

COP 17 Climate Conference in Durban: Mixed Outcome and an Appeal to Europe (13.12.11)

For the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Durban managed to save the process, Europe showed itself to be responsible, but a great deal remains to be done to tackle the problem of climate change. Faced with this situation, the ETUC calls on Europe to rapidly adopt a “new sustainable deal” by encouraging investment that should lead to a low-carbon economy capable of creating quality jobs.

The Durban Conference was brought to a close with an agreement which – for the moment! – has managed to save the multilateral approach, but not really the climate. We are in fact still far from the measures needed to reach the goal of limiting global warming to 2°C maximum, even if steps in the right direction have been taken.

Now, every year lost increases the climate bill still further and passes this heavy burden even more to future generations. Moreover, even though climate change is global, it affects the most vulnerable first -- the countries in the southern hemisphere which are the most exposed, but also workers and the most underprivileged members of society.

Unlike other industrialised parts of the world (including Canada which, deplorably has withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol), Europe assumed its responsibilities in Durban, by agreeing to continue to reduce its CO2 emissions under a legally restrictive framework, which will nonetheless only concern 16% of world's emissions!

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) wishes to congratulate the European Union on its position in Durban, and for the commitments it has undertaken, because they were better than many other developed countries. Nevertheless, the ETUC underscores the fact that these commitments, which essentially come down to business as usual, are not ambitious enough in view of the recommendations made by scientists.

The ETUC expects the European Union to set higher goals, in line with the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). It has reiterated its call for a “new sustainable deal for Europe” to be enacted by encouraging the adoption of active, voluntary public policies and the promotion of investment in energy efficiency and the rational use of resources, thereby creating and preserving quality jobs in Europe – whilst integrating, as the ETUC has always called for -- a strong and restrictive chapter in all commercial agreements that includes the need to comply with environmental and social standards.

The ETUC also calls on the European Union to chart a roadmap in cooperation with the trade unions, for the right transition to implementing these European commitments: an active promotion of the social dialogue at all levels, sectoral roadmaps, including strategies for employment, education and training, instruments for anticipating change and restructuring, the promotion of strong and efficient social protection systems, and respect for human rights and labour.

For the ETUC, the implementation of these commitments undertaken by the EU at Durban cannot be left to the market or to chance. The transition to a low-carbon economy must be managed at all levels, including the social level, which entails meeting all the conditions for a just transition that the international trade union movement has been advocating for years, and which all the signatory States recognised as a necessity in the Cancun agreement of 2010.

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 83 trade union organisations in 36 European countries, plus 12 industry-based federations.