

## **5th UNI Global World Congress, 17th June, Liverpool 2018**

### **Opening ceremony - President Ann Selin**

Dear friends, colleagues, invited guests, sisters and brothers

Welcome to the 5<sup>th</sup> UNI Global World Congress here in Liverpool!!!

What a marvellous performance!

What a place to have a trade union event! The strong labour history of Liverpool is very present and sets a perfect working tone to our congress.

In addition of producing a great number of labour leaders, the other tone that is eminent – the tone of one of the most successful bands ever – of course – The Beatles.

The Beatles Story Museum, just across the street, has just signed a union recognition agreement! Perhaps our presence helped!

Liverpool, “here comes the sun” and here comes UNI!

Thank you Liverpool! Thank you Mayor Joe Anderson! Thank you Culture Liverpool!

We have had more than a little help from our union friends at the TUC and our UK affiliates. They have been marvellous and a joy to work with.

The TUC celebrated its 150th anniversary on 2 June. Happy birthday! We are part of the celebration.

On 2 June 1868, thirty-four men around a table. Today, 50% of union membership in the UK are women! It is the same at UNI.

It is also the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote in the UK.

Our World Women's Conference has just finished. The job is not done. We fight on.

Women's rights are human rights are trade union rights.

The rights of workers must be protected, even though by March 2019, the UK will leave the European Union.

We demand the best possible deal for workers on both sides of the Channel.

Workers and citizens – in the UK and the rest of the EU – must not pay the price for Brexit.

We are present in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Americas and Europe. At this Congress, we are over 500 unions from 113 countries. We are very sad and outraged, that some union leaders, great figures in their local communities could not make it here. We are suffering from the uneven policies of the government on granting visas. This shouldn't be happening!

Now, sisters and brothers, we need to figure out what we need to do, to set the tone of the future world of work, so it will sound sound to the working men and women everywhere. Workers deserve better and we are making it happen!

We are facing change; global economy, new technology, global warming, growing inequality, the widening gap in distribution of wealth – issues that affect our lives and communities.

We are living in a very different world than we did just a few decades ago.

When the businesses were local the unions were local, when the businesses became national the unions became national. Now when more and more businesses are global, we – the unions - need to be more global too!

One thing is certain: no matter how much things change, human beings will still be the same – with the same basic needs, dreams and fears. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs will remain: all of us will still need food, love and security. When a human being is deprived of these, she or he will be restricted from aspiring anything higher.

That is why it is essential that we, the trade unions, fight poverty, fight for justice, equality, decent jobs and fair pay – we fight for basic human rights. And – sisters and brothers – as I said in my closing statement in Cape Town four years ago - Peace is what we need first! We want there to be peace, for people to get the opportunity to live a decent, meaningful life and have the dignity they deserve.

This is challenged over and over in many ways. Distribution of wealth gets worse and worse in the global scale. 1 % of the wealthiest own more than the rest 99% put together. The economy is based on the idea of constant growth and competition. In order to reach the desired growth, everything should be done faster and more efficiently, regardless of the impact on people – the workers in particular. The wealth acquired this way is not reaching the people who have contributed greatly with their hard work.

It is beginning to look obvious that constant growth is simply not possible. At some point we will destroy our planet and our communities in the greed for wealth, that will still be out of reach for so many. Everybody in this world should think about future generations and what we will leave for them. Ecological sustainability should be a priority. We must save the world for our children.

Ecological sustainability – yes- it is of utmost importance **and so is social sustainability**. We, as trade unionists, know this, if anybody. Work and working conditions are not separate from the other building blocks of our societies. Work is actually one of the most important ways to include all. This is so important, not only for every individual, but for the humankind. Work or the lack of it, is in the very core of our existence. This is why it is so important, that the quality and terms of work are decent. We must make this happen!

We will not accept inequality, poor working conditions or define success in quantity of wealth. We want everyone on this Earth to be acknowledged as valuable human beings. We must change the idea of constant growth and greedy individuality on the expense of human values and stress how we all must work together for a world where everybody has a role to play.

Constant growth at any price, competitiveness that drives for the race to the bottom, always chasing the cheapest price for the maximum profits – hasn't it gone far enough? Yes, we need businesses that are doing well – they are the ones that have the chance in offering decent jobs. But - how much is enough profit and shouldn't the workers share be bigger for it to be anywhere close to fair?

We need to speak up in a clear voice and make ourselves heard locally, nationally and globally. We need to tell when enough is enough. We need to put people first in this world.

We – the trade unions - have been encouraged to take a significant role in our societies. The Pope himself urged us to do so, when he had invited trade-union leaders from all over the world, including us from UNI, to the Vatican last autumn. I think we are ready to do so.

I'm sure that this 5th World Congress will push us towards new ways of thinking and working together for a better world and a better future. The theme for our Congress: "Making it happen" calls us to remember, that we in trade unions are the force that **can and will** make the change. As we will do this together, taking action all over the world, we will also challenge the capitalist idea of competition. If the production of goods or services would be made abiding fair rules everywhere, would the outcome be fairer to the workers as well!

We have a huge role to play and I am certain we are more than up to it!

We are bold. We have the spirit of Liverpool: we are defiant, brave and different!

Let me end with my favourite quote by Nelson Mandela. He said: "It always seems impossible, until it's done". Let us dream big here in Liverpool. Let's become the beacon of hope our changing world needs right now. We are Making it happen!