

**Statement of the Trade Union and Workers Constituency to the
2019 Asia Pacific People's Forum on Sustainable Development: Strengthening
People's Power for Development Justice in an Unequal and Divided
World**

Trade Union and Workers and the SDGs

The level and quality of trade union and workers' participation in Agenda 2030 process at the national level is far from ideal. While there is meaningful participation in a handful of countries, low to zero participation of trade unions and workers organizations is still the norm, with many governments failing to integrate decent work in national plans, making worse the continuing shrinking space for trade unions and workers across Asia and the Pacific. This situation would not improve if governments don't ratify and implement internationally recognised core labour standards and fail to institutionalise and operationalise social dialogue at all levels to ensure successful implementation of the SDGs.

Decent Work Deficits in Asia and the Pacific (Goal 8)

We deeply deplore persistently high decent work deficits in Asia and the Pacific with no progress; almost 70 per cent of workers are in the informal economy, working cannot free 400 million working people from poverty, half of all the workers in the region suffer from excessive working hours, more than 1 million workers are killed every year by occupational accidents or work-related diseases. Unless there is a significant change to expedite the implementation of Goal 8, it seems unlikely to achieve the commitment as the progress has not even reached its halfway to 2030. Decent work for all is integral to sustainable development not only by eradicating poverty and addressing inequality but also by ensuring productivity growth. Therefore, we strongly espouse for a rights-based and human-centred employment policy based on full respect of fundamental workers' rights, in particular, freedom of association and right to collective bargaining with universal social protection, including social protection floors¹, as well as genuine social dialogue being realised. Further, promotion of decent work is a prerequisite for a just transition for climate justice.

Meanwhile, we recognise serious and profound challenges posed by technological advances, often referred to as the 4th industrial revolution, to workers in today's as well as future world of work. Without proper policies in place, the shift to automation and digitization can exacerbate increasing informalization and labour outsourcing which are most prevalent in the Asia-Pacific region. In particular, it can result in massive displacement of workers and race-to-the-bottom of working conditions and wages, which could lead to further erosion of core labour standards, particularly freedom of association and right to collective bargaining. Providing social protection is much needed remedy to address the immediate impact of digitisation. However, high deficits in social protection in Asia and the Pacific prevails with 61.1 per cent of its total population with no access to social protection at all. If we are to attain decent work in the future, there is an urgent need for policies to utilise the broader framework of just transition anchored on development justice.

¹ ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)

In this regard, we recognise that it is imperative for governments, within social dialogue, to design and implement a 'Universal Labour Guarantee including fundamental workers' rights, an adequate living wage, limits on hours of work and ensuring safe and healthy workplaces' for all workers, which also ensure inclusive and brighter future of work.

Just Transition to tackle Climate Change (Goal 13)

Just Transition of the workforce with the creation of decent and green jobs, as confirmed by the Paris Agreement and reiterated by global and regional commitments², is an integral part of a paradigm shift towards a zero-greenhouse gas and climate resilient economies and societies for all with sustainable consumption and production. In this regard, governments should take into consideration a just transition, while preparing and implementing nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans and national long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies in cooperation with social partners and CSOs.

It is expected that climate action could create 65 million jobs and generate economic gains worth USD26 trillion until 2030³. Similarly, the ILO also estimates that climate mitigation action would create a net addition of 14.2 million jobs in Asia and the Pacific by 2030. In order for people in our region to be benefited fairly from this process, there should be no delay in implementing inclusive government policies for a just transition, anchored on respect for human and workers' rights, including ratification and implementation of internationally recognised core labour standards, implementation of universal social protection, and promotion of skill education and training.

In particular, it must be taken into account that many informal workers have been already involved in important "green jobs" such as recycling. In addition, 848 million jobs in Asia are directly or heavily relying on ecosystem services. However, those workers are normally living under the most vulnerable condition and exposed to the worst working conditions. Governments' implementing just transition should guarantee the formalisation of their work.

Collective Bargaining to redress Inequality (Goal 10, links to Goal 8 and Goal 5)

We acknowledge the role and importance of economic growth for job creation as means to alleviate poverty. However, its dividends are not shared fairly by all. It is very clear that increasing income inequality today is a result of failure in income distributive and re-distributive mechanisms. Without redressing it, sustainable growth cannot be ensured.

The Asia and Pacific region is home to the persistently high gender wage gap. Also the persistent violation of the principle of 'equal pay for work with equal value' has affected the most the group of most vulnerable workers - women, youth, indigenous

² Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration (December 2018, Katowice, Poland), ASEAN Declaration on Promoting Green Jobs for Equity and Inclusive Growth of ASEAN Community (November 2018, Singapore)

³ New Climate Economy Report 2018

people, rural area, persons with disability. The deep-seated structural inequalities of gender, caste, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation have relegated and restricted marginalised populations to indecent forms of work, and thereby denying a life of dignity. Indeed, economic growth must be coupled with and engineered to reduce social and economic inequalities and empower marginalised communities.

The importance of trade unions could not be emphasised more. Collective bargaining is a critical institution, as a fundamental practice of social dialogue, in ensuring fair sharing of the fruits of economic development.

Decent Work for Education Workers to ensure Education for All (Goal 4, links to Goal 8, 10 and 1)

Education is a basic human right and a public good. Public education must be publicly funded, regulated and controlled, and must ensure the right to education and equal opportunities for all. Education has a responsibility to foster the appropriate type of skills, attitudes and behaviour that will lead to sustainable and inclusive growth as a sustainable future for all is about human dignity, social inclusion and environmental protection. It is a future where economic growth does not exacerbate inequalities but builds prosperity for all.

Government needs to appoint professionally trained, qualified, motivated and well supported teachers with regular opportunities for continuous professional development. Laws must be enacted to guarantee teachers, education sector workers and their organizations their rights to organise and bargain collectively.

The State should demonstrate political will by allocating adequate and sufficient fund, as they have already committed⁴, to ensure quality public education for all.

Further, it must be ensured that the full participation and consultation of teachers' and education sector workers' organisations in the development, implementation, monitoring and review of education policy, including the implementation of Education 2030 and setting up or strengthening mechanisms for social dialogue with teachers' and education workers' organizations.

Stop Trade Union Repression and Engage in Social Dialogue (Goal 16 linked to Goal 17)

We reiterate the importance of social dialogue for socio-economic progress as well as social cohesion with peace and democracy. It is an essential ingredient to ensure creation of decent work, fair globalization and a just transition. However, we are deeply concerned about the continuous violation of human and fundamental workers' rights in Asia and the Pacific. Multilateralism has been undermined, while authoritarianism and populism based on social division has prevailed. In certain countries, trade union leaders have been harassed and jailed on trumped up charges to prevent them from continuing their organizing and education work among workers. Striking workers have

⁴ 'The Education 2030 Framework for Action' proposed two benchmarks as 'crucial reference points': **allocation of at least 4% to 6% of GDP to education, and/or allocation of at least 15% to 20% of public expenditure to education**

been violently dispersed. Worse, a number have been killed. This is unacceptable. Attacks on fundamental rights of workers concerning collective bargaining and freedom of association must be stopped. Respect and practice of trade unions' right to engage in negotiations for setting proper wages and working conditions for the benefit of all workers, and for workers to use the right to strike accordingly should be established in law and practice.

We strongly urge governments to promote social dialogue as an institution to ensure democratic governance for sustainability and inclusiveness in social-economic development with accountability and transparency being strengthened. It should reflect in trade agreements that do not reduce the protection of workers' rights. Hence, an effective institutional framework, based on full respect of freedom of association and right to collective bargaining, should be designed and implemented in order to make genuine and real social dialogue work. ###