

Major Group Intervention : Workers and Trade Unions

20 October 2011. Seoul, Korea.

Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to thank you very much for giving workers and their representatives the opportunity to voice our concerns and perspectives.

As a Korean trade unionist who weathered both the Asian contagion of 1998 and the recent global financial crisis, I can see differences between the first and the second crisis. In the first crisis, foreign investors' manic and panic swings in and out of the Korean stock market and crash of our currency had huge impact on the real economy: GDP rapidly contracted, thousands of workers were pushed out to the street and communities were devastated.

This second crisis, while many Korean companies had improved their debt to equity ratio, we saw many foreign TNCs leave workers high and dry. In one case, a French transnational autoparts maker informed workers their plant was closed on the day it was closed, at 11 am after they were already working and by telephone.

And with the Occupy Wallstreet and the Occupy Seoul movements, we see not only deep insecurity about whether we have a future, but a deepening problem of social vulnerability. Precarious work is the daily reality for the majority of people in Asia and Pacific and social inequity has risen.

This brings me to my first point, regarding the **objective of the conference**, that **people must be at the center** of any green economy and of sustainable development efforts, and the commitments must be based on **people, their rights and empowerment** if development is to bring the uplift we hope for.

We echo Ms. Yoke Ling Chee's recognition that the acknowledgement of rights is a significant achievement and to this would add the COP16 recognition of the importance of ensuring that the transformation towards a low-carbon economy involves a '**Just Transition**' and creation of **decent jobs** as another important development. I also add, workers rights are human rights, and there needs to be an acknowledgement of the role that collective bargaining and Occupational Health and Safety rights for workers could play in sustainable development.

Workers call on countries to identify **targets on decent jobs** to be reached in the next 5 – 10 years accompanied by a package of decent work policies to secure jobs quality. Any agreement on sustainable development goals should include a commitment that at least half of the workers of the world have decent jobs by 2020.

Second, as a **new and emerging issue**, since the second crisis we have seen the deepening and escalating problem of social vulnerability and precarity. We believe Rio+20 presents a unique opportunity for the leaders of the world to decide on longterm solutions including universal access social protections systems and we see a **social protection floor**, especially in the developing and least developed countries, as a key way to move forward and improve resilience.

Third, implementation gaps are many and I cannot address all, but here I would like to address the difficulty that many countries in Asia suffer from poor resources and financing. A renewed political commitment needs to go hand in hand with a clear identification of sources to fund those commitments.

We are deeply convinced that one fundamental stepping stone towards a **global funding architecture is a Financial Transaction Tax** and urge governments to consider the developing countries whose economies have been frequently affected by manic panic swings and financial crises over recent decades. We call for a heads of state level decision to implement a Financial Transactions Tax globally.

To briefly comment on the **IFSD** issue, trade unions believe that social, economic and environmental institutions should have equal political powers and authority in the multilateral system.

Trade unions also support the designation of an institution or a person to represent the interests and rights of present and future generations.

Rio gave citizens the right to access to information, public participation and justice on environmental issues. Rio+20 must launch negotiations for the establishment of an international convention on those rights based on Rio Principle 10.

Trade unions also support the creation of a United Nations Environmental Organisation but we echo the Australian delegates' hope that there first be clarity on how the body would improve on existing approaches. That is, we agree with the creation of UNEO only if it has strong powers and authority.

The world's trade unions support strong and urgent climate action.

We call on governments to deliver Outcomes beyond pre-recorded language at the Rio+20 summit. This requires a **strong political document** making clear that **One, the Green Economy must respect the main principles**, including a Just Transition for workers and for developing countries in moving towards a sustainable society, **Second, a significant role for social protection systems** to ensure resilience for impacted communities, and **Third, a commitment to strengthening rights** to defend the planet and communities.

Governments know the urgency.

Some 20 years ago, world leaders gathered at the United Nations "Earth Summit" in Rio shared a vision to globally address the way we live in our earth and to lay the foundations for a **world in which every person could have a decent life in a healthy and secure environment.**

We urge you to take up this challenge.

Many thanks to you all for your time and attention.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) represents 175 million workers in 151 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates. The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) is an affiliate of the ITUC and Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMWU) is a member union of the KCTU.