

Veerle Solia

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European Trade Union Confederation [ETUC]
Confédération européenne des syndicats [CES]

Rio+20: social justice can only be guaranteed with environmental protection

Brussels, 20 June 2012

Following a complicated process of closed door negotiations and a 'take it or leave it' approach by the Brazilian hosts of the UN conference, Ministers negotiating in Rio ahead of the arrival of Heads of State and governments tomorrow, have concluded a provisional agreement.

Steps forward on social and worker issues have been undermined by the weaknesses of environmental commitments and the outrageous deletion of women's reproductive rights from the final draft.

Following strong pressure from the trade union movement, the text includes strong language on the current unemployment crisis, decent work, the promotion of social protection floors, Just Transition and the role of workers and their trade unions in sustainable development. However, there are few proposals on how to implement these references. Unions will be demanding clear actions from governments and the EU to implement these statements.

However, these steps forward for international work on sustainable development have been totally overshadowed today by the deletion of women's reproductive rights from the text agreed by ministers, under intense pressure this week from the Vatican (a non-state actor in the process).

Moreover, the provisional agreement's chapters on environmental protection from the Earth Summit's draft agreement are unacceptably weak and well below the ETUC or ITUC's demands. For instance, renewable energy has been placed on an equivalent level to fossil fuels-based energy in the energy chapter, and the right to water and sanitation while recognized, has been restricted 'according to national law'.

It was with great disappointment to the international and European trade union movement that ministers so rapidly endorsed the document which steps back from commitments made in previous international agreements.

Trade unions are sending clear messages to their governments in Rio that social justice is only possible if environmental protection and human rights are guaranteed and promoted.

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) exists to speak with a single voice, on behalf of the common interests of workers, at European level. Founded in 1973, it now represents 85 trade union organisations in 36 European countries, plus 10 industry-based federations.

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For more information :

Patricia Grillo.

ETUC Head of Press and Communications

+ 32 (0)2 224 04 30

+ 32 (0)477 77 0 1 64

E-mail : Pgrillo@etuc.org

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