



AFL-CIO RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING LABOR PROGRAMS IN FOREIGN ASSISTANCE AND DIPLOMACY

The AFL-CIO believes that international labor rights and international labor diplomacy are critical elements of US foreign policy. They should be valued and incorporated into nearly every agency of the US Government (USG). According to the Advisory Committee on Labor Diplomacy, established by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in 1999, “Promoting core worker rights is central to the basic purpose of US foreign policy, which is to create a more secure, prosperous and democratic world for the benefit of the American people.” (*A World of Decent Work*, 2000)

Labor programs build democratic and free unions and promote democratic processes in the developing world. (Labor as used in this context is meant to mean workers, not to be confused with labor ministries, or employers.) Such programs give voice to underrepresented workers, and promote social and legal equality through collective bargaining and legal aid for workers and their organizations. Union-to-union development assistance gives flesh to the rule of law by action at the work site level, in courts and national and multilateral agencies. Further, as unions grow, poverty diminishes.

By necessity, trade unions build constituencies and seek their continuing allegiance through vigorous representation. Also by necessity, they build alliances with human rights and community organizations, and other NGO’s including those with health-based initiatives. Unions work with lawyers, teachers, journalists, health care professionals, and reformers. And they draw on an extensive global network of worker organizations. Unions and their allies are durable civil society entities working consistently at the grass roots to champion social justice, democracy and the rule of law for ordinary working people. As social building blocks, their development work is more likely to prove enduring because union programs have a direct and lasting purchase in communities and workplaces based on known relationships of trust rooted in advocacy that university, development expert, and contractor programs rarely achieve. Development programs fashioned by US unions with their counterparts across the world are cost-effective, and foster a diverse civil society, expanded democracy, the rule of law and social stability that collective bargaining brings by fostering participation and a more equitable distribution of the benefits of development.

Unions, which have largely been written off as development partners by the current Administration, should be restored as full partners in global development. Unions have valuable tools with which to begin to repair the fractures wrought by globalization and the wreckage inflicted by the deteriorating economic environment. Not only are unions essential components of developing strong, diversified economies that mesh with global trends, they are also valuable partners in dealing with issues beyond the limits of the workplace, such as communal conflict, child labor, violence against and harassment of women, and HIV/ AIDS and other communicable diseases. Because unions seek to transcend the confines of race, ethnicity, religion and gender in the workplace, they are



often able to act as bridges across these divides in their communities. Foreign assistance programs should take full advantage of labor and what it can bring to the process of development.

As a means to achieving this, the AFL-CIO has submitted The *AFL-CIO Recommendations Concerning International Labor Affairs* (attached). In order to give greater centrality to international labor rights and labor diplomacy in US foreign policy, the AFL-CIO has recommended filling the position of Special Representative for International Labor Affairs and giving it Ambassador-at-Large status within the Department of State. We have further recommended that this position be given the responsibility for policy coordination across all agencies of the USG, including USAID, that have labor related portfolios and programs. In addition we are calling for a Department of Labor with a truly effective and responsible International Labor Affairs Bureau led by a person with broad-based, practical and credible international labor experience. Further, we would like to offer some specific recommendations regarding USAID labor programming that we believe will make that organization more effective in meeting our nation's goals for global, sustainable development.

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has historically been the lead programming agency for trade union strengthening and other labor programs worldwide. It is the only government agency that currently supports technical assistance for all aspects of labor's efforts to address the USG's broad-based foreign economic development and democracy goals and objectives.

However, a number of former USAID Administrators and other public and government officials note that USAID, as presently constituted, is not able to develop effective, globally integrated economic and political programs. This is especially true with regard to labor-related programs, which are constrained by stove-piping and the lack of policy coherence both within USAID as well as among other government agencies concerned with international labor-related issues. In addition, large congressional earmarks and White House initiatives have crowded out labor programs in countries around the world. The net result is that, at present, the USG, through USAID, is not capable of effectively addressing international labor issues, including labor rights, at either the policy or program levels. Therefore we offer the following initial recommendations:

Specific recommendations for USAID

- Establish a senior labor advisory position in the Administrator's office, for effective coordination with the Special Representative at State, and to ensure coherence and integration of the Administration's labor policies within USAID programming across all bureaus and offices and US missions abroad.
- Ensure those responsible for labor programs within USAID have, in addition to policy expertise, practical trade union management and administration experience at the domestic and international levels, and a demonstrated capacity for devising and administering sustainable labor programs.



- Provide training commensurate with their responsibilities to USAID officers in the field and in headquarters responsible for labor programming, similar to that afforded the labor reporting officers (LROs) at State that adequately addresses the positive role of workers and free trade unions in democracy development.
- In order to appropriately respond to global challenges, ensure support for central global programming in cross-cutting thematic areas including labor and worker rights, worker education, health, gender, and the environment.
- Select as implementing partners organizations (rather than contractors) with the long-term experience, expertise, relationships, networks and structures that will lead to sustainable development.
- Continue to seek out and develop evaluation methodologies that do not sacrifice depth of analysis for quantitative measures, for programming such as civil society and democracy promotion where qualitative assessments may offer better evidence of impact.