

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions

Climate Change and Jobs:

Towards a Strategy for Sustainable Employment

Trade Union Statement to the Kyoto Conference (1-10 December 1997)

Ministers in Kyoto face the dilemma of making commitments that meet the imperative of action to slow down and arrest global warming but do not compromise the economic development needed to reduce poverty and unemployment. There is a grave danger of environmental and employment policies pointing in contradictory directions. Yet in the debates about what should be the global programme on climate change, there is very little discussion of a sustainable **employment** strategy.

My presentation on behalf of the trade unions in the 137 countries that are members of the ICFTU and the written statement we have circulated, focus on how a sustainable employment policy can help to build a credible international effort to reduce and arrest climate change.

Trade unions are concerned that few policy-makers have considered the impact on workers and workplaces of meeting the challenges identified by the Assessment Reports of the IPCC. Working people around the world could well find themselves bearing a disproportionate share of the direct and indirect costs of **either** dislocation as a result of failure to arrest global warming **or** of large scale changes in employment structures as a result of action to reduce emissions.

Lack of research means we do not know enough about the effects on employment patterns and communities of continued climate change or of policies to counteract global warming. Precious time needed to plan for change is being lost.

Furthermore the underlying problem of the social and economic consequences of environmental policy is being ignored, thus leading to divergent views about what needs to be done and what is politically feasible.

As the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions come from the manufacturing industry, energy production and supply, as well as from transportation and construction sectors in industrialised nations, workers in these sectors are most at risk from proposals to reduce emissions. One of the few studies available, estimates over 340,000 US job losses in six energy intensive industries for meeting commitments agreed upon in the Berlin mandate. Total job losses could be in a range between 900,000 and 1.6 million jobs. While new jobs in "green" industries will be created, such as energy saving in buildings, it is unclear where and how many and therefore what training and adjustment measures are needed.

Whatever targets are decided, trade unions intend to ensure that employment transition issues are dealt with in an international context. Resistance to high targets will come from those sectors in both industrial and developing countries which will suffer most and, given crisis levels of global unemployment, may be opposed by workers unless strong and equitable employment transition measures are linked to target-setting. Proposals to soften the effect of targets on companies through such mechanisms as "tradable permits", could result in the dangerously divisive effect of closures of industries in one country to allow an increase in emissions in another.

Developing countries must be encouraged to participate in emissions reductions because firstly, their emissions are rising fast and will soon reach significant levels. And secondly, once locked into a high emissions development pattern, it becomes increasingly costly to break out of it.

As prime contributors to global warming, **industrial** countries have a responsibility to take the lead, both by cutting emissions and by providing financial and technical assistance. However it is vital to the development of a strong response from industrialised countries that the global dimensions of the challenge are fully recognised from the outset, by a recognition from developing countries that they too will need to join in the setting of binding targets even if they have differentiated goals and timetables.

Our over-riding concern is to ensure that action to prevent environmental degradation is consistent with the goals of full employment and the eradication of poverty. This will **not** be achieved by relying on market mechanisms or by suppressing workers legitimate concerns about their jobs. It **will** require careful planning by governments, employers, and trade unions in all countries and by the UN.

The ICFTU therefore urges COP-3 to initiate large-scale detailed studies of the employment implications of the decisions you adopt. The ILO should be asked to establish a tripartite team to work on sustainable employment programmes to be part of climate change programmes.

The ICFTU, and the International Trade Secretariats like the ICEM who are also represented here, will continue to press for an international climate change strategy that is equitable to workers and their communities. The disruptive and costly effects of both climate change and measures to combat it can be reduced significantly if trade unions are involved, through such tools as the workplace eco-audit. We will also work to influence public policy by collaborating with other sectors in society. We appreciate this opportunity to present our ideas to the Third Conference of the Parties in Kyoto, Japan and look forward to working with you in the future.