

Meeting of the Socialist International Committee on Local Authorities, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, 2-3 March 1998

Some fifty delegates, including many mayors, gathered in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, for the meeting of the SI Committee on Local Authorities on 2-3 March 1998. The meeting was hosted by the Ivory Coast Popular Front, FPI, and was chaired by Philippe Busquin, SI vice-president and leader of the Belgian Socialist Party, PS, who reiterated how fundamental the concerns of this Committee were to society and democracy. In an increasingly globalised world, he continued, making politics accessible for all was a real issue, and decentralisation and encouraging politics of proximity could lead to more direct contact between governments and citizens. SI Secretary General Luis Ayala emphasised the importance of the Committee's work in the pursuit of solidarity and community by seeking ways to ensure social responsibility at grass-roots level. Delegates were welcomed by Laurent Gbagbo, FPI president, and addressed by Jean-Marie Kobo, a representative of the Ivory Coast Ministry of the Interior, who drew the attention of the Committee to the specific problems facing municipalities in Africa today.

The Committee gathered to prepare for the second Socialist International Conference of Mayors to be held in 1998, following the successful first Conference held in Bologna in 1995. It was agreed that the conference would be held in Morocco, under the title 'The Urban Face of Socialism II' and would bring together socialist mayors from SI parties, guests and experts from different regions and continents. Delegates will divide into groups to focus on four main areas: 'Globalisation and local collectivity: the role of solidarity', 'Society and information: citizens' access', 'The new partnership', 'The future and quality of the city: a socialist response' and a working group will also discuss 'Cities in conflict'.

It was agreed that working papers on the topics would be prepared for distribution prior to the Conference and that there should be increased publicity to encourage mayors from all cities and towns to participate.

The Committee also looked at the question of solidarity between cities. Delegates compared the cases of their national situations and contributed widely on questions of legislation, financing, cooperation, infrastructures and decentralisation. It was agreed that local politics demand practical mechanisms in order to serve communities properly, and, by putting democracy into practice at grass roots, the influence could be far-reaching. The Committee concluded that the dynamics of local politics must work in many directions - between towns and cities, between local government and central government, and between cities in other countries.

Before the closure of the meeting, Pierre Amondji, FPI, Ivory Coast, was elected vice-chair of the Committee.