

# WORKERS & CLIMATE CHANGE

**INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC) CONTRIBUTION  
TO THE 19TH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNFCCC**  
11TH – 22ND NOVEMBER 2013 – WARSAW, POLAND

**A**s the UN gathers for its 19<sup>th</sup> annual conference on climate change in Warsaw, the latest scientific evidence from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of human influence on the global climate system is clear and unequivocal. Each of the last three decades has been successively warmer at the Earth's surface than any preceding decade since 1850. The atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane, and nitrous oxide have increased to levels unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years. The need for urgent intergovernmental leadership to tackle carbon emissions has never been greater. Perhaps the most startling analysis from the UN's report is that we have burned our way through more than half of the carbon emission we can "safely" use to keep the rise in global temperatures to below 2 degrees above pre-industrial days. In straight terms, we have emitted 545 billion tons of carbon gases from coal, oil and gas since the 1860s, and cannot safely go beyond 1000 billion tons without leading ourselves into dangerous territory. This is a direct challenge to companies and governments controlling fossil fuels, whose known resources are at least five times this upper limit.

The international labour movement has supported the UNFCCC convinced that it is the place for delivering a fair, ambitious and binding global Agreement on climate change. But time is running out.

The international community cannot afford an endless counting of victims of extreme weather events or slower changes in our ecosystems. Each one of them carries a too heavy toll in terms of jobs, livelihoods and lives.

With a global crisis, economic slowdown and unemployment spreading, our leaders might think that this is not time for strong action on climate change. Trade unions do not support this lack of leadership. We need our leaders to re-mobilise and respond to the climate challenge at the same time they address social priorities.

The fact that we are discussing a post 2020 agreement does not mean we justify delaying climate action until then. Governments must raise the ambition of their commitments without any delay.

## **2015: A JUST, AMBITIOUS AND LEGALLY-BINDING AGREEMENT**

A renovated climate change agreement is needed for 2015. It must assure the stabilisation of GHG concentrations in the atmosphere, at a level which will avoid man-driven interferences in the climate system.

It must give a high likelihood of maintaining the climate system below 2°C or ideally below 1.5°C in average temperature increases

The next agreement must include targets, commitments and actions within a framework that provides sufficient support to countries with low capacity and ensure sufficient support for dealing with the impacts of climate change. It should also develop strong rules including on accounting and compliance.

This is not about negotiating a full new climate regime, but to complement and strengthen the structure provided by the UNFCCC.

A renovated framework for climate action will have to be informed by science, based on equity, be environmentally effective and ensure broad participation of all countries, while respecting their different responsibilities and capacities. It will have to provide clarity on (1) **emission reduction objectives**, (2) **adaptation**, (3) **support (financial,**

**technological and human)**, strengthen its commitment to (4) **Just Transition** and develop (5) **common rules**<sup>1</sup>.

Trade unions call for

- A global regime which ensures a high likelihood that it will keep the rise in global temperatures to below 2 degrees, or 1.5° if possible, above pre-industrial levels.
- Developed countries to urgently increase the ambition of their economy-wide targets, and go well beyond the 25-40% reduction compared to 1990 levels which was necessary by 2020. We also call on them to take the lead in taking commitments for the year 2050, in such a way of aligning them to Fourth IPCC report recommendations and the soon to be released V IPCC Report.
- Even though the entry into force of the future agreement will only take place in 2020, parties must urgently increase the ambition of their mitigation policies and plans in all possible sectors and at all relevant levels: local, national, regional, international and global.
- Social Protection policies (Income security, unemployment benefits, child care and maternity protection, health

<sup>1</sup> A common trade union position on common rules is being developed.

care and pensions, including for people with disabilities, and respect for human rights) are critical for ensuring sustainability of adaptation policies. This must be reflected in the new agreement.

- Developed countries, according to the commitments they made, to mobilise the scale of funding required to face the impacts of climate change and help developing countries shift to low-emission development paths.
- **Just Transition:** The new UN agreement must honour the commitment made by Parties in COP17 on the importance of ensuring a “Just Transition which will create decent work and good quality jobs in the transition towards a low emission and climate-resilient society” A strong message to the working people is key to show government’s commitment to fight climate change in a socially-sound manner.

## **(1) EMISSION REDUCTIONS**

Trade unions call for a global regime which ensures a high likelihood that it will keep the rise in global temperatures to below 2 degrees, or 1.5° if possible, above pre-industrial levels. This will require interim targets, commitments and actions for this to be achieved. Following the Convention’s commitment from all Parties to reduce emissions, trade unions believe that it is time for all countries to take mitigation commitments and actions, within a multilaterally agreed, ambitious and equitable framework. Developed countries should increase the ambition of their economy-wide targets, and go well beyond the 25-40% reduction compared to 1990 levels which was necessary by 2020. Major emitters in developing countries and countries that have surpassed a certain development threshold should take commitments and actions to deviate from projected emission trajectories.

Since 2007, the ITUC supports an 85% reduction in global emissions by 2050, consistent with the Fourth IPCC report’s scenario for keeping average global temperature increase below 2°C. The union movement will review this objective in light of the IPCC V recommendations for the same temperature scenario.

In order to link climate policy to political cycles, commitments could be presented as a timeline with several years and different levels of precision, i.e. 2025 (a clear number), 2030 (a narrow range), 2035 (an indicative range) and 2050 (a goal).

**At COP 19 We need a process for defining the rules with which governments will assess their contributions vis-à-vis science and equity. Draft commitments could be presented in 2014, during the Heads of State Summit called by the UN SG.**

A periodic review of the implementation of commitments and the adequacy of aggregate efforts based on science and equity will be needed, along with a thorough analysis of the extent of support provided.

A sound emission reductions' regime must be designed in parallel with a responsible strategy for transforming and developing clean industries, empowering workers to access jobs created in them and supporting them and their families in the transition (**see under Just Transition in the 2015 agreement**). In this regard, emission reduction commitments could be complemented by commitments to public policies, which will give broader public visibility and positive flavour to climate action, and could include commitments to energy efficiency or renewable energies targets, to incorporate full climate cost accounting to public procurement, investment in sustainable water and land management, sustainable urban planning, among others.

Nonetheless, it is clear that all this will never be sufficient if we do not change, at the same time, our consumption patterns.

## (2) ADAPTATION

The UNFCCC has established recently a certain number of bodies to deal with adaptation. This said, it is important to ensure adaptation commitments have a high profile in the next agreement. A commitment from all Parties (for some, conditioned to the provision of support) to document their efforts to run inclusive adaptation policies (therefore gender-sensitive, focused on vulnerable groups, including workers and rural communities) will be key. More substantially, future adaptation work must ensure there is a link between adaptation policies and the strengthening of social protection systems, decent employment programs and public services at the country and local level.

The securing of income, unemployment benefits, child care and maternity protection, health care and pensions, including for people with disabilities, holds real potential for sustaining the livelihoods of communities that might be at risk as a consequence of climate change, and today face these risks with little or no protection. While there is a clear consensus among UN agencies and adaptation actors on the potential social protection systems have when tackling vulnerability to climate change, this still needs to be reflected at the policy level.

## (3) SUPPORT (CLIMATE FINANCE, TECHNOLOGY AND CAPACITY BUILDING)

The international trade union movement is convinced that unless climate finance is made available in the long term, promises and plans for achieving a low-carbon and climate-resilient world will remain empty words. According to the commitments they made, developed countries must mobilise the scale of funding requires

to face the impacts of climate change and help developing countries shift to low-emission development paths. The Green Climate Fund can play a major role in financing adaptation and scaling up low carbon investments, provided it develops a sound governance, where civil society stakeholders, including trade unions, can voice their proposals and concerns at all stages of the decision making process (from the Board to ground projects), where solid social and environmental safeguards (including ILO labour standards) are developed, and, most important, sufficient funds are provided to undertake its tasks.

The launch of the GCF requires new pledges on short term funding, and a rapid workplan on resource mobilisation where public sources are detailed, including innovative sources such as the Financial Transactions Tax.

Accelerating technology transfer is crucial for moving the transformation of our economies forward. Developed countries must provide the means for making it happen. Technology transfer must be organised in such a way that national circumstances, skills needs and capacity building is taken into account.

**At COP 19** **With the Green Climate Fund work progressing in parallel to climate negotiations, trade unions will underscore the importance of adopting strong labour rights and working condition clauses under the social safeguards of the GCF. These have been ignored by the Secretariat's draft document in the last GCF Board meeting and will now be discussed within an Expert Group with no union involvement.**

## (4) JUST TRANSITION

The commitment taken by Parties in COP17 on the importance of ensuring a "*Just Transition which will create decent work and good quality jobs in the transition towards a low emission and climate-resilient society*" must find its place in a new agreement. A strong message to the working people is key to show government's commitment to fight climate change in a socially-sound manner.

Just Transition is about

- sustainable investments and decent work promotion,
- social protection,
- assessment and anticipation of employment impacts,
- local economic diversification,
- skills' development support, and
- tripartite negotiations and union consultation.

Different dimensions of the world of work, including the adoption of mitigation policy targets with strong job creation component or the inclusion of social protection in adaptation (see above) will also have to be incorporated. Current work at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in defining the policies of a Just Transition should also feed into the UNFCCC negotiations.

The need for accompanying emission reductions and other climate policies with a Just Transition strategy is now acknowledged not only by the COP but also by several organisations involved in climate work. However, we underscore that neither ambitious climate policies nor industrial strategies have been put in place to ensure workers and their families are fully part of a low carbon and sustainable economy. All the elements of a Just Transition strategy mentioned above are key for succeeding in adopting socially-fair climate policies. We urge governments to put them in place along with climate policies.

### **FORUM AND WORK PROGRAMME ON RESPONSE MEASURES (SBI, ITEM 15 & SBSTA ITEM 9)**

The Forum on response measures has provided a unique opportunity to address issues of vital importance for the trade union movement, including the different means to ensure a Just Transition of the workforce, as agreed in 1/CP.16<sup>1</sup>.

**At COP 19 Parties must ensure a space is maintained for an exchange on the means by which the Just Transition could be operationalized and effectively implemented. That space could be the one of the Forum. Potential future activities could include:- Collection of practices and methodologies for assessing employment consequences of climate policies to support countries to take more socially-sound decision making based on best practice and lessons learnt in other countries,**

- Collection of good practice of “multi-stakeholder approaches” to industrial policy at national level, including those in which trade unions participate.
- Identification of public policies that have been designed to counter negative impacts on jobs, or to multiply positive impacts as a means for helping other Parties in operationalizing a Just Transition domestically.
- Assessment and identification of investments needed in order to support economic sector transformation, and the potential sources for funding them. The link between this assessment and the possibility for UNFCCC institutions to support the most vulnerable populations should be progressively done.
- Assessment on how ILO Decent Work Country Programs can be mainstreamed into national climate change policies and programs to ensure complementarity.

1. ITUC Submission to the UNFCCC on Just Transition <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2013/smsn/ngo/343.pdf>



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