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Unions Welcome Pathway to Green Economy in UN Environment Report

Brussels 21 February 2011 (ITUC OnLine): A green economy can mean higher overall employment and better jobs, and is not just a luxury for wealthy countries, reveals the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) in its Green Economy report released today. Supported by concrete examples from around the world, and a thorough macroeconomic analysis, the report underlines what the labour movement has maintained for several years: that a Green Economy, based on the right principles and properly planned, can deliver for workers and the poor.

“I am pleased to read that UNEP shares with workers around the world the deep belief that a green economy should work for the people and the planet, and not just for GDP growth and a few wealthy companies,” said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow. “As the report signals, one of the challenges is to ensure a just transition that will steer transformation across all sectors of the economy and lead us towards the decent and sustainable jobs of tomorrow.”

The report indicates that the allocation of 2% of global GDP towards the green economy could lead to immense benefits for workers and communities around the world and help overcome the diverse challenges countries are facing. It finds that a green economy can generate at least as much employment as the traditional economy, and outperforms the latter in the medium and long run, while yielding significantly more environmental and social benefits. The report stresses the importance of ensuring trade union rights, including freedom of association, and occupational health and safety in traditional and emerging sectors.

To those who consider that there is a high risk of 'green and social-washing', Burrow reacted, “the risk is the status quo. The green economy presents an opportunity to engage in a transformational path towards sustainable development. We must ensure this is not misused, we must ensure that green economy works for working people.

“The UNEP report sets out a clear pathway towards a green economy, but policies being pursued by governments at the moment risk taking us backwards. Neo-liberal recipes, based on the dictates of the financial markets, have to be jettisoned in favour of a progressive approach in which governments fulfil their responsibility to regulate banking and finance, promote policies which stimulate greening of workplaces and creation of new green jobs, and ensure that this is based on social dialogue and social inclusion,” explained Burrow.

Along with specific education and training policies to ensure the skills needs for a green economy are met, economic safety nets and social protection are crucial to achieving the necessary transformation in a way which maximises the economic and social benefits.

“A green economy which works for social justice can only be a collective endeavour; it should therefore be equitable, inclusive, democratic and people-centered. We will continue to push the case, in the coming days at the UNEP Governing Council meeting in Nairobi, and also during the next 16 months in the run up to RIO+20, to make the green economy a driver for prosperity and decent work,” concluded Burrow.

<http://www.unep.org/>

* The ITUC is represented at the UNEP Governing Council, taking place in Nairobi, Kenya, from 21 to 24 January.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 301 affiliated national organisations from 151 countries and territories. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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