

Report from an Informal Meeting with Geneva-based CSOs

Thursday 19th June

Briefing by the Chief of the Office of the Secretary General on the outcomes of UNCTAD XII:

Chief of the Office of the UNCTAD Secretary General, Mr. Taffere Tesfachew, gave a briefing on the outcomes of UNCTAD XII which took place in Accra, Ghana 20-25th April 2008, and he evaluated the conference.

Mr. Tesfachev put a lot of emphasis on the manifold round table discussions surrounding the conference, confirming UNCTAD XII position as forum for trade and development matters. He felt that the round table discussions around "a new deal for Africa" were particularly promising, as they took on new perspectives and refrained from only focusing on trade liberalization and market access. Instead, there was a new focus on the sale of African products, South-south trade and the importance of the role of the state. Mr Tesfachev is hoping to feed results concerning Africa into the General Assembly.

UNCTAD XII coincided with the beginning of the food crisis. While the immediate needs of starving people must be addressed, Mr. Tesfachev mainly stressed that the food crisis was "not just a food crisis, but a development policy crisis" and "a wake-up call", raising awareness for a fundamental development policy problem. Developing economies should refocus on developing a sustainable agricultural practice that protects and enhances soil fertility.

Mr. Tesfachew evaluated the civil society meeting at UNCTAD XII as "very effective". Statements by civil society organizations were said to have "moved" and "touched" UN Secretary General Ban. There were more than 105 organizations represented at the meeting, spanning all continents.

According to Mr. Tesfachew, after years of only talking about the role of the market, the role of the state came into discussion again in Accra, a development he felt was very positive.

While working on the Accra Accords was a "tiring" process, the final document is now considered to be "comprehensive".

Overall, Mr. Tesfachew evaluates UNCTAD XII as successful for at least four reasons:

- 1) The outcomes of the two previous conferences were maintained and expanded further.
- 2) The three UNCTAD pillars (research, consensus building, and technical cooperation) were strengthened.
- 3) The work program was enlarged: Most importantly, there are now explicit mandates to work on climate change, migration and energy security, (always integrated in the general trade and development framework).
- 4) While the negotiations around institutional reform were the most difficult ones, the final outcome was "satisfactory". The three former UNCTAD commissions ('Commission on Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities', 'Commission on Investment, Technology and Related Financial Issues', and 'Commission on Enterprise, Business Facilitation and Development') were merged into just two commissions, one called the 'Trade and Development Commission', the other one named the 'Investment, Enterprise and

Development Commission'. These commissions now have a mandate to produce "agreed conclusions", which significantly strengthens the importance of discussion outcomes. For example, it will be easier for LDC to refer to UNCTAD discussion outcomes in WTO deliberations. In the Accra Accord, civil society is explicitly mentioned as a source of input for the commissions.

Comments from NGOs and "Geneva steering Group":

There were some comments concerning the food crisis and the way it was dealt with, but the main focus lay on the importance of civil society at the conference.

The UNCTAD secretariat stressed very much that they would like civil society to participate "on every aspect and on every level" of UNCTAD. For example, they are glad to organize more briefings with UN experts on certain topics, include more NGO statements at conferences and have civil society representatives sit on the panel at panel discussions. However, the secretariat made very clear that NGOs would have to work together without UN supervision to aggregate their needs and then communicate them to the UNCTAD secretariat.

Subsequently, an informal "Geneva steering Group" was discussed. All NGOs seem to agree that the establishment of such a long-term group would be reasonable. There might even be two such informal NGO groups, one for Geneva only and one international group. For the Geneva group, agreement was reached on the following: 1) There should be a convener, a position that should rotate among the NGOs . 2) Some substantial work needs to be done (surprise, surprise!) 3) All NGOs should join, but only if they can ensure consistent work. 4) The group should work closely with the UN, but be able to stand on its own. All interested NGOs will meet again next week to discuss in further detail.

September Hearing Preparations:

The **Trade and Development Board** will have its 55th annual session September 15th to 26th 2008 in Geneva. Most likely, there will be ½ day **hearings on the 16th and 17th of September**. All accredited NGOs and IGOs will be able to participate. From experience, we know that the NGOs should focus on no more than two topics. The NGOs should provide certain questions beforehand and give them to the delegates (best by **August 28th when an informal meeting with the participating delegates** will take place), so the delegates can prepare themselves thoroughly. The NGOs will meet and discuss what topics should be chosen and what outcomes should be reached.

Personal Comments:

The whole UNCTAD secretariat seemed genuinely happy with the UNCTAD XII process, and really glad about some new impetuses that were given (e.g. new deal for Africa, role of the state).

Because of language barriers (some didn't know English, others didn't know French), the discussion among the NGOs in the informal meeting was full of misunderstandings and exhausting. The great variety of backgrounds the NGOs were coming from only added to this effect.

Participating for WILPF: Nora Hofstetter