



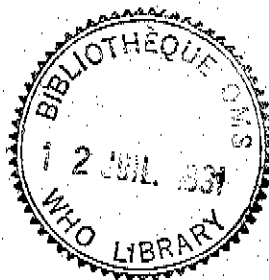
# WHO

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE

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## WHO/TRADE UNIONS CONSULTATIVE MEETING

Copenhagen  
22 March 1991



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## TARGET 25

### HEALTHY WORKING CONDITIONS

*By 1995, people of the Region should be effectively protected against work-related health risks.*

#### Index terms

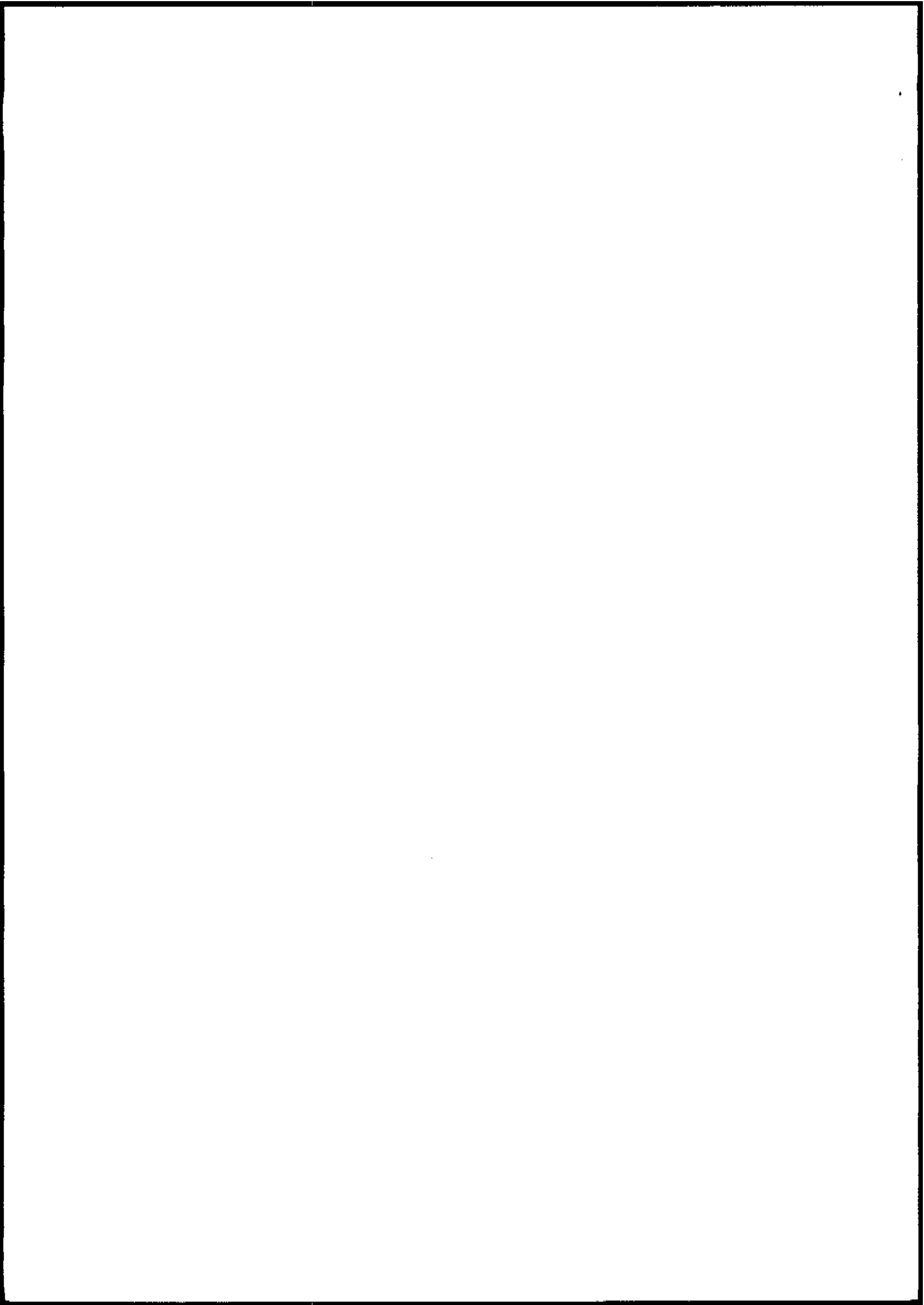
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH  
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH  
LABOR UNIONS  
HEALTH POLICY  
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION  
EUR

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<sup>a</sup> *Targets for health for all. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office Europe, 1985 (European Health for All Series, No. 1).*

## CONTENTS

|  | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-------------|
| 1. Introduction . . . . .  | 1           |
| 2. Scope and purpose . . . . .   | 1           |
| 3. WHO European health policy and strategy . . . . .   | 1           |
| 4. Maintaining the health of working populations . . . . .   | 2           |
| 5. European targets for environmental health . . . . .   | 2           |
| 6. Health activities of international trade unions . . . . .   | 3           |
| 7. The European Community and trade unions . . . . .   | 3           |
| 8. The Occupational Health Programme of WHO . . . . .  | 4           |
| 9. Other WHO programmes relevant to trade unions . . . . .   | 4           |
| 10. Activities of individual trade unions . . . . .  | 4           |
| 11. Conclusions and recommendations . . . . .  | 5           |
| Annex 1. A short survey of international trade unions with a view to<br>creating collaboration relations with WHO/EURO . . . . . | 6           |
| Annex 2. Participants . . . . .  | 10          |



## 1. Introduction

The first Consultative Meeting between the representatives of the International Trade Unions and the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/EURO) was organized on 22 March 1991 in Copenhagen on the initiative of the Regional Office and in collaboration with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the European Confederation of Trade Unions (ECTU).

## 2. Scope and purpose

The purpose of the meeting was to open up contacts between WHO/EURO and the International Trade Unions, which are coordinating and implementing global, regional and branch-oriented trade union activities in the field of health and the environment.

The objectives of the meeting were:

- to introduce the WHO European health policy and strategy;
- to introduce the health-related programmes of the International Trade Unions; and
- to focus particularly on programme elements concerning health in the workplace and environmental health, on both sides.

The aim of the meeting was also to discuss the potential interest in future practical cooperation between WHO/EURO and International Trade Unions and, if possible, outline the mechanisms for further collaboration.

Dr J. Rantanen (Finland) was elected as Chairperson and Dr D. Macfadyen (WHO/EURO) was Secretary. The list of participants is attached as Annex 2.

## 3. WHO European health policy and strategy

In his introduction of the regional health strategy, Dr J. Asvall, Regional Director of the WHO Regional Office for Europe, indicated that, in spite of remarkable advances in biomedical research, medical technologies and development of health services, the health of male working-age populations has not improved as expected in Europe. In the 1980s, the male European worker had less life years ahead than he had in the 1960s. This negative development is principally due to excess mortality from cardiovascular diseases, suicides and accidents. National health policies have been treatment-oriented and prevention has not been given much attention. To respond to the problem, the preventive approach is being strengthened through measures such as healthy nutrition, physical exercise, moderating drinking habits and smoking cessation. Smoking, for instance, caused 10 million deaths in Europe between the years 1950-1975, and the cumulative figures for the years 1975-2000 will be 50 million, for 2000-2025, 120 million and for 2025-2050, 250 million. There are also numerous environment-related health hazards such as air pollution, chemicals, contamination of ground water and accidents.

Health is also inequally distributed between the countries, and the prime target of the European strategy is to reduce by 25% the variation in health status both between the countries of the Region and within the countries, especially between social groups with wide differences.

On the other hand, there are encouraging examples of programmes that demonstrate the effectiveness of preventive strategies, such as the North Karelia project in Finland, which shows significant and permanent decrease in coronary heart disease risk and in lung cancer risk as a result of a community-level health education intervention.

Broader health policies were needed, and WHO/EURO therefore took the initiative to encourage Member States to design new strategies, to implement them and to share their results and experiences. The "health parliament", the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, adopted, in 1984, 38 targets and a new European health policy. The strategy is based to a great extent on local activation of countries and people. WHO/EURO has encouraged such activity by trying to mobilize new actors and bring them within a wide network. Besides the national health authorities, important new elements in the network are urban communities through the Healthy Cities movement. Other networks are health workers' associations, school health and public health organizations. Occupational health services and workplaces are important parts of the network and provide access to working people and social partners who otherwise may be difficult to contact.

In this networking process the role of trade unions and collaboration with international trade unions are of utmost importance.

#### 4. Maintaining the health of working populations

On behalf of the International Trade Unions, Mr Reg Green of ICFTU thanked WHO/EURO for its initiative and expressed the Unions' interest in collaborating in the field of health policies and particularly those relating to environmental and occupational health. He also emphasized the need to approach the employers in order to provide a tripartite forum for discussions on the health problems of working people. Mr Marc Shapir of ECTU also expressed the great interest of European Unions in collaborating with WHO and stressed the key role of occupational health in maintaining the health of the working population.

#### 5. European targets for environmental health

The set of European Targets relating to environmental health were introduced by Dr S. Tarkowski, Director of Environment and Health, WHO/EURO. He listed several problems in environmental health policies in the Region, including the lack of multisectoral collaboration, fragmentation of responsibilities in environmental health, lack of data on the effects of the environment on health, and the conflict between economic development and the quality of the environment. To overcome these problems, the European ministers of health and of the environment adopted the European Charter on Environment and Health in Frankfurt in 1989.

The European health strategy contains eight targets (18-25) specific to environment and health, including occupational health. In addition, Target 11 on prevention of accidents is highly relevant from the worker's point of view.

The key elements in the European environmental health policy are breaking the barriers to collaboration between various sectors, developing multisectoral infrastructures and establishing information systems for environment and health. Practical tools for the management of environmental problems are being developed and technical cooperation is being organized. A

special programme to meet the environment and health problems in central and eastern Europe has been designed, including identification of the most urgent problems and mechanisms to prevent an aggravation of problems during the process of rapid social change. Emergency technical help will be given in environmental health problems such as prevention of industrial emissions, contamination of air, water and soil, disposal of hazardous waste, and health and safety at work.

#### 6. Health activities of international trade unions

Mr Reg Green described the organization and programmes of the ICFTU, which has 140 national affiliated unions in 101 countries and represents more than 100 million workers (see Annex 1, a short survey of international trade unions). The ICFTU has 90 staff members including an occupational health, safety and environment officer in Brussels; it has no regional organization. The organization presents trade unions' policies to international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and other United Nations agencies. The principal activities of ICFTU concentrate on encouraging the development of the capacities of workers' organizations at the national and local levels. This also requires activities for helping national unions to sponsor and arrange training of trainers to train unionists at the local level. Usually three to five national projects are going on simultaneously in different parts of the world. ICFTU also works in close collaboration with the international trade secretariats representing workers of different sectors of the economy. The scope of ICFTU is global, but it is also active in different regions including Europe.

#### 7. The European Community and trade unions

Mr M. Shapir of ECTU described the activities of his organization, which is not a regional organization of ICFTU. ECTU speaks for trade unions in the European region and consults national trade unions in substantive issues. It also provides information on international law and distributes information on workers' health situation in Europe.

ECTU concentrates on all the programme elements carried out by the European Community (EC) under the Social Charter, in ensuring the workers' interest when the internal market opens in 1993: namely the implementation of EC directives on occupational health and safety concerning physical factors, chemical substances, adaptation of work to the worker (including improvement of ergonomics and standards for working environment, equipment and risk assessment). The implementation of the 1989 EC directive on occupational health and safety, the development of preventive services at the workplaces, and the ratification of ILO Convention No. 161 on occupational health services are also priorities of the European unions.

#### 8. WHO's occupational health programme

Dr F. La Ferla of WHO/EURO described the occupational health programme of WHO/EURO as a part of the regional strategy of health for all by the year 2000 (target 25). The programme aims at the development of occupational health services, protection of vulnerable groups such as working women, elderly and migrant workers, and development of information systems on occupational diseases and accidents. The programme organizes meetings on occupational

health, activates national institutes to participate in the WHO/EURO network, organizes expert groups on specific items, supports central and eastern European countries, carries out technical cooperation and provides support to least developed countries of Europe.

9. Other WHO programmes relevant to trade unions

The following special activities of WHO/EURO were described at the meeting.

- Programme activities generate a high number of different types of publications and documents for distribution, including on average ten books per year. Among bibliographic databases is a health legislation data bank.
- Mental health activities include activities for both the individual worker and a working environment conducive to mental health. Special aspects considered are the stresses of social change, unemployment, migration and the working environment, particularly in small enterprises. Mental health problems and alcohol abuse, as well as factors related to suicide risk, are also of special interest.

Other topics covered included:

- elderly people; public relations; financial issues; process for cosponsoring meetings; AIDS; health policy (a forthcoming WHO European Health Policy Conference in Madrid in March 1992 was of great interest to the trades unions); health promotion, including established programmes for healthy cities, healthy schools, healthy hospitals, plus the proposed new programme on healthy worksites.

The trade union members expressed a wish to get the documents prepared for the Madrid meeting, and were interested in obtaining a supply of documents and publications routinely. It was agreed that those reports which were discussed during the meeting will be sent to the participants by WHO/EURO.

10. Activities of individual trade unions

The international trade union secretariats introduced their activities.

- Miners' International Federation (MIF, Mr D. Roland), which is a global organization and provides information for developing countries, organizes conferences and provides help in surveying hazards in mines. The union is interested in technical collaboration with WHO.
- Plantation and Agricultural Workers (IFPAAW, Mr S. Nielsen) is a unique union in that it includes self-employed farmers.
- Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF, Mr E. Brombart) has 6 million members in 106 countries. The union has activities in information dissemination, training of trainers and members; it also represents unions in international fora.
- International Chemical, Energy and General Worker Federation (ICEF, A. Rice), whose members are workers of high-risk industries, runs activities mainly in Europe. The union has programmes on high volume

production chemicals and studies on the use of asbestos, solvents, etc. They document lowest threshold values for chemicals and participate in the preparation of international chemical safety cards of the International Programme on Chemical Safety, as well as the organization of training and conferences. ICEF has also made a special study on the Bhopal disaster. ICEF supports central and eastern European countries, represents unions in international organizations such as IPCS and is interested in working with WHO/EURO.

- Public Services International (PSI, Mr C. Humphries) is an international union of 11 million workers in 90 countries. The union has a broad membership covering public sector workers, including health workers. The PSI has initiated and prepared policies and programmes for training, on AIDS as an occupational health problem, on energy, on water, on new technology, fire fighters, elderly, disabled persons, health services, defence workers. The European Charter on Environment and Health is relevant for PSI, as is the WHO programme for countries of central and eastern Europe.

#### 11. Conclusions and recommendations

On the basis of the presentations and discussions, the following conclusions and recommendations were made on future collaboration.

- (1) Both sides see the opening of this kind of contact most valuable and are interested in developing collaboration further.
- (2) WHO/EURO, ICFTU and ECTU will exchange letters in which both sides will indicate the areas of interest for collaboration such as information, data banks, publications, assessment of relevant guidelines and documents, participation in conferences and meetings, health promotion activities at the workplace and other related topics.
- (3) The possibility and interest to apply for nongovernmental status for unions is under the jurisdiction of the World Health Organization's Executive Board. If appropriate, this possibility will be examined separately.
- (4) A list of names of contact persons for various activities will be provided to the unions by WHO/EURO, and WHO/EURO will also be informed of the contact persons of the unions.
- (5) A follow-up meeting of this first one will be organized in two or three years.
- (6) The possibility of organizing the next meeting on a tripartite basis, also including employers, will be examined.

Annex 1

A SHORT SURVEY OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNIONS WITH A VIEW TO  
CREATING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONS WITH WHO/EURO

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BACKGROUND

In the planning process of WHO/EURO the question has arisen as to what extent the Regional Office should and could develop its relations with the International Trade Unions to make use of their competence in several fields such as occupational health, environmental health and health promotion. So far such contacts have only been sporadic and based more on the capacity of individual persons than on the very organizations themselves. This is the first attempt to survey the relevant international union organizations and their possible role as counterparts for WHO/EURO. The information for this survey has been obtained from various persons working in those organizations but it is still superficial and for certain parts inaccurate. At the end of this paper, proposals for strengthening the contacts between International Trade Unions and WHO/EURO are made.

WHY COLLABORATION?

Trade Unions are the most representative organizations of the European workers, who number 380 million and who constitute in one form or another one of the strongest political driving forces in all countries. Working populations also constitute the largest uniform target group for health policies; they are major consumers of health services. If the principle of community participation is considered and combined with consumer participation in the design and implementation of health services, the working populations should be considered to a larger extent than so far has been the case. WHO in general and also WHO/EURO have numerous contacts with the industries. Though informative and beneficial, these contacts do not necessarily reflect the views of the workers as a target group of health policies and as a target of WHO/EURO policy. Thus, direct contacts with the unions of working people would be of great value.

The working populations are also crucial in view of prevention. Most of the chronic noncommunicable diseases which determine the health status, functional capacity and need of care among the elderly populations start their development early. Morbidity from these diseases is also a high burden to the health services during the first 10 years of retirement. A great deal of such morbidity could be affected by preventive measures, provided these measures are implemented early enough, i.e. at a young working age.

Access to the working populations is through occupational health services, which at present cover some 70% of the European workers but which are, for example according to ILO Convention No. 161, to be developed, so that they cover all those who take part in the working life. Workers are also very close to environmental issues and both national and international unions have expressed growing concern for the environment. Some of them, such as the

International Chemical and Energy Workers' Federation, have hired specific expertise for environmental health. While working in industries, services, transportation and waste handling, the impact of environmentally aware and well informed workers may be and has been in some cases much stronger than that of any other body. Some Nordic industries have challenged their workers to take care of the environment by controlling more carefully the industrial processes for which the workers are responsible.

By creating closer links with the unions, WHO/EURO would gain both professional and political advantages which are getting more and more valuable particularly now that the labour movement is actively taking part in societal reforms in both eastern Europe and the integrating of western Europe.

## ORGANIZATIONS

### General aspects

The world of international trade unions is divided in two major blocks.

- (a) The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, ICFTU, which serves as a central international organization for national confederations or other types of national trade unions' central organizations in the western industrialized countries and in some developing countries.
- (b) The World Federation of Trade Unions, which serves as an international organization of national trade unions' confederations in central and eastern European countries and for certain unions in capitalistic countries, such as CGT in France.

So far these two groups have not had much collaboration with each other but relations seem to be getting closer. Since trade unions are represented in the ILO as national bodies, these two groups have not had any official mandate in ILO. Thus, the trade union members of western European countries and those from the central and eastern European countries have been members of the Workers' Group in ILO, but the voting behaviour of the trade union representatives from the central and eastern European countries has sometimes followed more their respective governments' voting rather than complying with that of the free-union-dominated Workers' Group. International unions play, however, an important role in the coordination of supporting the activity of the Workers' Group in ILO.

### INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU)

Through its headquarters in Brussels, ICFTU coordinates the work of three regional organizations: the European Trade Union Confederation, ETUC, the Latin-American Regional Office, ORIT, and the Asian-Pacific Regional Office, APRO. The two latter are tightly bound to ICFTU and are also financed by it, whereas in principle ETUC is an independent confederation. ICFTU headquarters is organized according to the different sectors of its activities. The most relevant body to WHO/EURO is the office for occupational health and safety and social affairs. The actual number of workers represented by ICFTU is more than 100 million.

## INTERNATIONAL UNIONS OF DIFFERENT SECTORS OF ECONOMIES

These organizations are international associations of national unions of different sectors of economies and industries. They are loosely bound to ICFTU and are in practice rather independent. In total there are 16 such international unions within the framework of ICFTU, for example the International Metal Workers' Federation, IMF (Geneva), the International Chemical and Energy Workers' Federation, ICEF (Brussels) and the International Union of Food Workers, IUF (Geneva). Most of these organizations have at least a small office for occupational health and safety either separately or in connection with environmental health or other social affairs. For instance, ICEF has an office responsible for occupational health, safety and environment in Brussels and an industrial hygienist located in Geneva. The number of workers represented by different international unions varies greatly, for example ICEF represents 6 million workers and the representation of IMF is still wider.

## POSSIBLE INTEREST OF WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TOWARD WHO

Basically the international organizations have substantive activities relevant to WHO and they have often highly professional experts responsible for such activities. They also have close contacts with the experts of national trade unions. So professionally these contacts could be highly productive. Some of the international unions have been appointed nongovernmental organizations of WHO. For example, ICEF is a nongovernmental organization for the occupational health unit of WHO/HQ. ICEF has also actively taken part in the work of the International Programme on Chemical Safety by providing valuable assessment of the practical feasibility of international chemical safety cards. Such collaboration could probably be expanded to other international unions as well as to ICFTU and ECTU in particular.

## POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION

Co-sponsoring joint events with WHO is one possibility. It might be of potential interest to obtain nongovernmental status for some of the international unions and to give mutual support in that capacity. This question will be specifically examined in contact with relevant representatives of the organizations.

## WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS (WFTU)

WFTU is another major international organization of trade unions established by the national unions in the central and eastern European countries, which all belong to this organization. Some national unions in western European countries, such as CGT in France, certain British unions, the Construction Workers' Union and the Food Workers' Union in Finland belong to WFTU. The Federation has its headquarters in Prague.

Under its umbrella WFTU has 15 branch-oriented international unions (TUIs) which serve as collaborative bodies for branch-oriented national trade unions.

Since WFTU works without exchangeable currency the possibilities of providing financial support or participating in a form that would imply financial contribution may be small. The possibility of giving support to WHO events or joint events in countries where non-exchangeable currency is used should therefore be examined further.

So far no specific contacts have been taken with WFTU for the purpose of this survey. Thus, the information on their interest in and possibilities for collaborating with WHO and other relevant aspects of collaboration should be examined further.

#### PROPOSAL FOR FURTHER ACTIONS

To examine further the interest of International Trade Unions within the framework of ICFTU in collaborating with WHO in the fields of occupational health and environmental health and to give general support to and participate in the implementation of an overall HFA strategy, and the organization of a provisional collaborative programme.

Annex 2

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