

Council Meeting of the Socialist International
Istanbul, 11-12 June 1991

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL

May I begin my report by thanking the Social Democratic Populist Party and all those who have helped to organise this, our first Council meeting in Turkey.

I hardly need to say again here that since the last meeting of the Council in New York last October the international community has lived through a crisis centred in the Middle East. Consequently, during that period, many of the activities of the International concentrated on our response to the Gulf crisis and the situation in the region as a whole.

The International, however, also carried out in recent months a wide range of activities in many parts of the world, focused on many different concerns.

I will mention briefly a number of areas in which the Socialist International has been active since our last Council meeting.

Concerning the Middle East, our committee met in Bonn last November and again in January in London, in advance of the date which was set by the United Nations Security Council in relation to the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. The committee monitored the situation closely and also examined possibilities for diplomatic solutions. In line with this, following the London meeting the chairman, Hans-Jürgen Wischniewski and other representatives of the committee held discussions in Paris with President François Mitterrand on the French government initiative.

When the fighting started, we emphasised the need for a speedy halt to the conflict and a durable negotiated settlement to the problems of the whole Middle East region.

At a meeting of the Disarmament Advisory Council held in Stockholm in late January, events in the Gulf and their implications for global security and disarmament were among the topics discussed.

An urgent meeting of the presidium was convened in Vienna on February 1 to discuss the Gulf crisis, a meeting which was also attended by a number of other leaders of our parties.

After the cessation of hostilities, our International held further discussions at the Party Leaders' Conference in March in Sydney.

The Middle East Committee met again in Cairo at the end of April, in order to review the situation in the Middle East as a whole. The meeting was hosted by the National Democratic Party and we were also received by President Mubarak.

The positive exchanges we have had here in Istanbul on the Middle East will surely strengthen our role as a force for peace in the region.

At the end of April, a mission of the International came here to Turkey and, in cooperation with the Social Democratic Populist Party, held discussions on the tragedy of the Kurdish and other refugees at the borders and in northern Iraq, and visited the frontier areas.

A major event of recent months, which I have already mentioned, was the SI Party Leaders' Conference held in Sydney on 9 and 10 March, to which I will refer again later this morning. The Australian Labor Party is celebrating its centenary this year and this was an appropriate occasion for the launching of a new phase of Socialist International activities in the Asia-Pacific region.

Our organisation has continued to follow closely developments in eastern and central Europe. In January, we learned with concern of the violent incidents in the Baltic republics and called in the strongest terms for respect for human rights. Our presidium, at its meeting in Vienna in February, decided that a Socialist International mission should be sent to the Baltic republics and this took place the same month. The members of the delegation met leaders of SI member parties and other political forces there, and also travelled to Moscow, where they held talks on the situation with representatives of the CPSU central committee and with the Social Democrats of the Russian Federation.

Exchanges of information and views on political developments in central and eastern Europe have continued, in informal meetings with international secretaries which we have convened from time to time. Following a decision we took at a meeting in Vienna, we are convening another in London at the end of this month, with the participation of international secretaries from eastern and western Europe.

On 31 March, long-awaited elections were held in Albania and our International participated in the observation of the ballot, which turned out to be but one step in the still-developing process of democratisation.

Our International also collaborated in the preparation of a conference on eastern and central Europe organised in Bonn in April by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and other foundations and convened by our president.

Turning to the Latin American continent, I must begin by referring to the sad death of our vice president, Guillermo Ungo, last February. Together with other representatives of the Socialist International, I was at his funeral in San Salvador, which was also attended by many friends and colleagues from the National Revolutionary Movement. Guillermo Ungo has been sorely missed, as much within our International as in his own country. He died at a time of advance by the democratic left in El Salvador and of renewed progress towards peace and stability in Central America.

A delegation from our International observed the first round of elections held in Guatemala last November. The SI group also took the opportunity to reiterate our grave concern at the unsatisfactory nature of investigations carried out in Guatemala into the assassination of Héctor Oqueli and Gilda Flores. Following the victory of President Jorge Serrano in the second round of voting our member party in Guatemala, the Democratic Socialist Party, have joined the new government of National Unity.

An SI mission, in which I participated, travelled to Haiti to observe campaigning for the first free elections there for several decades. Subsequently, another group visited the country to observe the voting. Our member party, PANPRA, has welcomed the successful carrying out of these democratic elections, which resulted in victory for President Aristide.

Most recently, another International mission was in Surinam to observe the elections held on 25 May, another step towards democracy in that country.

It is intended that a similar mission will observe the elections later this year in Guyana.

Since our congress in Stockholm, Socialist International missions have travelled to many countries to observe elections, from Namibia to Romania, and from Nicaragua to Bulgaria, a part of our tangible commitment to the, at times slow and difficult, but always encouraging development of democratic societies.

Members of the Council will recall that in 1990 our International took part in the process whereby the M-19 in Colombia surrendered its arms and its members were re-incorporated into civilian political life. This was a new role for our International in the cause of peace and disarmament. Again recently, a delegation was present in Colombia at ceremonies in which the EPL guerrilla group surrendered its arms and re-formed as a civilian political party. Also in Ecuador, SI representatives acted as witnesses to the ceremony in which members of the Alfaro Vive guerrilla movement laid down their arms and returned to civilian life.

A meeting of the Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Aruba on 10-11 April, hosted by our member party there, the People's Electoral Movement. There we discussed regional integration; the human rights situation, and political developments in the Caribbean. Delegates attended from most of our member parties in the region, together with representatives from some member parties in Europe and observers from a number of other parties and organisations in Latin America and the Caribbean. A special report will be presented today by the chair of the committee.

In Sydney in March, we took the opportunity to review the rapid developments in South Africa. In a statement issued by that meeting, we welcomed the progress made towards the dismantling of apartheid, but stressed the long way still to go and the need to maintain international pressure on the South African government. We also urged the need for restraint and a turning back from violent confrontation.

Our contacts with parties and organisations in many African countries are intensifying, as change and democratisation in the continent continues to gather momentum. Here in Istanbul, the parties which are active in our committee on Africa held discussions before our Council and decided on a forthcoming meeting of both committees where we will examine our contribution to the new emerging democratic forces. A number of visits to African countries are also planned for the near future.

Our Human Rights Committee met in Lisbon last December, at the invitation of the Socialist Party of Portugal. The committee is currently working on a plan for adoption by the Council on the question of the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. In Portugal, we also discussed the question of East Timor and issued a statement calling on Indonesia to apply United Nations resolutions, and to seek a peaceful solution to the conflict in that territory under the aegis of the UN. The next meeting of the Human Rights Committee will deal with the situation of minorities and ethnic groups. A future meeting in Caracas, Venezuela, is also planned.

At the end of May, the Environment Committee held a meeting in Malmö, Sweden, at the invitation of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, which will be reported in greater detail by a comrade from that party. The committee looked forward to the United Nations Environment Conference to be held in Rio de Janeiro next year. Prior to that, the committee will hold its next meeting also in Brazil this coming October.

Our Disarmament Advisory Council, which has met twice this year, as our president said yesterday, will be concentrating more attention on European and other global security issues, in the context of the present changing international relations.

After our discussion on North-South issues at our last Council meeting, the Economic Policy Committee will also hold a meeting in September in the Netherlands, at the invitation of the Dutch Labour Party, at which it will return to the North-South agenda last touched upon at our meeting in New York last year.

Our vice-president, Pierre Mauroy, yesterday announced an initiative to bring together socialist local authorities from our member parties in 1992, to which he will be dedicating himself in the coming months. This will go far to implement the decisions taken when the Local Authority

Committee was established in Geneva in 1989. We welcome member parties' response to this idea and their collaboration in its implementation.

I think this brief sample of our most recent activities and the few I have mentioned which are planned for the immediate future bear witness to the relevance of our democratic socialist strategies today. As we look back on the forty years since the re-establishment of our International in Frankfurt in June 1951, we can appreciate how much our movement has grown, both intellectually and geographically. We must make certain that that development continues.
