

# Trade Unions and Climate Change

## ITUC Contribution to UNFCCC COP22

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The times when climate action was raised as a job killer are behind us. Ambitious emissions reduction and adaptation policies are now recognised as vital to protect jobs, people and communities from the impacts of climate change, and investment is creating jobs in renewable energy, public transit, energy efficiency in buildings, sustainable agriculture, forestry, water and more.

We are living in a time of contradictions. A minority of corporate interests intends to benefit until the last minute from a socially unfair, environmentally-damaging and undemocratic system by obstructing change. Many governments bow to these interests while austerity policies, attacks on regulation and public services remain on the same governments' tables, even when those policies have proven to be disastrous and their countries face climate-aggravated crises.

For the past years, the international trade union movement has stood strong in calling for ambition from our political leaders on climate because we all know: “there are no jobs on a dead planet”.

In 2015 government leaders from all over the world signed the Paris Agreement, which will regulate international climate action from 2020 onwards. For unions, every step that contributes to global governance in favour of rights, justice and solidarity – every investment in climate action is a welcome one. However, **we are conscious that the long-term objective governments have set for themselves and our societies of “staying well below 2°C in average temperature increase, and aiming at 1.5°C”, will only be reached if concrete measures are taken to dramatically change our production and consumption patterns and if national emissions reduction objectives, in particular in developed countries, are reviewed with greater ambition, before 2018.**

Reaching the agreed goals will also require governments to deliver on their climate finance commitments and agree to provide more support so that everyone can contribute to the global effort. The Paris Agreement is one step in a long journey for protecting our climate.

This is not only a matter of principle – it is a matter of need: we need ambition to trigger sustainable investments and decent jobs at a time when we face historic levels of unemployment with half of the world's workers either unemployed or in vulnerable employment, with two in five young people in this situation.

We know millions of workers and families still depend on a fossil-fuel-based economy for their jobs and livelihoods. They have generated the energy required for today's prosperity. Governments and employers, with workers and their unions must sit together and commit to protect our future through a *just transition* strategy – a plan which guarantees decent work for all. The inclusion of a *just transition* in the Paris Agreement is an important first step.

Corporations who refuse to diversify their energy base instead set out to frighten workers. But fear will not deliver for working families in communities dependent on fossil fuels. Fear will just increase the costs of action and make the prospects for organising the transition we need to build together more difficult. A difficult set of challenges confront us. The imperative to make our societies compatible with all forms of life and with the restrictions of limited planetary resources must be met with national and international plans that must deliver

on social justice and prosperity for all. The decisions by global leaders to meet the sustainable development goals by 2030 with the Paris agreement chart a course to a zero poverty, zero carbon world but this journey will only be realised when people act to make it happen.

## 1. The international trade union movement and climate change: some history

The commitment of the international trade union movement to this issue has its landmarks that underpin the progress made on climate change at the national and sectoral level.

The 2006 Assembly on Labour and Environment was the first statement of commitment of the international labour movement to tackle climate change<sup>1</sup>.

This resolution constituted a key input into the ITUC Foundational Congress (Vienna, 2006)<sup>2</sup>, which would recognise in the Constitution the importance for trade unions to act on environmental issues. The 2<sup>nd</sup> ITUC Congress (Vancouver, 2010) went further on defining the policies for the labour movement and dedicated a full resolution to climate change which underscores the commitment to supporting a transformation of our societies allowing us to remain under the 2°C temperature increase goal; a goal which recognises the need for developed countries to take the lead in reducing emissions according to their capacity and responsibility; and the importance of linking climate action with jobs and decent work and the call for a just transition – these points were at the heart of the discussions<sup>3</sup>.

A further step was taken in 2012 at the 2nd Assembly on Labour and Environment<sup>4</sup>, a *must-read* for anyone involved or interested in the links between trade unions, climate and environment. Building on previous decisions, the Assembly detailed union commitments with the climate agenda: challenging employers and governments, making workplaces key in the transformation, linking climate action to new rights, and working in alliance with other movements to foster change. These are key features.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process was instrumental for structuring trade union inputs on climate change, and for energising a community of union leaders ready to take up the challenge of fighting for climate and workers' justice. From a handful of unionists participating in COPs in the 1990s, union involvement grew to reach more than four hundred union leaders from all over the world in the key Summits of COP15 in 2009 and COP21 in 2015. However, numbers don't tell the whole story. At the UNFCCC, trade unions developed a strategy, on the one hand raising our voices both in support of ambition on emission reductions and for climate financing for developing countries. In addition we advocated for governments to recognise the strong link between social justice, employment and climate change, and most importantly, commit to ensuring a *just transition* for workers affected by the transition to a zero-carbon economy. The Paris Agreement made an historic step in this direction.

In parallel, trade union actions around the world grew in number and ambition. A campaign launched in 2015 #Unions4Climate brought them under the same banner and shows commitments that go far beyond the lowest common denominator.

1 <http://www.sustainlabour.org/documentos/Resolution.Assembly.EN.pdf>

2 [http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc\\_constitution.pdf](http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc_constitution.pdf)

3 [http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/CONGRESS\\_Decisions\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/CONGRESS_Decisions_EN.pdf) Page 65

4 <http://www.sustainlabour.org/documentos/Trade%20Union%20Resolution%20on%20Labour%20and%20Environment.pdf>

## **2. Our mission: social justice & decent work for all; our goal: a *just transition* for all workers & communities**

The international trade union movement's engagement on climate change is based on the belief that trade unions have a vital role to play in improving the quality of jobs, in protecting jobs in existing workplaces and industries by demanding sustainable industrial transformation, organising workers in new decent jobs emerging from environmentally sound investments and policies and fighting for the *just transition* measures that will ensure we leave no one behind.

### **Jobs, industrial transformation and Just Transition**

Industrial transformation is an imperative.

The industries of today are the foundations for the industries of tomorrow. The next 15 years will be critical. The opportunities for jobs are significant. So too are the challenges.

In order to have a chance to stay within the 2°C limit, and even more for the internationally agreed 1.5°C objective, emissions should be reduced to zero as soon as possible, and no later than between 2055 and 2070.

Entire economic sectors must transform their carbon footprint to reach that goal. All jobs must be made climate-compatible.

### **Jobs in energy, transport, construction, industry, agriculture and services – all sectors hold opportunities**

Investment needed in infrastructure by 2030 is estimated to be up to USD 90 trillion. With infrastructure requirements in transport, energy, water systems and the built environment, this could mean USD 6 trillion per year on average over the next 15 years. This means jobs. With the right framework in place, we need to ensure those are decent jobs and that they contribute to building a fairer economic system as much as they provide the foundation to stay within planetary boundaries.

A 2010 study by the Millennium Institute for the ITUC showed that if just 12 countries invested two per cent of GDP each year for five years in major sectors, this could generate around 48 million jobs.

The ILO has found that most studies show a positive net employment effect of policies facilitating climate transition. Net gains are up to 60 million jobs, combining economic growth with environmental improvement.

Climate adaptation and resilience policies also offer opportunities for job creation and improvement, including, in the public sector, in particular at the municipal level, which should be strengthened to respond to the climate challenge.

While all sectors hold opportunities, the key to the transformation of our industries and our communities is energy – reliable, renewable energy. The estimates vary, but studies show that at least 80 per cent of current fossil fuel reserves will need to be left in the ground to meet the objectives of the Paris Agreement. Opponents to the transition to alternative energy sources cite their relative cost, but ignore health and pollution costs in our current energy dependency on fossil fuels – not to mention the hefty subsidies these fossil fuel businesses enjoy.

Universal access and democratisation of energy is needed if we are to achieve ambitious climate action. Energy, along with other common goods that belong to humanity (air, water), must be guaranteed for all and public

oversight and administration are grave matters of public debate. Energy companies need to be restructured in order to allow for such democratic involvement of those affected and public oversight, including that of workers' participation.

New models of renewable energy driving decentralised systems of power generation and distribution are needed. Cooperatives established to meet community energy needs are increasingly seen as an option and often assisted by municipalities. Energy transition plans at the national and subnational levels need to be developed in ways that serve the public good, meet science-based emissions reduction targets, reduce energy poverty and facilitate cross-border cooperation in research and development. These plans should involve communities in decision making while ensuring that the energy transformation is equitable and sustainable according to the principles of a just transition and participatory democracy.

The transition towards a sustainable, zero-carbon society must provide a means to pivot decisively away from ecologically and socially destructive methods of fossil fuel extraction (as in the case of "fracking" for shale gas, tar oil exploitation, among others) towards renewable energy. It also requires prioritising the global common good against the profits of large fossil fuel companies that continue to promote the use of ever greater quantities of coal, oil and gas.

Education is key to raise global awareness of the climate emergency. It becomes urgent to increase the place of education to sustainable development (ESD) in all action plans and programs that aim to fight against climate change

## **We will leave no one behind**

Despite the opportunities for jobs, there will be significant challenges for many workers and their communities. The ITUC is determined that no one be left behind and that the energy revolution be supported by *just transition* measures.

In addition to sustainable industrial transformation, we must ensure that the energy costs for private households and companies remain affordable in the transitional phase. The burden must be distributed fairly, taking into account pressures on low-income households and energy intensive industries where change will be felt most.

Unions want a clear vision of future industrial and energy options and the impact on workers. It is our job to fight for a transition that is just. In sectors where job losses are unavoidable, social partners (unions and employers) need to develop binding transition plans and strategies that offer new opportunities to employees and actively shape structural change.

Unions represent workers employed in the energy and fossil fuel sectors and in other areas that will be affected. While companies make the necessary changes to compete in an environmentally sustainable economy, **we must recognise the fears of people who believe they will lose their jobs. These workers are the backbone of many communities and they must be guaranteed a future.** Redeployment, the chance to further develop their skills and make a contribution in new sectors and secure pensions must be an integrated package of guarantees.

An economic conversion of this magnitude will require very robust research, innovation and training policies in order to facilitate adequate labour market adaptation. Vocational training and the package of transition policies should not be limited to a few wealthy countries. Decisions should be made in coordination with workers and trade union representatives. Trade unions demand financial support be made available so that developing countries can deploy *just transition* measures.

## **Transforming business and industries: A workers' right to know**

All industries must use technologies and processes that contribute to a zero-carbon economy. All workers have a right to know what their employer is planning to ensure their jobs are secured through this transformation.

Unions will support dialogue in existing industries and organise workers in new industries. The formula for decent work includes mature industrial relations, fair wages, safe and secure work, and respect for workers' rights including dialogue.

## **We demand a *just transition***

This transformation of sectors and industries must be supported by *just transition* measures. Unions have played our role in UN negotiations and fought for these commitments. Now these are enshrined in the Paris Agreement. This means that carbon-dependent communities and workers must not be forced to bear the costs of change and that plans for industrial transformation in all sectors are developed. We have a right to a seat at the table as we act to stabilise the world's climate by moving toward a zero-carbon emissions future.

The challenge for unions is to be part of the dialogue that drives investment, shapes industries for sustainability and ensures decent work. Social dialogue, consultation, collective bargaining – workers have a right to be involved in the design of their future.

Workers and communities are on the frontlines of climate change, particularly in developing countries. They must lead the transition to a zero-carbon world. If the transition is to be fast and fair, they will need to see concrete plans for a future that, notwithstanding the threats, has both security and opportunity.

Transformation, however, is not only about phasing out polluting sectors. It is also about creating new clean industries, new jobs, new investment and the opportunity for a more equal and just economy. It is about community revitalisation and development so that, for example, the closing of a mine brings new investment, jobs and infrastructure, rather than leaving workers and their families jobless and stranded.

Concrete and transparent plans are necessary to give everyone certainty, from communities and workers to investors and employers. Workers have the right to know what these plans are and to help shape them.

These plans must be built on social dialogue<sup>5</sup> involving workers, communities, businesses and governments, so people feel some power in shaping their working lives and their communities.

To deliver and build the social dialogue for a *just transition*, the ITUC and its partners are establishing a Just Transition Centre. The Centre will facilitate government, business, trade unions, communities, investors and civil society groups to collaborate in the national, industrial, workplace and community planning, agreements, technologies, investments and the necessary public policies.

## **Rights must be at the heart of any climate response**

Climate policies – both those aimed at reducing emissions or those aimed at building resilience and adaptive capacity – must contribute to the realisation of human rights. This is a prerequisite for achieving the sustainability of climate policies: people will always stand with measures that improve the overall quality of life and their chances to live with dignity on our planet. Having rights integrated in climate policies is a condition for communities to contribute to broader social progress. Respect for indigenous peoples' rights and their self-determination, gender equality, workers' rights, and migrants' rights are fundamental for climate policies to support those who need them the most.

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<sup>5</sup> Social dialogue is a tripartite process between workers, employers and governments that exists in all countries where unions exist and at all scales, from the workplace to international negotiations. It includes formal processes of negotiation, consultation and information exchange and covers both economic and social issues.

### 3. After Paris: Climate governance needs to be strengthened

A sound global climate regime is a critical part of the solution. Regulations, timelines, shared objectives, common rules – these are fundamental for ensuring that there are no free-riders, that a level playing field is built and that the most vulnerable are protected.

In Paris, unions mobilised for a climate agreement that would give us a chance to deliver a fair world for current and future generations. This requires governments: to raise their ambition on emissions reduction targets before and after the entry into force of the new agreement; and developed countries to provide clarity on the delivery of their climate finance commitments. All governments must recognise for the first time in a binding UN agreement that there is a requirement to protect workers and communities in the biggest policy-driven transition of our history by committing to putting in place *just transition* strategies.

None would challenge the Paris Agreement being considered a diplomatic success. That said, the goal it sets for the international community is not accompanied by clear targets and the means to make it achievable in the time available. Significant work is therefore needed both nationally and internationally to fill the gaps so that we protect people and the planet from climate change.

We must ensure the following:

- National contributions are comprehensive and incorporate aspects related to employment and *just transition*.
- The sound design of the five-year review cycles agreed in Paris, where national contributions are measured against each countries' responsibilities and capacities, and where civil society contributes to these assessments building the credibility of the system.
- Clear standards for measuring progress and reporting ensuring promises are realised.
- Climate finance commitments are delivered, including the mobilisation by developed country governments of USD 100 billion by 2020, and building on that sum to reach new, more ambitious commitments is critical for supporting developing countries in their development objectives.
- Funds are committed for financing *just transition* measures at the national, sectoral and regional level.
- Technology and knowledge transfer becomes a reality. Support for research and innovation in developing countries, including a substantial increase for research and development (R&D) budgets, is needed to ensure ownership and appropriateness of innovations, as well as preventing new forms of dependency.

## 4. Climate action – part of ambitious action for sustainable development

In 2015 the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) gives the international community a chance to build coherence across policy areas. Every effort must be made to avoid silos in national implementation. From a union perspective, ensuring Goal 8 on ensuring “Decent Work for All” requires alignment with climate objectives, so that every job created contributes towards climate protection and resilience.

The adoption by the International Labour Organization and its three constituents (governments, employers’ and workers’ representatives) of the “ILO Guidelines for a *just transition* towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all” is a major landmark in providing international guidance to governments and social partners willing to make a *just transition* a reality in their countries.

The need for all international agencies to align their policies with climate goals is needed to reach the Paris Agreement objectives. Trade agreements should not be used to hinder climate action or social progress.

The call for coherence is not limited to international levels. Social dialogue and planning are needed at the national level, in particular in developed countries to close the gap in emissions that prevent us from being on a safe emissions trajectory. Unions are conscious that each decision on investment, infrastructure, employment, trade and taxation policies, among others, matters for the climate transition. Our commitment is to support these policies going in the right direction.

The struggle for climate justice touches all aspects of our societies. Therefore, working in cooperation with social movements, environmental, gender-based and indigenous groups, as well as with progressive allies in local governments and among employers, is crucial if we are to win this battle. The union movement is committed to strengthen alliances which support a deep transformation of our economic system into a fair, truly sustainable one.

## 5. COP22 three top priorities for trade unions on international climate governance:

### ***#priority 1: Raise Ambition and Realise Job Potential of Climate Action***

COP22 must deliver

- Concrete emission reduction initiatives before 2020

– Strong processes for reviews that increase national commitments, through the development of sound, democratic modalities for the agreed “facilitative dialogue” in 2018 which is to lay the ground for the five-year review cycles.

The agreed objective of staying below 2°C and aiming at not surpassing a 1.5°C increase in average temperature requires science, equity and fairness to be brought into the review exercise.

### ***#priority 2: Deliver on Climate Finance and Support the Most Vulnerable***

COP22 must deliver certainty on how climate finance commitments will be achieved so that there are sufficient resources for supporting communities’ resilience to the impacts of climate change and supporting efforts to reduce emissions and build a *just transition* to a zero-carbon economy. Current commitments to mobilise USD 100bn annually by 2020 should be a floor for post-2020 finance.

### **#priority 3: Commit to Securing a Just Transition for Workers and Their Communities**

The Paris Agreement took a first step in securing the commitment to a *just transition* for workers. COP22 must consolidate it through a call to parties to incorporate *just transition* elements to their NDCs and recommend future work on this issue under SBI/SBSTA. This is essential to support the challenge of industrial transformation in all sectors and in particular jobs and livelihoods for workers in emission-intensive industries.

National Contributions supported by zero-carbon development roadmaps are critical for building a long-term vision for transforming our economy, as well as for driving sustainable investments. Factoring-in employment and *just transition* will align them with broader social aspirations in each country.

## **Trade unions @ COP22:**

- **Every day, 9:00 – 10:00 Trade union meeting (check screens under TUNGO)**
- **ITUC booth**
- **TUNGO office (within the “constituency offices” space)**