

## Meeting of the Socialist International Committee on Local Authorities, Cartaxo, Portugal, 10-11 September 1999

The Committee on Local Authorities met on 10-11 September in Cartaxo, hosted by the Socialist Party, PS, of Portugal. The meeting was chaired by Philippe Busquin, then Chair of the Committee who took up the post of European Commissioner for Research later that month.

The Portuguese Prime Minister, Antonio Guterres, addressed the participants, stressing that at all levels there existed a 'distinctive socialist way of exercising power' which was seen in the impact on citizens in their daily lives, consequently there was an added importance to promoting social democratic policies and vision at the local level.

Delegates gathered from many regions and the urgent situation of a number of cities in crisis was highlighted. Reporting on the aftermath of the earthquake in Turkey, Sefa Sirmen of the SI-member Republican People's Party, CHP, who is the Mayor of Izmit, the town principally affected by the disaster, and Sule Bucak, Deputy General Secretary of the Republican People's Party, CHP, thanked the international community for the solidarity it had shown and outlined the practical concerns currently facing the town and the country. In response to this firsthand information, the Committee issued a statement on the situation in Turkey and on cooperation between municipalities, calling for decentralised cooperation initiatives to help local authorities in crisis as a result of such disasters. The Committee emphasised that humanitarian aid could be accompanied by technical and material support in the rebuilding of basic infrastructures, such as the provision of water, health and hygiene control, systems for sewerage and refuse and the construction of housing: 'Such cooperation efforts should seek to work in conjunction with action undertaken by NGOs and by the governments themselves', the statement made clear.

Speaking on the situation of cities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Ivan Vojnovic, of the Social Democratic League of Vojvodina from the city administration of Novi Sad, described the difficulties for democratic opposition at a local level in Serbia. Nikola Dajkovic, Deputy Mayor of Podgorica, of the Social Democratic Party of Montenegro, a member party of the International, said that international isolation and national repression made local democratic government extremely difficult in his country, where, nevertheless, the majority of communes were led by social democratic opposition. Conny Fredriksson, European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, outlined the Forum's assessment of the situation in the region and called for twinning projects to be started up again. The Committee issued a statement on the Balkans, calling for 'cities throughout the world to show their solidarity by giving help in the reconstruction and democratisation of the Balkans, particularly by setting up partnerships with local authorities to work for peace, democracy, social justice and the respect of human rights'. The issue of the economic interests of the region was also addressed and the Committee stated the urgent need to take the relevant measures to allow traffic to flow once again on the river Danube.

Aminata Mbenge Ndiaye, Minister for Family, Social Security and National Solidarity and Mayor of Louga, Socialist Party, Senegal, presented the case of Africa where many nations remained affected by conflict and where the practical measures of the international community could be invaluable at a local level.

Zahran Marouf, Mayor of Qualqiliya, Fatah, reported on how the general problems of the Middle East region were reflected locally in terms of infrastructure and provision of services in his border town.

Benito Urrea, Secretary for Municipal Affairs, Democratic Action, AD, gave an overview of the importance of local authorities for the consolidation of democracy in Venezuela. In a statement, the Committee expressed its concern for the effects of the governability crisis on the autonomous and democratic nature of municipalities in Venezuela and reaffirmed its call that the strengthening and legitimacy of local authorities be respected.

A report was heard on the latest developments in East Timor by Jose Lamego, International Secretary, PS, Portugal. The Committee strongly condemned the terror and violence inflicted in East Timor, deeming the disregard of the will of the people for independence as absolutely unacceptable. The Committee emphasised once again its support for self-government and local democracy and called for the holding of democratic elections of local authorities there as soon as possible.

Turning to ways of organising the Committee to address the new tasks ahead, four initiatives, as outlined at the Second World Conference of Mayors of the International in Fez, were considered. Firstly, the preparation of a Charter of socialist local authorities. Secondly, putting into place institutional mechanisms at all levels for decentralised cooperation. To this end holding a seminar on the issue was proposed. Thirdly, the creation of a network of communication among SI mayors. Finally, support for a Global Charter of local autonomy and for the creation of a single local authorities organisation.

A summary of the proposals will be included in the draft general resolution of the XXI Congress of the International. The Committee also agreed to hold meetings in 2000 in Rosario, Argentina, at the end of March, and in Budapest, Hungary at the end of September.

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## STATEMENTS

Statement on the Balkans

Statement on the Earthquake in Turkey and Cooperation between municipalities

Statement on East Timor

Statement on Venezuela

List of participants

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### STATEMENT ON THE BALKANS

Original: French

Having heard the reports from several mayors of the Balkan region, notably those from cities in Serbia led by the democratic opposition and from Montenegro,

Noting that the considerable damage caused by the war, in Kosovo as in Serbia, risks having catastrophic repercussions on the populations once winter arrives,

Noting the specific situation of Montenegro which is suffering both the effects of the economic sanctions and the repression of the Milosevic regime, as well as the presence of many refugees and displaced persons,

Noting that the war, particularly due to the destruction of bridges on the Danube and the railways, has prevented economic exchange between several countries of South Eastern Europe and the rest of Europe from operating under favourable conditions,

Noting that the only means of re-establishing lasting peace and security in this region is to build true democracies which respect the rights of all the inhabitants.

The Socialist International Committee on Local Authorities, meeting in Cartaxo on 10-11 September 1999,

*strongly appeals* to cities throughout the world to show their solidarity by giving help in the reconstruction and democratisation of the Balkans, particularly by setting up partnerships with local authorities to work for peace, democracy, social justice and the respect of human rights, and

also *considers* it urgent, in the economic interest of the region as a whole, to take up the necessary measures in order to allow traffic to flow once again on the river Danube.

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### STATEMENT ON THE EARTHQUAKE IN TURKEY AND COOPERATION BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES

The earthquake which hit Turkey on 17 August was centred around the city of Izmit in the Marmara region. It claimed more than fifteen thousand lives and left tens of thousands injured. The consequent material and human devastation has been unimaginable.

Thousands of people are now living in tents and in makeshift shelters. The opening of schools in the region has been postponed until October as many schoolbuildings are in ruins.

We, as socialists, must draw our own conclusions from this and must take the lead to push the process of further developing solidarity with the Turkish people. As socialists, this has always been our duty. This earthquake has sharply reminded us of this once again.

As the SI Committee on Local Authorities, we have obtained direct firsthand information about the present situation in Izmit and have been able to address what we can do to help.

It is fundamental to initiate decentralised cooperation to help municipalities in crisis as a result of such disasters.

Faced with such situations, the recent earthquake which affected several municipalities in Turkey, deserves a strong expression of solidarity from our Committee, as well as an urgent appeal for aid from other municipalities within the international community.

This aid could be humanitarian, but could also focus on technical and material support for the reconstruction of basic infrastructures, such as the provision of water, health and hygiene control, systems for sewerage and refuse and the construction of housing.

Such cooperation efforts should seek to work in conjunction with action undertaken by NGOs and by the governments themselves.

It is incumbent on us as representatives of local authorities to evaluate the situation and take decisions so that in future the impact of this type of crisis on our cities is minimised.

The main lesson to be learnt from a catastrophe such as the recent one in Turkey is the need to construct quality buildings, correctly administer town planning and development, and coordinate measures for civilian protection.

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## STATEMENT ON EAST TIMOR

Original: Portuguese

The Socialist International Committee on Local Authorities, meeting in Cartaxo on 10-11 September 1999, strongly condemns the terror and violence which the militias and the Indonesian army have inflicted in East Timor since the referendum on independence.

The Committee cannot accept this disregard of the will of the people of East Timor who have voted unmistakably and by a large majority in favour of independence.

The Committee demands that the Indonesian authorities ensure that the militias and their army respect the will of the people and the result of the vote which they themselves proposed under the auspices of the United Nations, and put an end to the massive deportation of civilians.

The Committee calls on the international community to ensure that the law is upheld in East Timor as elsewhere, and affirms its complete solidarity with the whole population there, which is today victim of this new barbarity.

In light of these latest developments in East Timor,

considering that the will for independence and self-government of the people of East Timor, a people who have suffered oppression for so long, was expressed by a large majority in the referendum,

taking into account that the Socialist International, and particularly its Committee on Local Authorities, has always fought for self-government and local democracy throughout the world.

The Committee,

*Calls for* the decision of the people of East Timor to be respected and for the consolidation of the independence process in peace, in accordance with the United Nations decisions and presence there, and

*Calls for* the holding of democratic elections of local authorities as soon as it become possible and the support of every initiative facilitating that objective.

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## STATEMENT ON VENEZUELA

Original: Spanish

The Socialist International Committee on Local Authorities, meeting in Cartaxo on 10-11 September 1999,

aware that democracy requires solid political institutions based on the distribution of political power and the rule of law,

recognising the positive aspects afforded by the advances in the administrative reform of the state in relation to decentralisation and local political decision-making,

concerned that progress in the democratic process and decentralised administration be supported in the drafting of a new constitution according to the electoral bases approved by the Venezuelan people in the consultative referendum,

aware of the role and autonomous nature of local authorities and municipalities in Venezuela, as institutions which strengthen the democratic regime of freedom, human rights and justice.

*Appeals* for a solution to the crisis of governability and for the rule of law to be respected without violations or threats to the right to freedom of action and to the whole democratic system, and

*Reaffirms* its call that the strengthening and legitimacy of the regions, local authorities and municipalities, as fundamental tools for the implementation of viable social projects, be respected.

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