

## **United Nations Climate Change Conference – COP25, Madrid**

### **Climate Action for Jobs – Speech by ILO Director-General Guy Ryder**

**12 December 2019**

Thank you, Minister Ribera.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres,  
Colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, my thanks to the Government of Spain for hosting this event to launch, here at COP 25, the Climate Action for Jobs Initiative that the Secretary-General announced at last September's Climate Action Summit in New York. It is testimony to its importance that so many are here this morning.

Spain, working with Peru, has provided extraordinary leadership in heading up the 'action area' discussions on Social and Political Drivers that were part of the Climate Action Summit. The effectiveness of the collaboration that you oversaw played a fundamental part in the results that came out of the Summit. And one of the most important results was the commitment of no less than 46 governments to support a just ecological transition, by formulating national plans for just transition creating decent work as well as green jobs.

I hope we can channel some of the spirit of that Summit today, because we all know how urgently effective action is needed.

Colleagues,

This year the ILO has been celebrating its Centenary. 100 years of working for social justice. We are now planning for and looking forward to our second century. There is much unfinished business on our agenda. But nothing will more clearly distinguish the first hundred years of ILO history from the second than the imperative of greening the world of work. Moving forward to climate neutrality and to social justice for all.

This is the defining and decisive challenge of our time.

And the first thing we must recognize is that if climate change is a consequence of human activity, then that activity is, for the most part, work or work-related.

So it follows that if work is the primary cause of climate change, then it must also be central to the strategies that we need to prevent, mitigate and adapt to it, and that the key actors of the world of work – governments, workers and employers – must be leading players in their design and implementation.

Because the fight against climate change is inextricably linked with the battle for greater social justice, we know that these issues need to be brought together in our work. And this is precisely the commitment we have all made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

But, if we are going to shape a new model for consumption, production and development, our approach must be both comprehensive and pro-active.

The ILO, as a tripartite organization, is uniquely placed to contribute to such an approach. In bringing together governments, workers and employers, we can translate consensus into practical change in a way no other institution can. No-one else is going to do it for us and no one of us is going to do it alone.

We, and our constituents, have a responsibility to do this. And we must scale up and speed up our action.

More needs to be done; and done a lot more quickly.

The ILO is already moving forward. At our Centenary Conference last June, our members adopted the **ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work**.

The Declaration recognizes clearly and unequivocally that environmental and climate change are among the key forces transforming the world of work.

It states that, to live up to its constitutional mandate, the ILO must **ensure** “a just transition to a future of work that contributes to sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions”.

My friends,

That is an ambitious target - but it is not realistic to be any less ambitious.

But to be honest, ambition alone will not get us where we need to be. It must go hand-in-hand with the social, economic and policy initiatives that can in a very concrete way actually shape a new model of work for the future.

This means a human-centred agenda that places people and their work at the centre of policy and practice. To reference the Paris Agreement, it means a just transition built upon the creation of decent work.

Today, I would like to highlight four principal ways for turning potential obstacles into drivers that can help accelerate action on climate change. As the Secretary General said in his opening speech at this COP 25, it’s a matter of making the green economy “not one to be feared but an opportunity to be embraced.”

First, we need training, skilling and reskilling policies. These can, and must build the technical abilities that are indispensable for rolling out clean energy technologies and achieving large-scale energy efficiencies.

They can help workers prepare for the labour market changes that will inevitably come. The ILO estimates that some 24 million jobs in new, green, occupations will emerge from here to 2030 but let’s recognize that inevitably, some occupations will become obsolete, or require significant adaptation. The right skills policies can give people confidence that a greener future will be good for them. They can smooth labour market transitions, and prevent economic and social disruption.

Yes, this will require significant investments and planning, from governments in particular. And right now we know that too few governments have done enough in that regard.

Second, we need enterprise development policies that incentivize investment in new and innovative solutions, and the new fiscal policies that the Secretary General has referred to. These policies must work not just for the big players but for small and micro enterprises too.

Third, social protection will be vital to support people through the changes that come.

At the moment more than 70 per cent of the global population has no, or has inadequate, social protection. That simply means their ability to cope with change is limited or is non-existent. So, if we want to avoid disruption, if we want to support equity and sustainability, if we are determined to leave no one behind, then social protection has to be a priority.

Fourth, effective social dialogue is absolutely vital. Bringing together governments, workers, employers, and other actors, is the surest way to build strong, broad, and effective social consensus and political support for what we have to do.

Minister,

This brings me to the subject of our meeting today, the **Climate Action for Jobs Initiative**.

The Initiative, which the UN Secretary-General announced in September, is conceived as a broad partnership. It unites governments, workers' and employers' organizations, UN agencies, research and policy institutions, and other key actors.

It aims to be practical, and focused on practical solutions and real results. It must function at both national and international levels.

At the heart of the Initiative at the **national** level must be a jobs-and human-centred policy agenda for climate action, based upon country-level assessments, innovative social protection and strong consensus.

On the demand side, the Initiative will draw on tried-and-tested intervention models to promote the creation of green jobs. That includes both climate-oriented public employment programmes, and private investment as well.

On the supply side, it will help to address the skills gaps that can block the necessary labour market changes.

On this point, let me draw your attention to a new global report, *Skills for a greener future*, that the ILO will be launching later today. The report is based on 32 country studies. It looks at some of the issues that have come up as countries have moved towards greener skills policies, and at the sorts of skills strategies that countries do and that they will need.

I hope the Report will be a valuable contribution to your work.

**At global level**, work of the Climate Action for Jobs Initiative will be focused around three interrelated and complementary areas:

Firstly, advocacy and outreach. If we are to change lives we need to start by changing mindsets. So, we will use the latest science, backed by practical experiences. We will engage with inspiring voices such as the Climate Action Champions. And we will leverage the convening power of the Initiative's own members to get people together to talk, to learn, to decide, and of course to act.

Secondly, we will establish a policy innovation hub on building a just transition. Its job will be to gather knowledge and to generate innovative solutions.

Thirdly, the Initiative will provide capacity building and support to the tripartite actors - governments, employers' and workers' organizations.

And, by combining these targeted, complementary actions, we expect to make a greater cumulative impact, and to mobilize a much broader range of support.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is five years since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We know that very few of the nationally-determined contributions have taken adequate account of the social and labour-related impact of their climate policy responses.

So the current NDC review is an important opportunity to correct this problem, and to make sure that just transition measures are fully integrated into national responses.

Here I want to refer to the example provided by our host today, Spain, in demonstrating that national plans can meet social as well as climate objectives.

Spain's programme, the "*Just Transition Strategy within the Strategic Energy and Climate Framework of Spain*", contains measures that show how the ecological transition can generate employment and economic activity.

For example - the Strategy addresses the inevitable short-term challenges generated by transition, through measures such as Urgent Action Plans for Coal-mining Regions and Power Plant Closures.

We will have a chance to learn more about the Strategy in the second part of our meeting this morning.

But it is important to underline that the Strategy is based on negotiated just transition agreements; that is, collective agreements between government, workers' and employers' organizations and the regions.

Colleagues, this is all I wanted to say.

A sustainable future is within our reach, if we act with sufficient speed, ambition, determination and collaboration.

The Climate Action for Jobs Initiative can make a major contribution to this work. And I very much hope that it will do so.

Thank you.