

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION  
ITUC OnLine

Paris Climate Agreement signed at UN

Brussels, 25 April 2016 (ITUC OnLine): Earth Day, 22 April, was marked by more than 170 countries signing the Paris Climate Agreement and committing to action to keep the global temperature rise to below 2 degrees Celsius.

Last year was the hottest year on record, and so were the first three months of 2016. Temperatures at the North Pole rose above freezing last December during the depths of the polar night, with temperatures up to 30 degrees Celsius above normal.

Governments must now turn their Paris commitments into action.

What happens next?

Workers have a right to know what their government plans for jobs and communities in the necessary industrial transformation. The Paris Agreement commits to a just transition, so unions must have a seat at the table to develop these plans. No one should be left behind.

Businesses must also respond. Workers also have a right to know and be prepared for the energy and technological shifts in their workplaces and sectors that will be necessary to meet the challenge. Social dialogue here too is critical.

Pension funds can help. But it will require investment in a just transition - rights, jobs and engagement of workers.

The signing of the Paris Climate Agreement is a signal to working people, to communities and to business that governments recognise they need to work together collectively to keep the average global surface temperature increase to well below 2 degrees Celsius, compared to the pre-industrial era.

<http://www.ituc-csi.org/ituc-response-to-paris-climate>

The challenge of industrial transformation is both an imperative and an opportunity.

When there is a plan for a just transition, when people can see the future, they will have hope. That hope is vital to overcoming the fear that drives people to say no to change. Workers in many industries have been through transitions and they've learnt that too often they are simply displaced, their livelihoods and skills discarded.

When governments take responsibility for a national plan for energy, for decarbonisation, for jobs and communities - a plan that shares the economic transformation across an entire country and doesn't leave one sector or one community to shoulder the burden - then people will know they are part of a just transition.

When companies engage with unions and understand that workers aren't negotiating just for individual jobs, but for the life and soul of communities that depend on their work - then people will know they are part of a just transition.

And when workers have a seat at the table and a fair and equitable stake in the dialogue, then people will know they are part of a just transition.

Without a plan for a just transition, fear and uncertainty will rule for workers and for businesses. That's why unions have started the conversation with workers and their communities. Workers have a right to know how companies will be transitioning to a zero-carbon future.

Government responsibility starts with the signing of the Paris Agreement, but it does not end there. There are millions of jobs to be created through action on climate, but working people need to see governments acting in their interests.

There are no jobs on a dead planet.

The ITUC represents 180 million workers in 162 countries and territories and has 333 national affiliates.

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For more information, please contact the ITUC Press Department on +32 2 224 02 10 or <mailto:press@ituc-csi.org>

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