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Climate Change and Labour: The Need for a “Just Transition” International Journal of Labour Research 2010 Vol. 2, Issue 2

Climate change is now widely acknowledged as one of the great – if not the greatest – challenges facing humanity in the coming decades. Through its impact on average temperature, precipitations and sea levels, it will endanger the livelihood of hundreds of millions and impose increasing costs on our societies if nothing is done. Indeed, the economic costs of inaction have been estimated at something between 5 and 20 per cent of global GDP by 2050, a colossal burden. And to add insult to injury, it is the people from the poorest nations of the world, those who have in effect contributed the least to the problem that are likely to suffer its worst impacts. Clearly, inaction is not an option.

However, the failure in Copenhagen of the last Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC to generate a significant commitment on the part of governments, despite a broad consensus on the threat at hand, illustrates the inherent political difficulty in addressing a threat whose effects are not quite immediate (or at least are still rather diffuse compared to other problems) and which affects people unequally. Indeed, the very policies that have the potential to stem the problem (i.e. keep the rise in temperature below 2°C) involve an ambitious transition away from a carbon-intensive economy and will themselves impose costs on our societies.



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Table of contents

Preface

Dan Cunniah

Building a Just Transition: The linkages between climate change and employment

Anabella Rosemberg

Workers' rights in climate change policies:

The case of adaptation programmes in Small Island Developing States

Nazmul Huq and Jean Hugé

Climate change, poverty and migration processes in Chiapas, Mexico

Laura Elena Ruiz Meza

Employment opportunities from climate change mitigation policies in the Netherlands

Jerry van den Berge

BlueGreen Alliance: Building a coalition for a green future in the United States

David Foster

The greening of the offshore energy sector in the North Sea

Miguel Esteban, David Leary, Qi Zhang, Agya Utama and Keiichi Ishihara

The foundations for extending green jobs:

The case of the rail-based mass transit sector in North America

Jonathan Michael Feldman

Supporting a just transition:

The role of international labour standards

Lene Olsen

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