. Joining me from ACTRAV is our Regional representative in Latin America, Eduardo Rodrigues. I urge Latin American delegates to make his acquaintance. Eduardo, please stand up.

Education and trade unionism share many values. And you, in this hall, bring them together.

Education and trade unionism enable people to live their lives as successes rather than failures. Regardless of occupation, Education is, after all, a preparation for jobs and a preparation for life.

Eleanor Roosevelt said that one cannot be inferior against one's will. Helping to generate the will to demand respect and recognition of dignity is central to our mission.

We also build decent work and decent societies. We are instruments for workers to transform their workplaces, but also their lives, the lives of their families and their communities.

 Discrimination is a part of our challenge. It is not only a tragic waste for society, it is a personal tragedy. How is it possible that, in 2004, millions of girls are still denied the right to education? It is outrageous and unacceptable. And, what could be a better measure of a decent society?

EI and PSI are leading international trade union opposition to violations of human dignity related to sexual orientation. Let me be clear. As Fred said, this is a question of rights. It is a trade union issue. It is not somebody else's fight. It is ours and we must make it ours.

Issues of dignity are issues of rights, and rights go with power. They cannot exist exclusively on paper. It is only when people are engaged and use their rights, that they take life. That means showing effective solidarity with all who struggle for their rights.
Freedom of association and education are essential nutrients for democracy. They are so fundamental that it is alarming that so many leaders ignore them. Instead, they should all support free, universal public education and strong and free trade unions.

Many works including some teachers are victims of globalization. We all know the problems, but, we have a choice to make. Are we going to be actors, shaping and building a fairer globalization?

You have made that choice or you wouldn’t be here. You have EI and you can mobilize. You have an organization and global representation with EI that is more united than ever. It is a strong articulate voice. And with it, together, you are moving the world.

Thank you.

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