

9 October 1998



**Second World Conference of Mayors
of the Socialist International, Fez, Morocco, 5-6 October 1998**

Dear Comrade,

The Second World Conference of Mayors, as announced at our last SI Council meeting in Oslo, was held in the city of Fez on 5-6 October 1998, hosted by the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, USFP, our member party today in government in Morocco.

The Conference, which brought together over 250 mayors, members of municipal governments and organisations, and experts, focused on three main subjects: (1) The future of cities, the quality of life and the information society, the socialist response; (2) New partnerships: the State and local authorities; (3) Globalisation and solidarity: the role of the cities, and cities in conflict. The conclusions of the deliberations are reflected in 'The Fez Declaration', adopted by the Conference which I enclose herewith for your information.

This Second World Conference opened by the Prime Minister, Abderrahman Youssoufi, together with SI President Pierre Mauroy, and Philippe Busquin, Chair of the SI Committee on Local Authorities, among others, provided a new opportunity to discuss issues which are relevant to local and regional authorities and to renew contacts among them. Participants committed themselves to continue strengthening and developing the activities of the local and regional authorities within our International.

The list of participants at the Conference is also included.

Yours fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luis Ayala', with a long, sweeping underline.

Luis Ayala
Secretary General

The Fez Declaration

Original: French

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, the Socialist International reaffirms its commitment to the humanisation of the city.

It mandates its Committee on Local Authorities to continue the detailed development of the 21 points of the Bologna Declaration, which considered the issues of the city under various aspects: active citizenship, the improvement of city government in terms of greater transparency, probity and democracy, improvement in the quality of urban life, and openness towards the wider world.

The SI strongly reaffirms two fundamental principles that underlie its approach.

The first is that only democracy, in local and specific forms, can legitimise the powers exercised by mayors and other municipal office-holders. Although methods of appointment may vary from country to country, the powers of the local authorities have their basis in universal suffrage.

The second principle is that of equality between men and women. The SI will endeavour to ensure the application of this principle at every level of the exercise of political rights.

The Fez Conference was essentially concerned with three aspects:

1. The future of the cities, the quality of life and the information society, the socialist response.
2. New partnerships: the State and local authorities.
3. Globalisation and solidarity: the role of the cities, particularly in relation to cities in conflict.

1. The future of the cities

On the threshold of a new millennium, it is incumbent upon socialists to provide concrete responses to the accelerating pace of urbanisation and to the whole gamut of problems that this generates. We need to clearly determine how citizens live in and experience their city, and how they may be able to control its development.

Problems of town planning, housing, health, education, training, culture, public security and the environment have to be taken on board and clarified by a social ethics that can guide our responses.

Ensuring the social cohesion of our cities requires the reconciliation of an apparent contradiction, between on the one hand the need for a short term response to pressing social issues, and, on the other, the need for a long-term approach to the transformation of the cities.

Successful schooling, access to health and well-being for all, the opportunity for all to make their voices heard and to play a full part in the life of society, the promotion of cultural, artistic and sporting life, the development of a cohesive urban fabric, an emphasis on ecological quality, the struggle against all forms of unfit housing, the diversification and improvement of housing conditions, improvements in accessibility and transport, and finally democratic neighbourhood management are all assets which counter the risk of social exclusion and ensure the chances of success of the greatest number of citizens.

More than ever before, the future of democracy depends on the cities' capacity to master the economic, social and cultural exclusion that they witness and also suffer from.

New communication and information technology can obviously make its contribution to the socialist management of urban issues. Inequalities of access to the new communication and information technology and to training and in the distribution of these resources are real, but we must learn to 'civilise' the information revolution, which can lead to advances in democracy and to local developments based on solidarity.

New communication and information technology can become a tool to exploit the collective intelligence of our urban communities and thus offer spaces for discussion and creativity within towns, between towns, and between the cities of North and South.

In fact, affordable costs and the development of networks through satellite communications will offer even more opportunities for networking and the expression of solidarity.

However, we must be aware that economic and technological realities in the South are not the same as in the North. Despite their difficulties, the cities of the South must make an effort to open themselves to the new technology, in terms of the contribution it can make to improving citizen participation and establishing networks of solidarity and support. Given this, a Socialist conception of information and communication must promote an active citizenship.

This new communication and information technology is of course not neutral. It must be mastered and subordinated to our values as citizens.

2. New partnerships

In a modern, democratic and social State, the relations between all actors in society and in public life ought to be based on partnership. The goal is an efficient democratic State and an administration that is close to the citizen.

Citizens demand pragmatic solutions to their problems. This is why the fulfilment of the obligations of the public sector ought to be initiated by the level of government best placed to do so. This is the application of the principle of subsidiarity.

Central government control should be restricted to ensuring respect for legality, and administrative regulation should ensure flexibility and efficiency.

The indispensable condition for relations of partnership between the State, the intermediate level and the local authorities, is autonomy of the local administration. This is why local autonomy coupled with a guarantee of financial resources appropriate to the responsibilities attributed, should be legally or constitutionally guaranteed in every country.

On the other hand, local authorities cannot simply rely on external assistance, but must make the best use of their own resources. This is an essential contribution to partnership with the central government.

The strengthening of local autonomy will allow greater citizen participation and represent a strengthening of democracy itself. Representative democracy requires that office-holders be elected by the people and that the forms of direct democracy be further developed while respecting the unity of cities and urban agglomerations.

It is important to promote a culture of dialogue between the political class and the administration on the one hand and the citizens and all the other actors in civil society and economic life on the other. This ideal of partnership has become a priority at the global level.

It is especially necessary for the countries of the South to act so as to reduce disparities between town and country, the origin of the rural exodus and a source of marginalisation and social exclusion. Rural districts should benefit from a particular effort to promote truly sustainable development. This involves, among other things, the provision of roads, water, electricity, etc.

3. Solidarity

Today more than ever it is indispensable to promote our humanist values of solidarity and fraternity between peoples at the global level, which also includes solidarity between cities.

Solidarity must be promoted between the cities of North and South, and between those of East and West; solidarity between rich cities and poor cities, sometimes within the same country; and also solidarity within cities themselves.

Decentralised cooperation could provide an effective means of easing the difficulty that many countries of the South have in ensuring the development of cities and regions. This will require a system of partnership which chiefly involves the cities and regions of North and South and allow the bringing together of the interests of beneficiaries with those of fund-providers.

In the same spirit, it will be necessary to encourage democratic twinning arrangements which are directly and interactively addressed to the populations concerned, and which in various ways also provide concrete assistance, extending from the training of staff to the provision of humanitarian aid through NGOs, and including cultural exchanges, information networks, scientific research, the integration of women, children, young people and old people, and education in democracy and economic development.

For such cooperation to be effective, however, this requires the establishment of the institutional frameworks that provide the sites for reflection and human interaction, as well as action at every level of government, national and international, to open up the necessary lines of communication and make available the necessary resources.

Very particular attention must be paid to cities in crisis or conflict, such as Belfast, Luanda and Jerusalem, whose difficult circumstances require a very specific solidarity. Such solidarity must, however, also be extended to cities destabilised by conflict in neighbouring countries or by uncontrolled migratory flows.

Armed conflict can affect a city in many different ways, resulting in a state of siege, the exodus of population, violations of human rights, social exclusion, xenophobia etc. These crisis cannot be settled separately from the conflicts themselves. Nonetheless, solidarity actions, in the political sphere as well as in that of cooperation, can contribute to the search for a solution.

Meeting in Fez, the SI intends to translate its aspirations into concrete actions to the benefit of citizens.

Concrete proposals:

1. The reaffirmation of our ethical values in the management of public affairs by the adoption of a Charter of Socialist Local Authorities.
2. Decentralised and interactive cooperation. In this regard, socialists representatives must intervene at every level of government at which they are present to facilitate such cooperation. Democratic twinning arrangements and information networks are useful tools for this cooperation.
3. The creation of a network for the exchange of knowledge and experience, particularly by means of an Intranet linking the mayors of the SI, with particular attention being given to access by the cities of the South, and to their integration in the system.
4. Given that local autonomy is the fundamental issue for the future of local councils, it must be constitutionally guaranteed by the State. The SI supports the initiative for a World Charter on Local Autonomy taken by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, UNCHS (Habitat), and will actively work to promote it. It supports the current initiatives whose goal is to create a single organisation for local authorities.

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