

ETUC Resolution ahead of the Katowice Climate Conference

Adopted at Executive Meeting of 23-24 October 2018

Introduction

From 3 to 14 December 2018, the international climate negotiations will take place in Katowice, Poland, which will host the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP 24. This COP is of particular importance for the ETUC since Katowice is in Europe and more specifically in a region highly dependent on carbon-intensive activities. This COP provides a stimulus for governments to deliver on 'Just transition'. To prepare this important appointment, the ETUC adopted in December 2017 a Resolution 'From Bonn COP 23 to Katowice COP 24 – ETUC priorities for international climate negotiations in 2018'. Less than two months before the opening of COP 24, the ETUC hereby restates and updates its main demands.

Climate change is here, but not yet ambition in action

Recorded temperatures and extreme weather events all around the world in 2018 confirm that the planet is heating up. The IPCC special report on 1.5°C has clarified the impact that such warming would have and has identified the emissions pathway compatible with the aspirational objective of the Paris Agreement. The key message from scientists is crystal clear: crossing that temperature threshold will lead humanity into extremely serious problems, and the only way to limit the disaster currently in the making is to bring global emissions to net-zero as soon as possible after the mid-century.

A kind of preliminary iteration of the pledge and review system that the Paris Agreement set up is underway this year, known as the Talanoa Dialogue. Its main goal is to assess the efforts made by countries and to feed into the preparation of the forthcoming national climate plans (NDCs). Its structure comprises a preparatory phase, collecting information and evidence, and a political phase where decisions are expected to be taken, based on the knowledge gathered. Now that we are entering the political phase of the Talanoa Dialogue, it is of the utmost importance that governments translate all the warnings received from scientists and civil society into concrete measures to raise the ambition of their domestic climate policies as well as to tackle emissions from international transport and to better align the EU trade policy with the climate objectives.

In June 2018, the ETUC adopted a resolution calling on the EU to adopt a "Long-term low emission strategy" aiming at reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. The EU must use the Talanoa Dialogue to align its level of ambition for 2030 and 2040, based on the sense of urgency that this 2050 target implies. However, even though the EU should lead global decarbonisation by example, its efforts will be insufficient if the other major economies do not move at the same pace. It is particularly shocking to see that despite all the recent diplomatic efforts and the adoption of the Paris Agreement, CO₂ emissions from the G20 countries have been on the rise in 2017: +2% in one year! Worse, a series of large and medium economies still foresee an increase of the use of CO₂ intensive energy sources in the coming decades. If the Talanoa Dialogue can deliver anything, it should be a strong reminder to all countries that, with the adoption of the Paris agreement, they committed themselves to reaching global net-zero emissions before the end of this century and that their policies must be designed accordingly. Therefore, we need an ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement and joint climate action.

A coordinated procedure is essential to avoid carbon leakage, guarantee a level playing field and reduce the risk of structural breaks. This is crucial if we want the international climate regime set up in Paris to be more than a five-year beauty contest. What is at stake here is also the credibility of the UN multilateral climate negotiation process.

The credibility of the international climate regime also lies in its concrete working arrangements. As stressed in our December 2017 resolution, the Paris Agreement implementation guidelines, to be adopted in 2018, are of the utmost importance for the future of the global climate regime. The COP 24 must deliver a rulebook that will allow the new system to be up and running in 2020 while ensuring environmental integrity, transparency and comparability of actions.

The rules to be adopted must also guarantee that issues such as adaptation, provision of finance to the most vulnerable countries, transfer of technologies and capacity building, investments to create quality employment, decent work and just transition are integrated into planning on reporting commitments with the same requirements in terms of transparency and quality of data. Last but not least, working arrangements must put climate action into line with the UN SDGs.

The Just transition COP

Accelerating the pace of emissions reduction is vital if governments want to be serious about the commitments they made in Paris in 2015. Keeping in mind that 80% of global energy needs are provided by fossil fuels, the scope of the challenge ahead should not be underestimated. Fulfilling the Paris mandate will impact on workers and communities in many ways. Of course, deep decarbonisation will create jobs in many sectors and generate many co-benefits for the economy and for people. But highlighting the many positive effects of a low-carbon world does not tell the whole story. Many sectors will be profoundly reshaped while others might almost disappear. In the same way, the energy system will be fully reshaped in a context where more than 10 % of EU households are exposed to energy poverty. If governments want to secure public support for their climate policies, they must ensure that the low-carbon economy will leave no one behind and will not undermine energy affordability. It requires a strong commitment regarding Just transition and decent work and concrete action to deliver tangible results on the ground: building a sustainable industrial policy, creating good jobs, securing labour transitions, providing safety nets, and organising anticipation of change through workers' participation and democratic procedures.

The COP 24 must become an important milestone in the history of Just transition. First, we are entering an era when the decarbonisation process should accelerate and therefore also its impact on workers and communities. Speeding up emissions reduction without preparing the labour market at the same time would be a mistake. It would lead to unplanned and brutal disruptive effects in many industrial regions and, in doing so, it might weaken wide public support for climate policies. It may also trap climate action in skills-shortage deadlocks. Secondly, this COP will take place in the industrial heart of a country which still produces 80% of its electricity from coal. On the road to a low-carbon economy, regions like Silesia will face specific challenges that must be acknowledged and tackled by public authorities.

For these reasons, the trade union movement proposed in early 2018 that governments at COP 24 adopt a 'Ministerial Declaration on Just transition and decent work', to strengthen the political commitment made in the Paris Agreement to address Just transition and decent work when implementing climate action. The ETUC welcomes the draft text tabled in September 2018 by the incoming COP Presidency and invites all governments to endorse and sign the 'Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration'. This is a crucial message to communicate to the world that climate action will not be carried out at the expense of workers' rights and that the low-carbon economy will be fair and inclusive.