

DRAFT - Opening plenary Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR-6)

Nairobi, 19 February 2024

Dear chair and delegates,

My name is Bert De Wel, focal point at UNEA for the workers and trade unions major group. I'm global climate policy coordinator at the International Trade Union Confederation. The ITUC represents 330 trade unions from 164 countries with a total membership of nearly 200 million workers worldwide.

The workers and trade unions are easily overlooked in environmental policies. At best policies makers refer to employment opportunities and the jobs that are created with climate or biodiversity policies. At worst, and this is often the case, workers are at the receiving end of ineffective environmental policies. To give just one example. Workers and their families are victims at their work place of inappropriate rules on chemicals management. Look at the appalling inability of the Rotterdam Convention to ban chrysotile asbestos leading to 250.000 workers dying every year, a number that is expected to grow to a terrible 500.000 workers dying every year by 2050.

While we are convinced that there are many employment opportunities in the transition to climate neutral economies, in the circular economy or even with nature based solutions, there is a staggering lack of engagement with the workers and their trade unions about the ways to implement these policies, about the quality of the jobs being created, the skills needed, the health and safety on the shop floor, etc. Often there is no dialogue at all on how to manage the necessary transitions.

Workers demand appropriately implemented 'just transition' policies, implemented through social dialogue processes with the social partners and based on the protection and promotion of fundamental labour and human rights.

The sad reality is that all the governments that sit at the table to design environment policies actually have committed to engage with workers and their trade unions. Only last year in June, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) renewed its commitment to Just Transition and its formal Guidelines for the implementation of Just Transition policies and measures. The ILO is the UN agency bringing together governments, employers and workers of 187 Member States, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all people.

This is our offer to you. Engage with workers and trade unions on the implementation of environment policies and this will help you finding support in your home country for the policies that we are deciding on here in Nairobi. This is not an empty or easy

proposal. The impact of the climate disaster, biodiversity loss, desertification is hitting harder and harder, millions of people are being affected. This is eroding in record speed the trust in societies for the policies that are needed. Millions of organised workers are asking you to push back corporate capture of the negotiations and focus on social justice as a crucial fundament to deal with the environmental challenges we're faced with. A labour focused just transition based on labour and human rights, gender equality and the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples needs to be part of the solutions at the end of these two weeks.

Thank you.

For further information, you can contact:

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