

**106<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference  
Wednesday 7 of June 2017  
Plenary Sitting**

**Speech by Mr Luc Cortebееck  
Chairperson of the Workers' Group**

**Discussion of the Director General Report  
Work in a changing climate: The Green Initiative**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me commend the Director General for his report on “Work in a changing climate: The Green Initiative”.

The international trade union movement’s engagement on climate change is based on our realisation that millions of jobs and lives are at risk if we do not combat climate change. Trade unions have a vital role to play in protecting jobs in existing workplaces and industries by demanding sustainable industrial transformation, organising workers in new decent jobs emerging from environmentally sound investments and policies and fighting for the *just transition* measures that will ensure we leave no one behind. For years now, we have stood strong in defence of a multilateral approach to climate change, and we are proud to stand in support of the Paris Agreement, and climate action more broadly at times where some are still using jobs as a shield to prevent progress.

We would like to invite the DG to make explicit in the future the linkages between the world of work and other, equally challenging, environmental challenges. The centenary initiatives are aimed at equipping the Organization to take up successfully the challenges of its social justice mandate into the future. This means that when it comes to “Green”, the ILO should aim at taking a forward looking, visionary stance on environmental issues. Of course climate change is one, critical, determining challenge for humanity. It must be part of the ILO’s future mandate. Unfortunately, it is not the only one, and there are others, with similarly disrupting potential: ocean pollution, water scarcity, chemical dispersion, biodiversity loss, just to mention a few. The green initiative should therefore mark the spirits and actions for the century to come, and be explicit on the linkages between the world of work and each and every one of the planetary boundaries.

The Workers’ Group welcomes the integration of just transition to environmental sustainability as a cross cutting element of the Programme and Budget, and looks forward for a detailed definition of the elements that are to be mainstreamed, so that this initiative truly leverages progress at a much faster pace than in the past. Mainstreaming work can build on the progress made in terms of integration of environmental issues in areas such as social protection. It is the expectation of the Workers’ Group that this exercise will help the organisation drive coherence between decent work and environmental protection when it comes to its standards and recommendations to governments on issues such as infrastructure, employment and growth assumptions.

We consider the focus of the 2018 World Employment and Social Outlook a very good step forward and would like to encourage the Office to be visionary: to go beyond job creation figures in growing green sectors and assessing potential losses in shrinking ones, towards assessing what no one else is actually doing in the international system: understand how do we achieve decent work for all in a resource-constrained world. If indeed technologies will play a key part, we also know our economic system depends on growth for job creation. We need more jobs but jobs that are decent and green. The ILO needs to help us finding an alternative for making decent work and environment work together; not just at the micro level, knowing investment in clean sectors lead to jobs; but at the macro economic level, keeping in mind the overall objective of decent work for all and social justice. WESO could be a good starting point for this reflection.

Let me now turn to the linkages between climate change and the ILO. We agree that labour ministries and social partners must play a much more active role in the design and implementation of the Nationally Determined Contributions - the country-led process of definition of climate goals under the Climate Paris Agreement. This involvement must aim at supporting further ambition from governments while securing the livelihoods of workers and communities which depend today on Fossil Fuels. We are not calling for a dialogue that could undermine progress on climate. We see social dialogue as an enabler for ambition. This must be clear in ILO's engagement with all constituents. Labour ministries, unions and employers must be more involved in long term decarbonisation pathways, as it is on this horizon that we will see the biggest shifts in terms of production. Involvement in these prospective exercises requires further support and capacity building for all ILO constituents.

The Workers' Group supports the idea that "predictable and appropriate regulation, together with informed tripartite involvement, are key ingredients for successful just transition". Without doubts, achieving the temperature targets established by the Paris Agreement require government's leadership and the development of dialogue mechanisms which for the moment have taken marginal account of social partners views. That said, we consider that when addressing carbon pricing and other means of taxing greenhouse gas emissions, the ILO should fully factor in potentially negative distributional consequences of these measures. The ILO should not limit its role to comment on these measures, but fully assess their consequences in terms of inequalities and decent job creation, as well as outline potential measures to cushion their negative impacts. To date, other agencies, such as the OECD, are taking up this work. Our Group considers it vital that the ILO uses its own modelling and analysis tools as well as its global reach to draw its own conclusions on these matters.

The report makes the case for a "*fully-fledged ILO Skills for Green Jobs and Just Transition programme, [which] would put the Organization in a position to offer much needed support directly to enterprises and workers, and also to partner with initiatives such as the Africa Renewable Energy Initiative and the International Solar Energy*". The Workers' Group supports the development of such an initiative and stands ready to be involved in it in light of the important role that trade unions play in skills development.

We concur with the report on the important role to be plaid by social protection in achieving a just transition. Social protection is much needed for workers in sectors vulnerable to climate change and other environmental crisis, as it is workers in sectors facing restructuring and transformations to move to a zero carbon economy who will need support. That said, while it is critical to ensure the full deployment of social protection floors, social security and more

elaborated systems of social protection will be needed to ensure social justice in the transformation and achieve a Just Transition.

The ILO Guidelines on Just Transition indicate, for example, that there is a need to “promote and establish adequate social protection systems providing healthcare, income security and social services, in line with international labour standards”, therefore broadening the scope of protection beyond social protection floors.

The international trade union movement has been calling in all possible intergovernmental spaces for cooperation between the ILO and UNFCCC. We can only see with satisfaction the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two organisations, and expect this work will also help UNFCCC better incorporating the three ILO constituents as a resource in their discussions.

The Workers’ Group would also like to congratulate the Office for its climate neutrality goals, as well as for the recognition that offsetting emissions is not an end on its own, and that the organization needs to aim at reaching zero emissions as soon as possible.

When it comes to the section on the “Road ahead”, the Workers’ Group would have liked to see many more developments being proposed. Such an ambitious assessment on the state of affairs does not seem to be followed by an equally ambitious take on future measures.

The workers’ group regrets the absence of references to the importance of piloting in as many countries as possible the ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition, as a means to show they are a useful tool for tackling climate change in a socially progressive way. It is also our view that further promotion of the Guidelines will help other constituents understand what the workers’ group and some governments already know well: we need an international labour standard to guide ILO tripartite constituents on just transition.

We also regret that some issues are not considered as part of the future work of the organization, such as the need for better assessing the costs of a just transition and the resources governments will need to fund it. Strengthening research capacity in the organization to respond to this need will be key.

We see environmental efforts as a massive rejuvenation action, where attention must go to maintaining what is essential to the ILO: its standards, social dialogue, its goals in terms of social justice and decent work for all - while ensuring that the need to protect our environment is well entrenched in each of these aspects. If we understand the importance given to finding new resources, and we very much hope governments will contribute to further ILO work in this area, we are also convinced that the biggest contribution would come from making each of the ILO programmes compatible with planetary needs.

The Workers’ Group has always been supportive of an ambitious ILO agenda on environment. This is not because we have suddenly become environmental organisations, but because we are already witnessing the disruptive impacts environmental crises are having on working people. We are more convinced than ever that the world of work holds also the solutions for making the transformation we need socially just within a timeframe that would ensure current and future generations have also access to decent work.

Greening of work must be a key component of the future of work we want.