

# TRADE UNION STATEMENT

COP4 – Buenos Aires, Argentina, 11 November, 1998

## Mr. Luis Anderson

General-Secretary, Inter American Regional Organisation of Workers

### ICFTU / TUAC / ETUC

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)

Trade Union Advisory Committee to OECD (TUAC)

European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

Thank you, Madame Chair.

I speak today for the WORLD body of trade unions, for trade unions from OECD countries and for trade unions from the European region.

As General-Secretary of the Inter American Organisation of Workers – based in Caracas- I am horrified by the effects of the recent hurricane in Central America. Workers have died, others remain injured, while many have lost their homes and their jobs.

Something like “El-Niño” may be to blame but climate change will only make things worse. Worldwide, the figure of the 60 million environmental refugees -estimated four years ago- as possible victims of climate change by the year 2030, seems to be getting sorrowfully out of date.

With each passing day, the magnitude of the problem grows. You would think the resulting suffering would already have incited the workers in your own countries to demand very firm action in support of more aggressive programs for change.

Yet, this is not happening.

Why?

Trade unions have a tremendous capacity to bring about change. About 130 million workers are represented by our trade unions, engaged in some 2.5 million workplaces, involved in every conceivable production activity and in almost every country in the world.

Together with employers, we are in a position to help make sustainable development happen, whilst cracking the whip on climate change. We could do this by focussing on:

- energy conservation in workplaces,
- eco-efficiency in production
- the transportation habits of workers and employers, and on
- the family and community consumption patterns, through worker education.

Our work at the United Nations, at the OECD, and within the European Community has proven that joint workplace target-setting and enterprise auditing are extremely effective tools when workers and trade unions get involved.

Despite this, we've reached an impasse. Workers suspect that proposed programs might eliminate their jobs or the jobs of their co-workers, be they in the same enterprise, in another sector or town or, indeed, in another country. To many of our members, the Kyoto Protocol is good news and they are very eager to support it. To others, the Protocol is the bearer of bad news. We would like your help to address this dilemma.

The fact is, no one knows how many job losses should be expected or exactly how resulting employment would occur. Or could it be that as many jobs would be created? No one really knows. Despite the possibility, new jobs are no consolation to redundant workers who have neither access nor opportunity to secure them.

It is precisely because workers fear for their livelihood that the strong social consensus, so desperately needed now, has not yet materialized.

Just employment transition programs must be thought through regionally, nationally and internationally. Compensation must be planned for, as must the education and retraining of workers. Climate change programs must be allowed to contribute to unemployment or poverty.

The crucial questions about employment implications have not yet been posed. Article 2.3 of the Kyoto Protocol asks you to strive to minimize adverse effects, including for social impacts. Article 12.2 reminds industrialized countries to assist developing countries to achieve sustainable development

This afternoon at 6 p.m. we are hosting a special workshop in the EBONY room on how to set in motion some agreed inter-agency, inter-government process to study and research employment more fully. Please send a representative to explore how this could happen

Madame Chair, the trade unions and our members are eager to help build the social consensus you need for the success of the Climate Change Convention. However, you must help us bring more harmony to the conflicting concerns of workers, which make it difficult for us to engage them in effective workplace action for change.

Thank you Madame Chair.

Available at ICFTU Web site: <http://www.ICFTU.org>.

Formal statement available in French, English and Spanish

Also available at:

COP4 trade union table - Exhibition hall.