**Part 4**

# General Council Statements

***Congress adopted the following statements prepared by the General Council***

#### East Timor

The General Council deplore and note with deep and growing concern the gross abuse of the fundamental human rights of the people of East Timor and the increasing and brutal violence being deployed against them by anti-independence militias aided by Indonesian armed forces, who are seeking to negate the will of the overwhelming majority in favour of independence, expressed in the UN-sponsored referendum held by the Indonesian Government on 30 August.

The General Council are concerned that the exodus of UN observers and journalists from East Timor will enable further atrocities to be committed and to go unreported. Whether or not the Indonesian Government is in agreement about the course of action being pursued by the Indonesian armed forces in East Timor, those armed forces appear not to be under the control of a democratically-elected government. The order by President Habibie to have those same armed forces impose martial law to restore order is not credible and could give them a free hand to eradicate all opposition.

The General Council believe that the credibility of the United Nations will be irredeemably damaged unless it takes decisive action to prevent one more genocide marking the close of the century. The General Council fully endorse the resolution on East Timor adopted in June by the Human and Trade Union Rights Committee of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions which, inter alia, called on the United Nations to deploy a credible and efficient peace-keeping force in East Timor, either before or after the referendum, should the bloodshed and brutality continue and the situation deteriorate even further. They support the subsequent appeal of the General Secretary of the ICFTU to the Secretary General of the United Nations for such an international or regional force now to be despatched by the Security Council. Such a force should take any and all necessary means to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the civilian population of East Timor, to disband and disarm the armed militias, and to arrest, with the purpose of bringing them to trial, all those responsible for the murders of civilians and other severe breaches of international humanitarian law and human rights standards.

The General Council welcome the action of the British Government in providing refuge for East Timorese independence leader Xanana Gusmao in the British Embassy in Jakarta, and the presence of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at the emergency meeting of foreign ministers in New Zealand and of the British Ambassador to the UN in the Security Council delegation presently visiting Jakarta.

The General Council welcome the prompt action of the General Secretary in writing to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, asking him to use every possible means to press the Indonesian authorities to act to have ended the atrocities being committed and for a UN peacekeeping force to be sent to East Timor without delay, and reiterate those requests.

In line with the Resolution of the 1997 Congress opposing *exports to the Indonesian or other oppressive governments of equipment which enhances the capacity of their security forces to torture and kill the people under their control*, and deploring links with *elements of the Indonesian armed forces with operational responsibility for outrages perpetuated against the people of East Timor*, such pressure should include an immediate ending of all sales and deliveries of arms from all sources to those committing gross atrocities in East Timor.

The General Council endorse the ICFTU’s action in urging national governments, the multilateral financial institutions and Indonesia’s major donors and trading partners, to suspend direct budgetary support and all other non-humanitarian aid to Indonesia until basic human rights are guaranteed in East Timor and the Indonesian Parliament takes a vote implementing the results of the referendum.

*Adopted 9 September 1999*

**TUC Equality Structures**

The General Council recognise the strength of feeling within the trade union movement about the issues raised in the composite motion on the TUC’s equality structures. There are three issues: equality motions on the Congress agenda; the TUC’s disability structures; and representation on the General Council.

The General Council intend to give serious consideration to all the issues raised in the composite.

Taking them in turn: on the disability structures, the General Council do want to provide disabled members with the same level of service enjoyed by women, black and lesbian and gay members. We recognise that TUC disability structures are different from those serving the other groups, and that those differences are perceived by some as inequality. We are very willing to change those structures if this is the wish of the majority of unions. But we do know that some unions feel that more formal structures would reduce participation of disabled people in TUC affairs: the three disability forums a year attract around 60 participants; and the now annual disability conference has no upper limit on delegations. We promise to consult unions during the course of the year.

On General Council representation: at the moment discussions are going on about the structure of the Council - as part of the Millennium Challenge debate. The General Council recognise the strength of argument for some representation of disabled and lesbian and gay members - and the General Council will look positively at this issue as this review continues.

The third area - the question of the Congress agenda - raises difficult questions.

The General Council acknowledge that equality issues do not always get the attention they deserve at Congress. As is evident in the Council’s report to Congress, this issue featured prominently in debates at this year’s Women’s, Black Workers’ and Lesbian & Gay conferences. The General Council are prepared to look at ways in which the equality debate can be given a higher profile at Congress. This will include giving more attention to the decisions of the equality conferences. Having resolutions going direct from those conferences to the Congress agenda is one option - but there are questions to be considered, such as the sovereignty of unions in determining Congress policy, and the practicalities of any such arrangement. Nevertheless, we undertake to look at this, as well as at other methods of raising the profile of equality at Congress.

The General Council will consult widely with unions and report back on all these issues before Congress 2000.

*Adopted 16 September 1999*