



OPENING ADDRESS ILRS CONGRESS 30 June - 2 July 2006 Oslo, Norway

We welcome you all to this Congress of the ILRS.

We thank the Norwegians for the hard work in preparing the Congress for us, and a special thanks to Maria. I will also take the opportunity to give our thanks to Andrew for preparing all the papers and practical business for our Congress; many of us are not very good in responding to his e-mails! Now we are here, ready to take up our business, and a social democratic agenda can never be anything less than 'Change the World!'

We meet to face the challenges for a better world. We are not powerful, we are not many, but we are important players in the processes of democracy in our organisations, networks and countries. At this Congress are people with links to more than 25 countries. We will in our own way challenge this world's poor agenda on unilateralism, market beliefs and narrowness. We are global citizens; we are sisters and brothers of the world, we are people of faith and we are social democrats and democratic socialists.

The International League of Religious Socialists—ILRS—is an umbrella organisation for faith-related political organisations, and at the same time an organisation for people of faith in political and democratic ministries. We say that faith matters, but see the poor behaviour by religious institutions; we say that democracy is the foundation for human cooperation, but see that democratic institutions and political parties are too narrow-minded to challenge the real injustices in our present world. We understand faith as something that fits a political agenda from the left.

During these days we will tell our stories, challenge each other and contribute to the work of our organisations in our countries, find ways to develop our partnership and stimulate joint ventures between our national member organisations, and in practice find ways to do what we can to contribute to a better world.

On our theme of Social Globalisation we have prepared a document which opens the possibility for us to work with others. We need to expand our views and see the challenges, we need to deepen our analysis and find ways to act. As a preliminary paper we have produced a ten-point list [a condensed version based upon the main document]. During the day today we will expand our views and in working groups also relate this work to the Work Plan for the ILRS.

Ten ways to make a better world by making the process of globalisation a social one:

1. We affirm a global society. There is only one humanity and we need each other.
2. Globalisation must not mean only a global marketplace.
Social Globalisation means taking the necessary steps towards sustainable development, social responsibility, the economic welfare of all, gender equality and good governance.
3. We must deepen the understanding and exercise of democracy.

That focuses on the real meaning and the use of the term democracy and the legitimacy of our global institutions.

4. Sustainable development is the real quest in building a better world.

5. Human rights issues are now central to the agenda of globalisation.

The future welfare of working people is totally dependent on how well a country can prepare its citizens, especially the young, to claim their rights as producers and consumers when dealing with the economic challenges of a global society.

6. Reducing poverty is inseparable from all other political goals.

7. Multilateralism and peace must take priority over previous conflicts.

8. Markets must be regulated to serve human needs as well as wants.

9. People need to have democratic control over their own resources.

10. A true global society is a tolerant society.

A multicultural society with a variety of faiths is not something which will occur automatically, but rather needs conscious work on melting all the different roots together in a new tolerant society. We will not accept any negative etiquette of groups of people; not from secular people towards religious people, nor from the believer towards the secular or other believers. Freedom of religion is at the foundation of modern society. However, religious freedom is not unlimited; the limits must take into consideration both the common values and human rights within the (secular) society, and the sacred elements of different faiths. We want to express our search for a unity in diversity as a common understanding that human is spiritual.

Now this is in your hands. Tomorrow your recommendations and new perspectives will help the decision-making part of the Congress to develop the work of ILRS and then maybe agree on actions and papers for developing our work.

We are not many, but as world citizens it is our responsibility to do our part. We belong to each other and we are depending on each other.

Sisters and brothers: This is politics and faith. Not all are religious, but we are all spiritual. And we all are burning for human rights. That is the basis for human values and the value of humanity. The humans are getting their spirits together. We *can* make a difference. This is faith and politics.

*Pär Axel Sahlberg, MP
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