

CFTU

**Statement by the Representative of the International
Confederation of Free Trade Unions to the 2nd session of the
Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework
Convention on Climate Change**

Geneva, 8 July, 1996

Mr Chairman,

On behalf of the 127 million workers which it represents in 136 countries and territories worldwide, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions would like to emphasize that protection of the earth's atmosphere is one of the greatest global environmental policy challenges. The principles of precaution now calls for drastic reorientation as dramatic consequences could occur.

Even though there is considerable uncertainty about the economic and social effects of climatic change, working people are particularly affected by changes in their quality of life or living conditions resulting either from climatic change itself or its economic impact. Climatic change has direct repercussions on forestry and agriculture, fisheries and the tourist trade. The stability of infrastructures, e.g. in the field of water supply and sewage disposal, energy supplies or the protection of coastlines and flood prevention, are also directly affected by climatic change.

It is obvious that climatic change and disturbances in the atmosphere affect human health and well-being -we need look no further than the dangers excessive exposure to UV-radiation in unfiltered sunlight. Indirect health impact from climatic change is also possible when, for example, changes in the environment enable pathogens to spread into other regions. Global warming might conceivably lead to the spread of tropical diseases into the moderate zones of Europe. Moreover, changes in the ecological balance, for example by introducing heat-resistant plant species which had not previously been common in moderate zones, could result in the spread of hitherto non-endemic pests.

It is worth recalling that the objective of the Climate Framework Convention is "the stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous anthropogenic disruption of the climate system. Such a level should be achieved over a period of time sufficient to enable ecological systems to adjust naturally to climatic change, avoid threat to food production and allow sustainable economic development to continue" (Climate Framework Convention, Art. 2).

What the Climate Framework Convention does, is to place an obligation on the industrialized countries to bring anthropogenic greenhouse emissions back down to the level of 1990 by the year 2000.

The ICFTU and its affiliates consider the adoption of a protocol to the Climate Framework Convention to be a necessity, as current stipulations of the Climate Framework Convention are no commensurate with the ecological problems. The ICFTU believes, that a principal demand of such a protocol lies in the fixing of binding reduction targets within a specified time-frame for CO₂ emissions and other climate-related pollutants.

As the industrialized countries account for 3/4 of the world's consumption of natural resources responsibility for climate policy is incumbent particularly on them. A central element of a climate protocol must, therefore, be the obligation of the industrialized countries to make a major contribution to the worldwide reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The fact is, that not all the industrialized countries have met even their own obligations to cut their greenhouse emissions, or at least, the rate at which they are complying varies very widely. Overall progress will only be achieved by concerted global action.

The scientists of the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change take the view, that greenhouse gas emissions will have to be cut at least by half worldwide before the year 2050 if precautions against global warming are to be effective. Responsibility towards the future leads the ICFTU to suggest that the first step along the path should be to pick up the objective of the First World Climate Conference in Toronto in 1988 and set a minimum target of 20% CO₂ reduction by the year 2005 (compared with 1990) as called for on that occasion.

The ICFTU regrets that it was not possible to fix this objective in a "Berlin protocol" by the COP 1 last year. We hope that now the COP 2 will make a stronger effort.

Thank you.