

Plenary Session n°2

« Diversity and equal opportunity: a new field in social negotiation »



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Speakers:

- M. Luc VANLIERKERKE (Belgium): President of the European Business Ethics Network
- M. Guy RYDER (England): General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation
- M. Michael HARADOM (Argentina): President-Director of Fersol (Chemical industry)
- M. Sergio MAURO DE SOUZA (Brazil): Planning and Institutional Development Manager of the Ethos Institute, a leading CSR organization in Brazil



What do we know about diversity from the trade unions and the world of work points of view? With workers' greater mobility, diversity becomes nowadays a major issue and a challenge for firms. IBM has thus developed its own version of the English language to facilitate communication among its employees.

We are living in more and more diversified societies but the globalization process has sometimes provoked a feeling of insecurity. **Union activists and firm directors share the responsibility of working together to promote the equality of chances.** It is a duty, it is an ethical issue. But the Environmental and Social Responsibility can only be a complement to an existing legislative basis.

The International Union Confederation, presided by Guy RYDER, was established in Vienna in 2006 and gathers now 153 countries and 168 million workers. Mr. RYDER declares that we are living in a world of unequal work: wages inequalities between men and women, ethnic inequalities, inequalities between young and older people. Poor countries become always poorer and rich countries become always richer. **We then have to review this globalization model, in order to make it fairer. To this aim, union activists' confederations must become global and not national.**

We often hear that unions are obsolete organizations, that don't catch the interest of young people. For Mr. RYDER, the union must be able to answer diversity's challenges to ensure its future.

Each society has taboos and unbalances. From this point of view, the Brazilian example is interesting: 48% of the population is black or half-blood. This population has a wage 50% below the one of the whites; illiteracy is three times higher and infant mortality 60% higher. Other case: seniors are mostly put apart by the white population whereas other communities consider them as wise men.

To fight against « racial prejudice », the Brazilian law recommends the quotas' policy. And for a greater sexual equality, Brazil allows 6 months maternity leaves and 2 months paternity leaves. This leave is planned to be extended to the homosexual population (particularly in case of adoption). For Michael HARADOM, Director of the Fersol company: « *Diversity must be the cake's recipe and not the decoration* ». The aim being not to waste talents.

An organization like the ETHOS Institute, that gathers firms representing one third of the Brazilian gross product, plays a large role for the equality of chances: it brings diagnostic and recommendations to mobilize firms on issues like man-woman balance, ethical equality...

Social and Environmental Responsibility is a shared process, in which every stakeholder has to make its interests listen and has to participate to the debate. The issue of the means to be implemented (quotas, positive discrimination or ethical statistics) remains nevertheless a debate, highlighted by the example of the multicultural Brazilian society. For the economy to find its direction, all its stakeholders should become personally involved.