



#COP29: FRONTLINES BRIEFING

TRADE UNIONS DEMAND LABOUR
INCLUSIVE CLIMATE FINANCE AT COP29

CONTENTS

<hr/>	
INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT	3
<hr/>	
STATEMENT BY LUC TRIANGLE: MOBILISING CLIMATE FINANCE FOR A JUST TRANSITION	4
<hr/>	
TAKING STOCK OF COP28: WHAT HAPPENED?	5
<hr/>	
TRADE UNION DEMANDS FOR COP29	6
<hr/>	
UNIONS MOBILISING FOR CLIMATE AMBITION: PREPARING FOR COP29	11

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Through concerted and coordinated advocacy for over 10 years, the global trade union movement has successfully put the concept of Just Transition on the international policy agenda. It is included in the Paris Agreement and at COP28 in Dubai in 2023, the Just Transition Work Program was set up, which includes reference to the protection of labour rights. Today the challenge is to translate this political recognition of our Just Transition demands into transformative policies that deliver effective climate protection while ensuring social justice for workers and their communities.

Unions are calling for all countries to integrate Just Transition principles and measures in their national climate plans (the Nationally Determined Contributions or NDCs). Next year, when the NDCs are due, all governments need to have consulted

trade unions on the labour and social impacts of their climate policies.

At the multilateral level, there is moreover an urgent need to make progress with implementing the promises on climate finance from the developed countries to enable the development of low-carbon economies. This year's COP29 – taking place between 11-22 November in Baku, Azerbaijan – represents an opportunity to secure agreement on the Collective Quantified Goal of Climate Finance (NCQG) and ensure that Just Transition measures are at the heart of climate finance commitments.

This ITUC Frontlines Briefing reviews what has happened since COP28, sets out the joint demands of the global trade union movement for the forthcoming COP29, and provides some practical information on how trade unions can effectively take part in the COP and have our collective demands heard.



If you are attending a UNFCCC session for the first time, or want a refresher on COP processes, this [UNFCCC handbook*](#) provides the key information to follow the COP29 in a nutshell.

STATEMENT BY LUC TRIANGLE: MOBILISING CLIMATE FINANCE FOR A JUST TRANSITION

As we approach COP29, the world is facing an urgent reality: the climate crisis is no longer a distant threat but a present and escalating danger. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that every region of the globe will experience further climate hazards, with devastating consequences for both ecosystems and humanity. Already, the world has witnessed the hottest year on record in 2024.

For the 3.3 billion working people living in highly vulnerable regions, the impacts are particularly severe. These communities, disproportionately in lower-income nations, are bearing the brunt of climate disruption, deepening existing vulnerabilities and inequalities.

Without urgent action, as many as 130 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty by 2030, not only from the destruction of their homes but also from the collapse of local economies and labour markets. Workers in agriculture, construction, and other essential industries face unbearable working conditions in extreme heat, while many are forced to migrate as climate disruption eliminates decent work opportunities.

The world has an opportunity to chart a different course as we look ahead to COP29. This year's conference, hosted under the banner of "enhancing ambition" and "enabling action," holds the promise of transformative change. At the heart of these ambitions is the commitment to establishing new collective quantified goals (NCQGs) and strengthening Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which will be due by early 2025.

Building on the momentum of COP28 and the lessons from the first Global Stocktake, there is growing recognition that any meaningful climate strategy must centre on Just Transition. This means ensuring that the workforce – especially those in vulnerable industries – has access to quality jobs and decent work while fostering economic diversification to support sustainable development. The transition to a green economy must not leave anyone behind. We must implement these strategies with sensitivity to national contexts, ensuring that countries have the flexibility and support needed to meet their unique challenges.

But these goals cannot be achieved without unprecedented political will and financial commitments. Ambitious agreements, regulations, and funding are essential to unlock the necessary resources for adaptation, loss and damage, and mitigation.

COP29 will be pivotal in defining these pathways and demonstrating how the NCQG and other financial instruments can drive greater ambition in national commitments.

The urgency of our task cannot be overstated. But in this moment of crisis, we must also find inspiration in the resilience of people across the globe who continue to fight for a better, more sustainable future. Let COP29 be a moment where the world unites – not only to curb the climate crisis but to secure a more just and equitable world for all. We have the tools, the knowledge, and the collective power to create lasting change. Together, we can build a future that is not only sustainable but fair – one where the planet and the most vulnerable are protected and workers can thrive.

Luc Triangle
General Secretary
International Trade Union Confederation

TAKING STOCK OF COP28: WHAT HAPPENED?

A historic milestone was reached for the global labour movement at COP28 with the approval of the **Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP)** with reference to labour rights. The COP28 decision explicitly sets out that the JTWP will include the following elements:

(e) Just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities, including through social dialogue, social protection and the recognition of labour rights; (...)

(g) International cooperation as an enabler of just transition pathways towards achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement;

The JTWP is intended to build on the contributions of other relevant work streams and fora, including those on mitigation, response measures, adaptation and climate finance. It should actively collaborate with other workstreams under the Paris Agreement, such as:

- **The Global Stocktake (GST)**

- **The Mitigation Ambition and Implementation Work Programme (MWP)**
- **The Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA)**
- **The Katowice Committee of Experts on the Impacts of the Implementation of Response Measures (KCI)**
- **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)**
- Climate finance, including the Loss and Damage fund and the **New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG)**

While the concept of a ‘Just Transition’ is now broadly recognised within the international discourse, and a specific workplan has been set up to promote it within the UNFCCC – the meaning of the concept of ‘Just Transition’ is understood differently by some actors than others.

To promote our joint understanding of a labour-focused Just Transition, the labour movement has put forward the following definition – building on agreed negotiated international frameworks such as the ILO Guidelines on Just Transition. This definition is the standard to be used to critically evaluate all policies that claim to be a ‘Just Transition’:

A Just Transition secures the future and livelihoods of all workers and their communities during the transition to a low-carbon economy, effectively limiting global temperature rises to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, protecting the environment and restoring biodiversity in line with scientific consensus. Its objective is to stop the exploitation of people and the planet and contribute to the achievement of the sustainable development goals and to end inequalities between and within countries. A Just Transition is rooted in international solidarity and cooperation delivering decent livelihoods and welfare for all.

Just Transition plans should be co-created and negotiated with workers and their trade unions to provide and guarantee decent work, job security, training and skills development and social protection for all workers affected by global warming and climate change policies. Plans must be fully financed and underpinned by the fundamental labour rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining and facilitated through social dialogue between workers and their unions, employers and governments as established by the ILO. It applies to all economic sectors (formal and informal), at all policy levels (company, sector, national and global) representing all workers, marginalised and non-marginalised workers, in the global North and South, documented or undocumented migrants or refugees at work.

A Just Transition is based on the protection, promotion and enforcement of rights that deliver intra-, intergenerational and gender equity, racial justice, respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples, impacted communities and migrants, and promotes and protects human rights and ILO fundamental labour rights.

TRADE UNION DEMANDS FOR COP29

Workers are increasingly being affected by climate change as well as decarbonisation measures: their voices need to be heard in national and international deliberations on climate policy. Organised workers and their trade unions are key to delivering a Just Transition with effective policies to stop the climate emergency.

As we prepare for COP29 in Baku, major decisions are needed on the **New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG)**, which must incorporate a Just Transition with trade unions. The NCQG is the new global climate finance goal, due to be

agreed by the end of 2024. Looking ahead to COP30 in Belem, Brazil, we urge all parties to prepare **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** that include Just Transition policies. These policies must guarantee decent work, job security, training and skills development, and social protection for all workers affected by global warming and climate change policies. They must also be negotiated through robust social dialogue processes with unions actively involved at every stage.

TUNGO – the trade union constituency at the UNFCCC – has therefore collectively put forward the following joint demands for COP29.

1. Decide on an NCQG that incorporates Just Transition

Workers' issues are of fundamental importance to the NCQG. How funding is set up will have profound implications for the workforce, including what jobs are created and what form they will take. Funding is critical to protect working conditions in the face of new climate realities. **Heat stress alone resulted in 490 billion lost working hours in 2022**, and is projected to reduce global GDP by US\$2.4 trillion in 2030.¹ The Pakistan floods of 2022 illustrated how the failure to address worker needs can escalate the scale of loss and damage, with devastating impacts on both formal and informal workers. A proactive approach is necessary, and initial estimates indicate that funding for a Just Transition will require significant financial commitments.

The NCQG will ultimately only be successful if it explicitly recognises both the specific *needs of workers* and the *role of workers* in implementing climate solutions.

To achieve this, TUNGO is calling for the inclusion of the following **key points** in the next version of the NCQG text:

Specific mention of Just Transition in the overarching section (e.g. preamble): Require all financial flows under the NCQG to align with Just Transition principles, as defined by the Paris Agreement, the Just Transition Work Programme, and the ILO's 2023 **resolution** and 2015 **guidelines** on Just Transition.

Ensure that the quantitative elements of Just Transition for workers are included

The needs assessment for the **quantum (the total amount of funding or resources) must incorporate the evolving needs of workers**, including: full costings to support decent and quality jobs in all mitigation pathways. This must include elements such as funding for **workforce development, training, apprenticeships, and redeployment**; support for workers in high-emitting sectors requiring transition; funding for necessary adaptation and resilience measures, such as **ensuring safe and healthy workplaces**; provision for the irreversible **impacts of loss and damage on workers' livelihoods**; funding for social protection from all mitigation, adaptation, loss and damages, and funding to support social dialogue with trade unions throughout all change processes.

Ensure that Just Transition for workers, including social dialogue and labour rights, is included under qualitative elements

Workers must be explicitly mentioned, and given equal status to other constituencies, such as women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ groups. Both **social dialogue with workers and stakeholder engagement with affected communities** must be included, in order to recognise the specific importance of social dialogue between workers, governments, and employers, as well as the related but distinct process of stakeholder engagement with affected communities.

¹ https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_711919.pdf

Just Transition must also reference **labour rights**, following the definition in the Just Transition Work Programme and the ILO's 2023 **resolution** and 2015 **guidelines** on Just Transition, to guarantee a comprehensive and labour-focused approach to Just Transition.

Recognise public finance as the core of the NCQG, and include a sectoral focus

Developed countries must fulfil their historical responsibilities. There must also be safeguards against increasing debt burdens. To maximise impact, the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) must include **sectoral climate finance platforms** (e.g. transport, energy etc.) that integrate social dialogue. Moreover, countries should retain control over strategic sectors essential for the climate transition, such as energy, public transport, raw materials. The role of public ownership and control should be acknowledged and privatisation conditions should not be part of any climate finance agreements.

2. Ensure a full implementation of all elements of the JTWP into the next round of NDCs

To ensure that vulnerable people are not left behind, all climate action must be underpinned by principles of a Just Transition.

The Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) serve as high-level roadmaps for countries' climate action. They are submitted every five years to the UNFCCC secretariat. Currently, the number of NDCs mentioning Just Transition is growing, but remains at **23%**.

The deadline for countries to submit their next round of NDCs (NDC 3.0), is set by February 2025. ITUC calls on countries to **implement all elements of the commitments made at COP28 in the JTWP**, and to **align their NDCs** with the ILO's 2023 resolution and 2015 guidelines on Just Transition. This is crucial for achieving a transition to a low-carbon economy that is inclusive and sustainable, protecting the rights and livelihoods of workers and vulnerable communities.

Trade unions have the following demands:

Governments must prioritise the full implementation of the Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) as defined at COP28.

If parties fail to respect and implement the agreements made, they become part of the problem. The second JTWP dialogue before COP29, along with the ministerial meeting at COP29, must be utilised to share information, good practices, lessons learned from parties on how they are implementing economy-wide, structural Just Transition plans. This information should contribute to the development of ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) 3.0.

Unions ask countries for the full and balanced implementation of all JTWP elements agreed upon at COP28. International cooperation, as an enabler of Just Transition pathways, and the creation of decent work and quality jobs – including through social dialogue, social protection, and the recognition of labour rights – are equally important and mutually reinforcing.

Countries must demonstrate progress in incorporating Just Transition into their NDCs.

Governments should negotiate comprehensive Just Transition Plans in line with the ILO Guidelines in the next round of the NDCs, they should report on how they engaged with trade unions in the planning and implementation of climate policies through social dialogue. Full respect of fundamental labour rights at work must guide the work on NDCs.

We urge governments to specify the measures they will implement to ensure the creation of decent jobs, skills development and training, occupational health and safety, and universal social protection for all workers, both in the formal and informal economy, during the green transition. This information is essential for governments when reporting how their NDC is fair and ambitious in the light of their national circumstances.



The **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** are critical to the success of the Paris Agreement, as they outline the specific actions and targets that individual countries have committed to in order to address climate change.² They serve as high-level roadmaps for countries' climate action.

Article 4.3 of the Paris Agreement states that “*Each Party’s successive nationally determined contribution will represent a progression beyond the Party’s then current nationally determined contribution and reflect its highest possible ambition, reflecting its common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances*”.

NDCs 3.0 should build on **NDCs 1.0** and **2.0** and take into account the wider policy landscape and country priorities to ensure they become a fully integrated part of national development and planning activities.

3. Guarantee human rights, labour rights and inclusive participation

The full and comprehensive protection of human rights is essential to build support and trust across societies and to implement urgently needed climate policies. Labour rights are human rights.³ The ITUC’s Global Rights Index 2024 offers an important status report

on the worldwide struggle to defend and exercise core pillars of democracy: the fundamental rights and freedoms of working people and trade unions. As it attests, there are clear signs that governments and companies are accelerating their efforts to trample on these basic rights that underpin the very nature of democracy and the rule of law.

² <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs>

³ <https://www.ilo.org/declaration/lang--en/index.htm>

Governments must consider the broader geopolitical dimension of climate policy. No climate protection is possible while countries are waging wars, and violent conflicts are taking place. Respect for international law, labour and human rights, gender equity, the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the inclusion of youth, is fundamental.

This year COP29 takes place in Baku, Azerbaijan. To shape the transition to a low-carbon economy, national social dialogue should be conducted on a larger scale,

specifically focusing on industrial policies and the rights of workers and affected communities. The COP presents an important opportunity to strengthen the national labour movement and affirm international solidarity. The full and comprehensive protection of human rights is required to build support and trust within and across societies. They are an integral part of the ILO's Just Transition Guidelines and are enabling rights for achieving a Just Transition. The ITUC demands that governments include explicit language on human rights and labour rights protection for all workers, regardless of status, in all pertinent COP29 decisions.

IN SUMMARY: TRADE UNIONS' PRIORITIES FOR COP29:

- Focus on the implementation of the full scope of the JTWP as defined at COP28 in all pertinent COP29 decisions.
- Provide the urgently needed climate finance to invest in the Just Transition.
- Show progress with Just Transition in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- Guarantee inclusive participation, human rights, and labour rights protection for all workers in all COP29 decisions.
- Ensure decent work, job security, training, and skills development within adaptation measures, as well as social protection for all workers affected by global warming and climate change policies.

UNIONS MOBILISING FOR CLIMATE AMBITION: PREPARING FOR COP29

Unions' efforts to advance climate justice for workers does not start when big conferences like the COP happen; these efforts are built through continuous engagement, effort and determination. To ensure that workers' needs are at the heart of critical climate decisions, unions must organise early, build partnerships, and stay involved with their national and regional policy making. Unions are therefore encouraged to:

- **Establish contacts with your government on the preparation for COP29**, share the **trade union demands for COP29** with feedback on what action they intend to **prioritise and what action they take** well before they finalise their positions at the COP.
- Track your government's commitments to climate ambition, Just Transition and social dialogue and protection in its enhanced NDC. **Demand amendments to NDCs and national plans where there are gaps.**
- Organise, organise, organise! **Encourage union representatives** to speak to members about climate action and Just Transition. **Organise company Just Transition plans** and provisions in collective bargaining agreements (at the company, sectoral and national level).
- Collect **campaign and informational material** to share with other organisations and allies at the COP **to start the conversation on** Just Transition at any moment.
- **Identify and connect with your national delegation** to have access to crucial negotiations or be able to receive information about them.
- **Unions @ COP29**. An overview of our union activities at COP29 in Baku can be found [here](#).
- **Join the WhatsApp group** to share logistical and practical information for trade union participants at the COP in Baku: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/LIBa3hsjKik6ri0ltFV00n>



Trade union members are invited to participate at our “**Trade Union Strategy Day**” organised by the ITUC on **Sunday 17 of November** from 13:00 to 18:00 at the **Azerbaijan Academy of Labour and Social Affairs** (181 Azadliq Ave, Baku 1130). A dinner will be served for all the participants at the venue!

We will provide digital access via Zoom for those members that cannot be present in Baku. There will be EN/SP/FR/RU translation using the Zoom meeting.

You need to register for digital and physical participation at the Strategy Day [HERE](#).

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