

Address by John Evans to the FEDUSA 4th National Congress
Johannesburg
6 November 2008

Dear friends,

I am pleased to be here at the FEDUSA Congress and to bring you the message of support from TUAC- the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD – the Organization for the Economic Cooperation and Development.

Our central task in TUAC is to make the voice of the trade unions be heard on economic and social policy, by the government of the OECD countries as well as the G8 Summit and other international fora. TUAC's members are the trade union centres in the 30 industrialized democracies that belong to the OECD. We are part of the Council of Global Unions and work closely with the ITUC and the Global Union Federations. So I am pleased to have listened to speech of my friend Kwasi from ITUC-Africa.

I am here today because the OECD that for many years has been just the 30 industrialized countries in Europe, North America and Asia is now expanding – 5 countries are in negotiations for membership and five more that includes South Africa are in a process of enhanced engagement with a view to membership. As part as this process, during last few months the OECD has produced series of reports on South African economy, on tax cooperation. On education in South Africa and on the anti-corruption Convention – some of these are posted on your website at FEDUSA.

If governments are stepping up their coordination, then trade unions also have to step up joint action. We must work together to ensure that workers' voices and particularly the South African workers' voices are heard on employment, skills, worker rights, investments, the negotiations on climate change and a range of other issues being discussed or negotiated at the OECD.

But, we are also meeting at the time of the first really global economic crisis that has been sparked by the melt down of the deregulated financial markets. This crisis comes on top of 15 years of growing inequality – where incomes of the top one percent have spiraled and workers pay has stagnated.

Truly the neo – liberal model of self – correcting markets has collapsed.

If this crisis were just the rich losing the money they had gambled, we could look at it with some detachment and irony, but as was shown in the 1930's.

the risks of a financial crash leading to an economic depression are very real – only this time the slump may be global.

I listened with great consternation this morning to the report of rising unemployment in South Africa. In the OECD countries unemployment is lower – but it is surging in North America and Europe – firms are denied credit to invest, houses are repossessed and workers are laid off. But as demand falls, exports of Asia and Africa and South America are hit and the slump is transmitted globally. Beyond this – the pension security of our members is increasingly compromised. The capital on which pensions funds are based contracts.

A crisis demands a response and an unprecedented crisis demands an unprecedented response. It is also an opportunity to bring about change. What was inconceivable yesterday is conventional wisdom now. If one month ago anyone in this room had said that George Bush would nationalize the American banking system we would have called for a narcotics test – but that is what has been done.

If two years ago I had said a democratic candidate with Afro – American roots would be elected in a landslide vote, President of the United States with a platform of profound change – I would have been carried off this platform and put in psychiatric care. But that is what happened on two days ago.

Every crisis leaves a legacy and this must be the moment when the global labour movement responds with clear proposals – to halt the jobs crisis, to rebuild our economies, to re – regulate financial markets so that they serve the real economy and not private greed. We need to ensure that workers' productivity is reflected in their salaries and wealth is fairly shared. Above all we have to re – establish as normal that workers rights are respected and strong unions are seen as a key part of the solution to the crisis.

Next week we will be meeting in Washington as union leaders from the ITUC and TUAC. We will be meeting with the G20 Governments and the new US Administration – and this will be the message we will be giving them. We are calling for action:

To stimulate the real economy.

To make sure that this crisis never happens again by regulating financial markets :

To tackle the crisis of distributive justice and

To build a new system for governing the global economy

In TUAC we look forward to working with the South African union movement to ensure our voice is heard. We have to seize this opportunity. To ensure that one day no one, no one will be denied the right to join a union or have a decent job or fear for the future of their children.

Thank you and I wish FEDUSA success in defending decent work here in South Africa.