



XXI Congress of the Socialist International

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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL TO THE XXI CONGRESS OF THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL

FROM NEW YORK TO PARIS

The Socialist International held its last Congress at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York, a venue chosen in recognition of the UN's principal role in promoting peace and international cooperation. Now, three years later, and seven years after our momentous Congress in Berlin, we return to Europe for our twenty-first Congress.

I would like to thank our comrades and friends of the Socialist Party of France for all they have done as hosts of this Congress. Paris is a city rich in the history of struggle for liberty, justice and equality, social democratic values that are taking hold throughout the world due to the concerted work of our International and the solidarity and determination of its members. In the nineties alone the membership of the Socialist International has nearly doubled from about 70 member parties in all categories to more than 130. And in Paris we expect the total to grow to nearly 150, further proof that increasing numbers of people throughout the world feel at home within our family.

The global expansion of our International has been more than matched by the qualitative leap in our political influence within nations, and in our leadership internationally in the debate about how best to prepare the world and its people for the new millennium. Presently, more than a third of our member parties, either alone or in coalition, are in government—a greater number than ever before, and one that looks to increase as we continue to hear about new election successes by social democratic parties on several continents.

In Europe especially our political strength is evident from one capital to the next, and social democratic and labour prime ministers from every corner of Europe, joined by important social democratic leaders from all continents, are here in Paris to contribute to the work of our Congress. The growing and positive impact of our organisation in every region of the world shows that we are in the forefront of responding to people's needs and aspirations,

that the Socialist International is moving in the direction that people want to go.

Though social democracy has become a mandatory point of reference everywhere, we have recognised throughout this decade that the world on the eve of the 21st Century is ever changing, that new and diverse approaches to increasingly complex problems are constantly needed.

In the meantime, our Council has expanded and deepened the work of our committees, which now provide an overview, analysis and a common and shared platform on developments in every region of the world and on major themes at both the global and the local levels. Yet even as the architecture of the Socialist International has been advanced geographically, we have been and continue taking steps to strengthen our organisation internally so that it can better achieve the International's objectives.

At our recent Council in Buenos Aires, we noted that the pace of change in our world continues to accelerate and we focused on the idea of 'shaping change', to give it direction so that all the world's citizens are included in the promise of a better future. We emphasised that crucial to that task is our continued adherence to the principles that have always guided us as we are engaged in moulding them to the new realities. It is in that spirit that I am pleased to present this report on the principal activities of the Socialist International during the period since our last Congress.

AFRICA

In Africa the Socialist International has steadfastly been building a message of hope and commitment in the face of profound and complex problems from which too many others in the world have turned away. Our member parties in the region and our Africa Committee now provide the principal channels for voicing the democratic aspirations of people throughout the continent.

We are not alone in recognising the continent's economic potential, its rich natural resources and the challenges of globalisation. But the people of Africa increasingly are turning to social democracy because of our belief that economic development cannot be realised without the establishment of peace and democracy. And while we acknowledge that the problems of Africa are as difficult and longstanding as anywhere else in the world, this only inspires us toward even greater efforts to end conflicts through dialogue, to strengthen democratic culture in accordance with the emerging popular will.

Our Council established the SI Africa Committee in 1993. Today, the Committee can count on the participation of no less than 24 member parties from throughout the region as well as many more African parties of social democratic inspiration.

A number of the parties are in government, some are leading opposition forces, while others are struggling valiantly to carry out political activities amid repression or violent conflicts. All contribute to the work of our International, which, in the spirit of cooperation and learning from one another, enhances the efforts of our Council on behalf of the African continent.

For example, in Rome in January 1997, following a report of the Africa Committee, our Council issued a detailed declaration that helped to maintain our focus and the concern of the international community on the unfolding tragedy in the Great Lakes Region. Since then, improvements in the situation there have taken place to the extent that the calls by our International for humanitarian assistance and dialogue have been heeded.

Indeed, I can say with pride that wherever in Africa progress has been achieved toward greater democracy, respect for human rights and conflict resolution, the Socialist International has been involved, particularly in South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia and Morocco. With regard to South Africa, this past August I felt great satisfaction and a strong sense of history when I received from the African National Congress, only two months after that party's reelection under President Thabo Mbeki, its application to formally join the Socialist International at our Congress in Paris.

Since our last Congress in New York, the Africa Committee has convened on four occasions. The first meeting was held in Dakar in July 1997, hosted by the ruling Socialist Party of Senegal and addressed by SI President Mauroy and numerous leaders of SI member parties from throughout the region. In 1998 the Committee contributed to a major declaration, issued by our Council in Geneva before a sizable group of international journalists, which underlined the need to confront the deeper causes of violent conflict, including poverty, poor governance and violations of human rights.

This year, with the approach of our Congress, the Africa Committee has met twice. The first time was in March in Bamako, hosted by the African Party for Solidarity and Justice, ADEMA-PASJ, Mali, with the participation of more than sixty delegates from more than twenty countries. The Committee expressed its deep concern regarding the continued threats to democracy in the region, particularly in Equatorial Guinea, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Guinea, and its continued support for efforts to secure peace in Angola.

The Committee gathered in September in Maputo hosted by our member and ruling party in Mozambique, Frelimo. Following extensive deliberations, the Committee issued the 'Maputo Declaration', a wide-ranging document that stressed peace and democracy as necessary components for Africa's economic development and global integration, and reaffirmed our International's 'commitment to collective solidarity'. The Committee also addressed the issue of globalisation and emphasised, among other points, the need to protect the continent's human resources through better health care and education policies.

Globalisation increasingly has become a defining issue in Africa, as it has in every region. It has been addressed not only by our Africa Committee, but also by the Global Progress Commission, chaired by SI Vice-President Felipe González, which held its African regional seminar in Dakar in January 1999. Delegates from some twenty-five African parties assembled to explore how social democrats could develop strategies for integrating the continent into global markets, taking into account the uniqueness of the African situation.

Two months later the SI Committee on Local Authorities, meeting in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, underlined the view of the International that in an increasingly globalised world politics needs to be made accessible for all, which can best be achieved through more direct contact between government and citizens at the local level. Following discussions on the specific problems faced by African municipalities, the Committee began preparations for the second Socialist International World Conference of Mayors, held in the city of Fez in

October 1998 and hosted by our member party in Morocco, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, USFP. Attended by over two hundred and fifty mayors and members of municipal governments, the conference adopted 'The Fez Declaration', a multi-part document which reflected the fact that global cooperation among social democrats begins with efforts at the local and regional levels in both the South and the North.

While there remains great concern for Africa, there is equal cause for hope-the structure of our International, from the local and national to the regional and global levels, is at work throughout the region, proving that no matter how difficult the challenge social democracy can make a difference.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

In just a little more than a decade our International has made enormous strides in Asia and the Pacific, a region of increasing economic and political weight in the world. In the 1980s social democratic parties and movements, spread out across this vast area, had only limited contacts among themselves and few were members of our organisation. Today, as can be seen in the ongoing work of our Asia-Pacific Committee, established by the SI Council in 1993, and in the number of parties in the region which have joined or are applying for membership in the Socialist International, it is evident that social democracy has emerged as the foremost option for Asian and Pacific peoples seeking democracy, economic equity and social justice.

The initial meeting of the Asia-Pacific Committee in the inter-Congress period was held in New Delhi on the eve of our Council there in November 1997. It was the first SI Council ever held in India, hosted by our member party Janata Dal on the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence, and the second Council held in this region following the successful meeting in Tokyo in 1994. Drawing on the work of our Committee, the Council in New Delhi adopted a resolution that underlined the heightened relevance of social democratic principles throughout Asia and the Pacific.

The Council stated, in particular, that while a number of countries in the region had achieved success in integrating into the global economy, only social democracy provides the political and ethical framework, based on putting people first, that can ensure that globalisation leads to positive change for all people. In this regard, emphasis was placed on the protection of labour rights, including the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike, and on the need for the empowerment of women so that they can be an effective force for social change and sustainable development.

It was therefore fitting that only a few months later in April 1998, as we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, the SI Committee on Human Rights met in Manila to focus on, among other themes, the promotion and strengthening of social and economic rights. Participants discussed the need for increased dialogue and cooperation between our organisation and the international trade union and women's movements, and reiterated the importance of the indivisibility and universality of all human rights.

The Socialist International also continues to be in the forefront of the struggle for political

rights and civil liberties in the Asia-Pacific region. On the issue of Burma, no political organisation in the world has been as vocal and steadfast in protesting dictatorial rule in that country, while calling for the results of the 1990 democratic elections to be respected. In a resolution adopted by our Council in Oslo in May of last year, for instance, the International reiterated its support for Burma's democratic movement and its call for the international community to impose sanctions on the military regime until progress is made on democratisation and respect for human rights.

Similarly, our International for nearly a quarter century has stood firmly behind the right of the people of East Timor to self-determination and freedom from oppression, and it has consistently backed the actions of the United Nations in support of those goals, particularly during the developments of recent months. José Ramos-Horta, joint winner of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize, came to the SI Council meeting in Rome in 1997 to thank personally, on behalf of the East Timorese people, the Socialist International for our efforts.

Meanwhile, as our concerns regarding globalisation carry into the next millennium, it is worth remembering that our Council in New Delhi, echoing the assessments of our Asia-Pacific Committee, warned of the threat of being 'overwhelmed by unregulated market forces' and endorsed the idea, as originally stated by John Smith, that 'markets must serve people and not the other way around'.

As we saw less than a year later, the world indeed was rocked by the financial crisis that broke out in Asia. It was an unfortunate occurrence, but one which nevertheless gave credence to our long-held position that development without democracy, and globalisation without transparency and accountability, ultimately are not sustainable.

Since then, the members of the Asia-Pacific Committee, as well as other organisations of social democratic orientation with which our International maintains relations, have continued to analyse trends and developments in the region. This past June, as the time of our Congress approached, the Committee met in Kuala Lumpur. The gathering was not only an opportunity to further advance the cause of social democracy in Asia and the Pacific. It was also a clear expression of solidarity on the part of our International with our host and long-standing member party in Malaysia, the Democratic Action Party, DAP, which for so many years has endured authoritarian reprisals for its efforts to promote a democratic rule of law in that country.

Following extensive deliberations the Committee adopted the 'Declaration of Kuala Lumpur', a far-reaching document which addressed many of the key issues confronting social democrats in the region today. Emphasis was placed on the struggle for democracy and respect for human rights and their critical link to the task of keeping the world from being permanently divided into "globalisation winners and losers'.

In Kuala Lumpur, the Committee embraced the challenge of making the next hundred years 'the century for social democracy in Asia and the Pacific'. Not all that long ago, the prospects would have seemed remote. Today, however, our message increasingly is being heard and, as the reach of our International continues to extend throughout the region, we begin to see how such a vision can become reality.

EUROPE

The Socialist International is the leading political force in Europe today. Our member parties are in the forefront in building the continent's institutions for the next century and in defining Europe's critical role in the world. The electoral gains made by democratic socialists in the region in recent years are a powerful indication of the desire for change and the increasing popularity of the ideas and values of our movement. At the same time, the International and its European members recognise that they now have the responsibility to deliver and, throughout this period, have been working assiduously at the local, national and regional levels to build a better future for all of Europe's citizens.

Our first Council following the XX Congress was held in Rome in January 1997 and was addressed at its opening session by SI Vice-President Massimo D'Alema, leader of the Italian Democrats of the Left, DS. He welcomed the participants, which included representatives of nearly all the 33 member parties newly admitted at our Congress in New York, and stated that the fundamental challenge to government in modern societies is 'to extend the potential for growth and development inherent in globalisation and to curb its negative effects'. The following year, after a negotiated reconstitution of left and centre forces in Italy, D'Alema was sworn in as Prime Minister of the country.

By the time we convened another Council in Europe, in Oslo in May 1998, new social democratic governments were in power in both Great Britain and France. In May 1997 the British Labour Party won a landslide victory in parliamentary elections, paving the way for the inauguration of Prime Minister Tony Blair. One month later, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin took office in France following the victory of the French Socialist Party, PS, in parliamentary voting and, in accordance with PS policy, women were named to five of the fifteen cabinet positions.

The return to government of the British Labour Party gave new impetus to the search for an end to conflict in Northern Ireland. The Good Friday agreement of April 1998 was the product of the great efforts displayed by three members of the Socialist International-Tony Blair, John Hume, leader of Northern Ireland's Social Democratic and Labour Party, SDLP, and Dick Spring during his time as leader of the Irish Labour Party.

A month after the agreement was reached John Hume addressed our Council in Oslo. He emphasised the importance of dialogue and respect for differences among people, and expressed appreciation to the Socialist International for its consistent support in the search for peace in Northern Ireland. In October 1998 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize jointly with David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party. The Nobel Committee's recognition of Hume underlined, not for the first time, the efforts of the members of our International in promoting peaceful, democratic solutions to conflict in all parts of the world.

In June 1998, a month after our Council in Oslo, the Global Progress Commission met at Willy Brandt Haus in Berlin for the first of a number of regional seminars it held during the period. The aim of this gathering was to gain a European view of globalisation. In framing the discussion, Felipe González, Chair of the Commission, drew on the noted remark of Brandt who described the modern era as holding more promising and threatening potential than ever before.

Our Council met next in Geneva in November 1998. Only a month earlier, the electorate in

Germany had voted for change and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder was sworn in as head of a new Social Democratic Party, SPD, government. The election result was of major importance outside German borders as well because with the SPD in office it meant that labour and social democratic parties, either alone or in coalition, governed in thirteen out of fifteen states in the European Union.

The deepening of our influence in Europe helps social democratic leaders to ensure that the expanding Union will be truly a citizens' Europe. At the same time, it affects in a positive way the climate of political opinion in the rest of the world, as was evident in the Latin American media coverage of our Council in Buenos Aires in June, and as can be seen in the difference our member parties are increasingly making in all regions of the globe.

Central and Eastern Europe

The advances of our International in Europe have by no means been limited to the Western part of the continent. As the SI Committee for Central and Eastern Europe, SICEE, stated in the Warsaw Declaration adopted at its meeting in Poland this past September: In the ten years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, 'political parties of socialist and social democratic orientation have developed in the majority of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, many of which have taken responsibilities of government'. In fact, if we take into account the advances of our International in those countries, we see that in Europe overall there are now about twenty of our member parties in government, either alone or in coalition.

The increasing strength and influence of our member parties helps our International to respond effectively to the immense and complex challenges of Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in the Balkans, Russia and the Caucasus, and with regard to the enlargement of the European Union and NATO as well. SICEE, which met no less than six times during the period, the SI Peace, Security and Disarmament Committee, SIPSAD, and our Committee on Local Authorities, all working in coordination with the SI Council, have been very active in addressing these issues.

In June 1997 SICEE held a timely meeting in Rome, just prior to EU and NATO summits, during which representatives of nearly forty parties and organisations discussed military and economic priorities for Europe. SICEE, chaired by Committee Co-Chairs Piero Fassino, DS, Italy, and László Kovács, MSZP, Hungary, issued a declaration which supported the continuing integration of Europe through the enlargement of political and security structures, and stressed that fundamental social and democratic rights must not take second place to economic modernisation. Four months later SIPSAD, convening in Budapest to discuss the issue of NATO enlargement, reaffirmed the intention of SI member parties to implement in Europe 'a stable security-policy framework within which democracy, the rule of law and social justice can be accomplished and safeguarded'.

In May 1998 SICEE met in Sarajevo to discuss how best to achieve peace and stability in the Balkans, and many member parties and guests from throughout the region attended. Participants observed a minute's silence at the opening of the meeting for all victims of war and violence in the Balkans and later laid a wreath in a ceremony in the centre of Sarajevo. In its Sarajevo Declaration, adopted only weeks later by the SI Council in Oslo, the Committee called for the full application of the Dayton Accords and called on all democratic

forces 'to work towards implementing security and stability throughout the region as a condition for creating societies which are free, democratic, pluralistic, multi-ethnic and just'.

Our Council in Oslo also discussed and adopted a detailed resolution on the South Caucasus introduced by SIPSAD. In the document, prepared by the Committee during its meeting in Tbilisi, Georgia just before we met in Oslo, our Council endorsed the efforts of the international community, particularly the UN and the OSCE, to help resolve conflicts within and between the individual states, and called for greater economic cooperation in the region as well as protection of human and minority rights.

SICEE met again in Geneva on the eve of our Council in November 1998. A principal focus of the participants was the mounting violence and instability in Kosovo. In a declaration prepared by the Committee and adopted by the Council, the International supported all efforts toward starting negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina, a position that was reiterated by SICEE at its next meeting in Bucharest in February of this year.

In April, after the failure of attempts by the international community to reach a solution had led to NATO action, SICEE gathered in Rome, hosted by the Democrats of the Left, DS. At the end of the special one-day meeting, the Committee issued a declaration which condemned the intransigence of Milosevic as well as 'any attempt to base the existence of states on ethnic purity', and reaffirmed the International's position that 'every woman and every man must be respected, regardless of their culture, religion, nationality'.

At its meeting in Bucharest, hosted by the SI Romanian member parties, the Democratic Party, PD, and the Social Democratic Party, PSDR, SICEE also addressed developments in Russia. After hearing a number of reports from that country, the Committee emphasised that the crisis there was due in significant part to the lack of 'social orientation' during the reform process, and urged member parties of the SI to step up support for political parties and movements in Russia which 'commit themselves to strengthening democracy effectively'. In September, as part of its Warsaw Declaration, SICEE expressed hope that the forthcoming elections in Russia would be the occasion for the strengthening of 'real democratic political forces'.

Also in September the Committee on Local Authorities, during its meeting in Cartaxo, Portugal, followed up on its historic initiative begun in Serbia two years ago. In May 1997, soon after our Council in Rome where we heard of the determined struggle for democracy at the local level in Serbia, the Committee held a meeting in the Serbian town of Subotica as guests of the town council, and met as well with numerous Serbian local officials during a gathering in Arad, Romania.

These meetings, particularly the one in Subotica, were especially symbolic of the International's support for democratic change in Serbia. In Cartaxo, the Committee furthered its cooperation with municipalities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as it heard reports from representatives of local governments in Novi Sad, Serbia, and Podgorica, Montenegro, on the difficulties they faced due to internal repression and international isolation. The Committee issued a declaration which appealed to cities throughout the world to show their solidarity by helping with the reconstruction and democratisation of the Balkans through partnerships with local authorities in the region.

THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Socialist International has long viewed the Mediterranean region as a crucial strategic area for regional and inter-regional cooperation. Our Mediterranean Committee includes SI member parties from the European, African and Middle Eastern countries surrounding the Mediterranean, which gives it a truly pan-regional character. Like the Socialist International itself, the Committee represents a vital North-South partnership, bridging cultural and historical differences through common respect for fundamental human rights.

That has given our International a distinct advantage in advocating for stronger Euro-Mediterranean ties based on social democratic principles. In 1995, in fact, two years after the SI Council in Athens established our Mediterranean Committee, we saw reflected in the resolutions of the Barcelona Conference many elements of socialist thought such as, for example, the link between disarmament and development.

In March 1997, following our Congress in New York, the Mediterranean Committee gathered at a meeting in Tangier chaired by Committee Chair Raimon Obiols, PSOE, Spain. The venue not only afforded participants an enhanced perspective from the southern tier of the region, it also allowed the International to show its solidarity and support for our host and member party, the Socialist Union for Popular Forces, USFP. We were therefore very pleased less than a year later when the party, a consistent force for democratic transition in Morocco, was elected to form the new government there.

In Tangier, the Committee, reiterated a fundamental position of our International, that peace, security and prosperity on the northern shores of the Mediterranean are deeply linked to economic and social development in countries not only to the south but also to the east of the region. In this regard, participants also highlighted the crucial role of women who, by fully exercising their rights and aided by their experience, 'must be able to act as agents for development and peace'.

The next meeting of the Mediterranean Committee was held in Rome in 1998, hosted by the Democrats of the Left, DS. Participants from some fifteen countries from throughout the region lamented the setbacks and delays in implementing the Barcelona agreements and vowed that the Socialist International would step up its efforts to help put the process back on track.

Following a report by the Committee in Geneva later that year, our Council indeed urged that the governments of the European Union and the countries belonging to the Mediterranean Partnership honour the pledges they undertook in Barcelona. The Committee is meeting again in Paris on the eve of our Congress and will update us on the complex dynamic of Euro-Mediterranean relations.

The International, through the work of the Mediterranean Committee and our Council, also continues to play an important role in maintaining world attention on difficult situations in the region.

Regarding Algeria, for example, we have consistently expressed our support, as we did at each of our Councils since the SI Congress in New York, for all those who reject violence

and terrorism in favour of dialogue and finding a democratic solution to the tragedy there. Most recently, at our Council in Buenos Aires, we lamented the failure of the Algerian authorities to establish the necessary prerequisites for democratic elections, and reaffirmed our fraternal support for our member party in Algeria, the Socialist Forces Front, FFS.

With regard to seeking a resolution to the conflict in the Western Sahara, we reaffirmed last year at our Council in Geneva our long-standing support for a free, fair and transparent referendum on self-determination, and again called upon all the parties involved to cooperate fully with the United Nations in this regard.

The work of our International in the Mediterranean region, especially the cooperation within our Committee of member parties from three different continents, underlines the global reach we have achieved. At the same time, the people-to-people nature of our organisation was particularly evident during the recent September meeting of the SI Committee on Local Authorities.

At that gathering, hosted in Cartaxo, Portugal by the Socialist Party, PS, a number of delegates reported on cities in crisis. None spoke more poignantly than Sefa Sirmen of the SI-member Republican People's Party, CHP, in Turkey, who is the Mayor of Izmit, one of the towns most affected by the recent devastating earthquake. In response, the Committee issued a statement urgently appealing for assistance from other municipalities worldwide, a good example of how our social democratic networks of global solidarity are built from local links.

THE MIDDLE EAST

Since our Congress in New York, the Socialist International has had as members not only the Labour Party and Meretz of Israel, but also Fatah, the largest Palestinian political organisation.

So it was that the SI Council held in Rome in January 1997, the first after that Congress, provided a moving and historic moment as Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat met for the first time as fellow members of our International. Peres, embracing the occasion, noted that previously during negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians there had been a dispute over which title to use in addressing Arafat, but now, he said, 'I am very happy to call him by a new title, comrade'.

The moment was symbolic of the great achievement of the Oslo peace accords, and during the Council participants recalled the many years our International had been deeply involved in the difficult and patient work to establish a climate conducive to dialogue between the parties of the region. Arafat himself said that he would never forget the role of the International, 'from the beginning, in pushing forward the peace process. This has touched all Palestinian and Israeli hearts'.

Our Council in Rome, in its declaration on the Middle East, expressed satisfaction at the progress made up to that point toward full implementation of the Oslo accords. Within months, though, it was evident that the peace process had reached a dangerous impasse, in large part due to the intransigence of the Likud-led government in Israel. Such difficulties,

however, as always, only inspired our International, particularly our Middle East Committee, SIMEC, to redouble efforts to bring the process back on track.

In May 1997 SIMEC, chaired by Committee Chair Bjorn Tore Godal, DNA, Norway, met first in the city of Ramallah in the Territories under Palestinian Authority, hosted by Fatah, then reconvened the following day in Tel Aviv, hosted by our Israeli member parties. The Committee adopted a resolution that deplored the stalemate, emphasised the need for dialogue on all outstanding issues and called upon the international community to step up all efforts to get the parties back to the negotiating table.

SIMEC met next in Oslo prior to the November 1997 Council meeting in New Delhi. Our Council, drawing on the work of the Committee, adopted a resolution that pointed to the special responsibility of the Israeli government to ensure that the peace process remained on course.

In our continuing efforts to support peace, our Middle East Committee convened in Cairo in March 1998, hosted by our member party in Egypt, the National Democratic Party, NDP. Two months later, at the SI Council meeting in Oslo, hosted by the Norwegian Labour Party, DNA, both Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat again were present to inform our discussions. The Council, in its resolution on the Middle East, supported all efforts within the international community to assist in the implementation of the peace accords, particularly as they pertained to the principle of Land for Peace.

A breakthrough finally appeared to have been made with the reaching of the Wye River Agreement not long before our Council in Geneva in November 1998. SIMEC met on the eve of the Council to prepare a timely report for the participants on the latest developments. The Council, following discussions on the theme, 'Putting peace and democracy first', adopted a resolution welcoming the impetus provided by the new agreement and calling for an expedient follow-up to ensure against further delays in carrying out the peace process.

At our Council in Geneva, the International also addressed a number of other Middle East concerns. For example, it called upon Israel and Syria to resume negotiations on the basis of UN Resolutions and the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference. And, while appreciating that the Israel-Lebanese track of the peace process is part of a wider context, the International insisted that it be treated as an issue in its own right with full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon.

The SIMEC Working Group on the Kurdish Question, meanwhile, one of the few internationally based groups that focuses specifically on the plight of the Kurds, met three times during the period. The first gathering was held in Stockholm in February 1998, hosted by the Swedish Social Democratic Party, SAP. At our Council in Oslo four months later, the International reiterated its conviction that no lasting peace in the region could be established without 'peaceful and fair solutions guaranteeing the legitimate rights of the Kurds within the borders of each country concerned'.

The next two meetings were held in Paris in June 1998 and March 1999 at the invitation of the French Socialist Party, PS. In the interim, in September 1998, leaders of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, KDP, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, PUK, of Northern Iraq, came to the SI Secretariat in London for meetings after they had reached a peace and power-sharing agreement in Washington. At its most recent gathering in Paris, the Working Group

issued a declaration that emphasised the right to a fair trial in Turkey of Abdullah Ocalan, while reminding that the Kurdish question is an important issue in Turkey, it is also 'a great human tragedy of enormous historical complexity'.

At our Council in Buenos Aires in June, the International expressed its great satisfaction at the election of Ehud Barak as Prime Minister of Israel and congratulated our SI member parties there. The election gave renewed momentum to the Oslo process as Barak set a goal of reaching a final peace agreement as early as next year. The agreement this past September on ways to advance the Wye River accords was an important step in this regard.

In the meantime, we held SIMEC meetings again in Tel Aviv and Ramallah at the end of October in preparations for our Congress. The peace process is moving in a positive direction and in Paris we will hear of the latest developments. We know from experience that difficulties can always arise. Nonetheless, strengthened by the example of leaders such as Willy Brandt, Bruno Kreisky, François Mitterand, Olof Palme and Mario Soares who began the work of our International in the Middle East more than twenty years ago, we remain confident in our ability to help ensure that a lasting peace in the region is finally achieved.

NORTH AMERICA, LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Our International has a long and proud tradition in Latin America and the Caribbean where for decades we played a leading role in the struggle against dictatorships and in support of human rights. Willy Brandt, in fact, used to say that the region was the second pillar of our work after Europe.

Today, we are more active and have a greater presence in the region than ever. There are now nearly forty SI member parties from more than two dozen nations spanning North America, Latin America and the Caribbean-which is almost as many parties as the total worldwide membership of the Socialist International twenty-five years ago.

A number of our member parties in the Americas are in government, while many others play important roles in the political life of their countries. All have been working-through our SI Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean, SICLAC, our thematic Committees and our Council-to defend democratic gains, promote fundamental rights where they are still denied and counter the neoliberal economic policies that have marginalised so many people in the region.

Our principal activities in the region during the inter-Congress period began with the SICLAC meeting held in Santiago, Chile in 1997, one of the largest regional gatherings we have ever assembled, and culminated with our recent Council meeting in Buenos Aires where the International issued the historic 'Consensus of Buenos Aires'.

Nearly 150 delegates attended the SICLAC gathering in Santiago which was hosted by our three member parties in Chile, the Socialist Party, PS, the Social Democratic Radical Party, PRSD, and the Party for Democracy, PPD. The Committee, noting that neoliberal policies had increased poverty, particularly among women, 'the poorest of the poor,' called for the

inclusion of democratic and social clauses in regional and international economic agreements.

SICLAC met three more times during the period, and on each occasion applied the principles of social democracy to the search for practical solutions to the problems of the region. When the Committee gathered in Santo Domingo in March 1998, for example, hosted by the Dominican Revolutionary Party, PRD, it underlined the social responsibilities of governments and reminded that education, in the words of Michael Manley, 'is the only means by which a people can lift themselves out of their suffering and misery'. Manley, an SI honorary president and founding chair of our Committee on Economic Policy, had passed away the year before, leaving behind an extraordinary record of achievement as a leader in Jamaica and a major figure in the Socialist International for decades.

One of the principal themes of the SICLAC meeting in September 1998, hosted in Caracas by our member party in Venezuela, Democratic Action, AD, was fluctuating world markets and their impact on regional economies. Foreshadowing the work of our Council in Buenos Aires the following year, the Committee expressed its concern about the 'harmful and unregulated effects' of globalisation and reaffirmed the need for a review of the international financial system.

The meeting in Caracas opened with a tribute in memory of our dear friend and comrade José Francisco Peña Gómez, the chair of SICLAC for nearly two decades, who had died only a few months before. Peña was a global leader in the fight for democracy, and the fact that nearly all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean now have governments elected in free multi-party elections is certainly part of his legacy.

For the Socialist International, the quest for democracy has always gone hand in hand with our constant campaign for the protection of human rights, something that was underlined at the SI Council in Geneva where we gave full backing to the International Criminal Court, an institution long advocated by our International and whose creation involved the direct efforts of many of our member parties. The Council also reiterated our International's support for the right to bring to trial those responsible for crimes against humanity, following the arrest in the United Kingdom of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet.

The most recent SICLAC meeting was held only last month in Bogotá. The gathering provided an opportunity for our International to show its solidarity with our member and host party, the Liberal Party of Colombia, PLC, and all others who share the values of social democracy, in their struggle to achieve a peaceful and lasting resolution to the armed conflict there. As always, the Committee also expressed support for SI member parties that are confronting critical national issues in other countries, for example, the threats to democracy in Peru and Venezuela, and the unilateral exercise of U.S. military authority in Puerto Rico.

We were also active holding seminars and meetings in the three largest countries of the region. In July 1997 our Committee on Local Authorities gathered in Niterói, Brazil, hosted by the Democratic Labour Party, PDT, and delegates from Latin America, Europe and Africa discussed ways to strengthen social democratic solidarity and cooperation between and within cities.

With the Global Progress Commission we held in 1999 two seminars that bridged Latin

America and North America. The first, hosted in Mexico City by our SI member parties in Mexico and organised with our Secretariat, analysed globalisation from the Latin American and Caribbean perspective. At the second, that we held in conjunction with Georgetown University in Washington D.C., academics and policy specialists from the United States, including members of the Clinton administration, as well as from Latin America and Europe, gathered to assess globalisation from three angles—the economic and financial dimension, the political and security aspect and the cultural impact.

The various and concerted activities of our organisation have strengthened social democracy in the Americas and that, in turn, has enriched our International overall. Such was evident during the SI Council held in Buenos Aires in June.

At the meeting, hosted by our Argentinian member parties, the Popular Socialist Party, PSP, and the Radical Civic Union, UCR, more than 350 delegates representing almost 100 parties deliberated on the main theme, 'Shaping change'. The result was the 'Consensus of Buenos Aires,' which called for 'a worldwide consensus that leads towards concrete agreements for social change in addition to economic stability', a message which was carried by major media from South to North.

Fernando de la Rúa, presidential candidate of the Alliance for Work, Education and Justice, of which both the PSP and UCR are members, led the opening session of our Council, expressing the pride of Argentinian social democrats that the Council was meeting in Buenos Aires. All of us in the International were no less proud when just last month de la Rúa won a solid first-round victory to become president of one of the key countries in Latin America.

DEEPENING OUR COMMON AGENDA

Economy, Development and Environment

The Declaration on the World Economy, prepared by the SI Committee on Economic Policy, Development and the Environment, SICEDE, and adopted by the SI Congress in New York, was a far-reaching and prescient document that helped to frame our approach to economic issues throughout the inter-Congress period.

The Declaration warned, for example, of the negative effects of unregulated globalisation such as financial turbulence and increasing inequality, and called for a new system of collective responsibility to ensure stability as well as social and environmental improvements. Only a few months later the concerns of our International were vindicated by the outbreak of the currency crisis in East Asia.

In response, the SI Council in New Delhi in November 1997 reaffirmed our position that globalisation is in many ways a unique and powerful force, but that completely unfettered market forces undermined the prospects for balanced development, the alleviation of poverty and environmental protection. Meanwhile, the presence of our International in Asia underlined the cooperation between democratic socialists both regionally and worldwide in addressing the challenges of today's globalised world.

A year later in November 1998, with economic uncertainty and instability spreading beyond Asia to Russia and Latin America, SICEDE convened in Sintra, near Lisbon. The meeting, chaired by Portuguese Prime Minister António Guterres, Chair of SICEDE, prepared an extensive draft declaration, which provided a framework for political action to enhance the positive and limit the negative effects of global markets.

The Declaration, 'To Regulate Globalisation and to Globalise Regulation', was debated that same month by our Council in Geneva. SI President Pierre Mauroy, recognising the urgency of addressing the upheaval in the global economy, had proposed to bring forward the date of the meeting.

Following a wide-ranging discussion in which Guterres stated that, 'Our struggle is not against globalisation, our struggle is to regulate globalisation', the Council in Geneva adopted the Declaration which stated that regulating globalisation 'is not only a matter of concern to international financial institutions. It should be the means for a new international order, which can reinforce democracy and promote solidarity'.

The Council further advanced the work of the International on these issues when it convened this past June in Argentina and adopted the 'Consensus of Buenos Aires'. The document emphasised the need 'for a new international consensus to transcend the so-called Washington Consensus which stressed merely market reforms', one that 'leads towards concrete agreements for social change in addition to economic stability'.

Local Authorities

While the Socialist International has been a leader on the issue of globalisation, it also has been at the forefront in promoting local democracy and underlining the connection between the application of social democratic principles and good governance at the local level. SI President Mauroy, who is the Mayor of the French city of Lille, has taken a particular interest in this aspect of our work and played a key role in the creation of our Committee on Local Authorities.

The Committee, established only four years ago following the successful SI World Conference of Mayors in Bologna in 1995, has been especially active, as can be seen in the preceding sections of this report on our activities in specific regions of the world. Since the SI Congress in New York, the Committee has held no less than six meetings-from Europe, Eastern Europe and the Balkans, to Africa and Latin America-not to mention the Second World Conference of Mayors that we held in October 1998 when more than two hundred fifty mayors and municipal officials from around the globe gathered in the Moroccan city of Fez.

The Fez Declaration, adopted by the delegates in Morocco following two days of discussions in working groups and plenary sessions, emphasised themes at the heart of the International's work in advancing democracy at the local level. The document reaffirmed our commitment to the humanisation of cities and towns 'in a world in the process of profound transformation, characterised on the one hand by the globalisation of the economy and of information, and on the other hand by the accentuation of inequalities between countries,

between regions and between citizens'.

Our organisation, in fact, is the only international political movement that consistently underlines the link between global trends and their effect on citizens at the local level. As Philippe Busquin, Chair of the Committee, stated at the meeting held in Abidjan, Ivory Coast in March of last year, making politics accessible for all people, through decentralisation and encouraging 'politics of proximity', was a fundamental task of our member parties in an increasingly globalised world.

Similarly, in our efforts to enhance the viability of local politics, the Socialist International stands alone in our insistence on fundamental principles. In the Fez Declaration we reaffirmed, for example, that only democratic procedures could legitimise the powers exercised by mayors and other municipal officials, and that the equality between men and women must be fully respected.

Solidarity is yet another principle that is fundamental to our work at the local level. 'Solidarity between cities - Solidarity within Cities' was, in fact, the main theme of the meeting of our Committee on Local Authorities in July 1997. At the gathering, held in Niterói, Brazil, and hosted by the SI-member Democratic Labour Party, PDT, delegates discussed ways in which inter-municipal cooperation, not just within nations but across continents, could enhance the ability of local governments to meet the needs of citizens and reduce dependence on foreign aid.

At the Committee's most recent meeting, held in Cartaxo in September and hosted by the Socialist Party, PS, of Portugal, participants discussed initiatives that were outlined at the Second World Conference in Fez. Of principal interest was the proposed preparation of a Charter of socialist local authorities and support for a Global Charter of local autonomy, both of which can only enhance the work of our International in this critical field.

Peace, Security and Disarmament

Since our last Congress, we have utilised many of the structures of our International in focusing on conflict resolution, crisis prevention, conventional and nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of all forms of arms. For, as we stated in New York, in the declaration, 'Making Peace, Keeping Peace', 'Development and peace go hand in hand. Concern for the global environment is concern for peace. Social progress is a precondition for welfare, stability and peace'.

In October 1997, the SI Peace, Security and Disarmament Committee, SIPSAD, meeting in Budapest, took a stand on three issues that were the subject of resolutions debated and adopted a month later by the SI Council in New Delhi. In the first, with regard to NATO enlargement, the International supported the aspirations for membership of all European states 'that have laid sound and lasting foundations for a democratic form of government and for civilian control of the military, and have demonstrated a willingness to respect human and minority rights and resolve conflicts between neighbours by peaceful means'.

In the second resolution, the International supported the Ottawa process in order to reach a total prohibition (use, development, production, stock-piling, export or transferring) of anti-

personnel landmines, and welcomed the fact that more than one hundred nations had already taken part in this process, many as a result of the consistent efforts of our member parties. We noted in a third resolution that small arms and light weapons play a central role in countless civil wars and local conflicts and called for efforts aimed at establishing effective control of them.

We held another SIPSAD meeting in May 1998 in Tbilisi, Georgia, a gathering organised in collaboration with the Citizen's Union of Georgia, CUG, which became a member of our International at our Congress in 1996. The meeting focused on security issues in the South Caucasus, Black Sea and Caspian Sea.

The Committee prepared an in-depth resolution, adopted by our Council in Oslo, which presciently warned of increasing instability in the entire Caucasian region and reaffirmed the willingness of the International to cooperate with the states of the South Caucasus and the Russian Federation to prevent the escalation of conflict.

The SI Council in Oslo also condemned the nuclear tests that had been carried out by India and called upon that country to adhere unconditionally to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, stating that it was 'unacceptable that some states keep subjecting the international community to the continuous dangers of a possible nuclear weapon launch by mistake'.

Conflict resolution and crisis prevention in Africa was a principal theme addressed by our next Council in Geneva. The Council debated and adopted a comprehensive declaration drawn from the work of the SI Africa Committee whose Chair, Ousmane Tanor Dieng of the Socialist Party of Senegal, introduced the document. The detailed assessment of conflict situations in various regions of the continent underlined the close connection between peace, democracy and development.

The International also adopted in Geneva a declaration on Kosovo prepared by the SI Committee on Central and Eastern Europe, SICEE. The document supported all efforts toward a negotiated settlement between Belgrade and Pristina, a position reiterated by SICEE at its next meeting in Bucharest in February of this year. SICEE has remained in the forefront in providing analysis on the Balkans since the NATO action, particularly in the Warsaw Declaration of September in which we emphasised the need to bring about real democracy in Serbia by supporting democratic forces there.

Human Rights

Like no other political organisation in the world, the Socialist International continues to act in defence of fundamental human rights wherever and whenever necessary. At the same time, as was evident in the comprehensive Human Rights Agenda for the XXI Century prepared by the SI Committee on Human Rights, SICOHR, and adopted by our Congress in New York, our International also continues with the broader task of promoting national and international systems that can secure human rights protections throughout the world.

We were very pleased with the signing of the treaty for the International Criminal Court in July 1998, fittingly the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. The creation of the court, long advocated by our International, involved the direct

efforts of many of our member parties. Some 120 countries voted in favour of establishing this permanent court based on the principle that government leaders and officials are to be held accountable when genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes are committed. In the words of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the court is a 'present for future generations'.

The year before, in October 1997, SICOHR had held a meeting in London, hosted by the British Labour Party. Members of the Committee discussed ways in which the Socialist International could be more proactive in advocating for the respect of human rights. The commitment of our International to human rights was underlined by the participation in the gathering of two former secretaries general of Amnesty International, Thomas Hammarberg of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, SAP, and Ian Martin of the British Labour Party.

The Committee recommended the adoption by the International of 'a new priority for economic and social rights which historically have not received as much attention as civil and political rights'. The Committee noted that while the International would surely remain a staunch advocate for all rights issues, increasing globalisation more than justified a greater focus on advocating for social, economic as well as cultural rights.

SICOHR advanced the discussion on this theme further during its meeting held in Manila in April 1998 in collaboration with the Philippines Democratic Socialist Party, PDSP. The Committee reaffirmed that a rights-based approach to development and poverty eradication was correct as it emphasises that poverty is not just about need but about the denial of basic rights. Other issues which were discussed included racism and xenophobia in Europe and the rights of migrant workers.

Throughout the period our International, through the Council and various SI Committees, have continued to draw attention to specific country situations in which fundamental rights were being violated. Regarding Burma, for example, our Councils consistently have provided a forum for representatives of the National League for Democracy and have issued resolutions backing the struggle against oppression in that country. Our International has remained a constant voice, as well, in support of democracy and in human rights in Algeria, Equatorial Guinea, East Timor and other places where fundamental rights are or have been denied.

We also have maintained our focus on the human rights of women, as our Council in Geneva adopted a resolution in which our International fully supported the campaign against the atrocious discrimination against women under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS

Our International is at its best when we narrow the distance between people and nations, when we make the problems of people, even in the most remote parts of the planet, our shared problem, when we are able to structure common responses to common concerns, no matter the nation or the region, the culture or the level of economic development. During this period we have been able collectively, more than ever, to do exactly that, having brought in more people and more parties into the life of our International and carried

forward an ever greater programme of work.

What we do and what we say matters. It matters to our parties and to governments, to those who count on us as a forum in which to be heard or those who see in us a platform from which to develop common initiatives. It matters to those people and parties for whom our International provides a framework for cooperation and a network of lasting partnerships.

Working together with all those who contribute to what we do, we have attempted to enhance the relevance of our organisation, to heighten its capacity and to move forward based on the new character of a truly global International. We have done it through the work of our Committees, our Council and our Presidium, and by working together with the Global Progress Commission. We have done it by cooperating with the United Nations and with other international institutions and regional organisations. We have done it also by collaborating with our fraternal and associated organisations.

I am pleased to report that our International has been able to make a difference with limited resources, but with the deep commitment of many. In this context, since our last Congress I have had the privilege to develop and maintain active contacts with our members following the itinerary of our International, our meetings, our decisions, our commitments, our people, many of whom I would like to thank. First of all I would like to recognise our President Pierre Mauroy whose steadfast leadership has guided us through this period of change. I would also like to express my appreciation to Felipe González, Chair of the Global Progress Commission, to our Vice-Presidents, the SI Committee Chairs, our party leaders and all those in our parties who dedicate their time and attention to the activities of our organisation. And, of course, a special thanks to those who work with me in the Secretariat of our International.