

Speech delivered by Bernadette Ségol
General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation

EU-South Africa dialogue on Just Transition, Green and Decent Jobs

12-13 February 2013, Johannesburg

(Check against delivery)

I am pleased and honoured to be invited to participate in bilateral discussions with South African unions and political actors on the important topic of Just Transition, Green and Decent Jobs.

Your country and your trade union movement have for ever marked history.

You continue to fight for equality, decent work and decent wages. You support campaigns to eliminate HIV here in South Africa but also in solidarity with neighbouring countries.

Indeed, Friends, you have played and are now playing a key role.

In the African continent of course, but much more widely, at world level to turn the tide towards justice, decent work and equality.

Our world is getting smaller and greatly interconnected, our regions and countries are historically and economically tied. Trade relationships between countries and continents are set to increase. And this trade must be fair.

Environment knows no border; what is happening on the other side of the world is happening to each and every citizen of the world. Our concerns for environment are also connecting us.

Each of us has a responsibility to be the credible actors for fair and sustainable development.

We have the responsibility to do that where we are, us in Europe, you in South Africa, but we have the responsibility to connect with each other.

This is why we need to talk and to exchange, this is why I am here today.

Friends, strength and determination are fantastic assets. They are our assets.

They are trade union assets in South Africa, and in Europe.

Trade unions do not get derailed from their purpose.

Strength and determination: we will certainly need those qualities if we are to achieve our goal of sustainable growth and sustainable development.

Changing things is most of the time a long and painful process. You know this in South Africa.

To reach our goals, we must use all the platforms we have for our objectives. And we must use our trade union strength.

The ETUC is using its strong contacts with EU institutions to do so. But we do look beyond.

I did sit next to COSATU in preparing the trade union position in G20 events where your country has an important role to play. I expect to find you there again. I know also how influential your government can be at world level on environment questions.

The EU is going through a deep crisis. 25 million people are out of work. The average rate of unemployment is nearly 11%, a record high in Europe, with big differences between countries ranging from 4% in Austria to 25% in Greece and Spain.

The type of economic governance put in place during the last three or four years exacerbated unemployment. It might have contributed to saving the Euro as a currency, but it was done at the expense of workers, and it did weaken our European social model.

Indeed, the successful model of society including industrial relation, social protection, and public services, built after the Second World War is under attack in Europe.

We are being told that to be competitive, we need to decrease wages, liberalise our public services and weaken our social protection.

We know by experience that combining the welfare state with competitiveness is possible.

Competition must be organised so as to improve people's condition, not to make them poorer. Our societies should protect, they should not let the strongest win and the weakest lose.

Our answer is: No to a jungle economy, no to casino capitalism.

There will not be a solution to unemployment without growth. What we need and want is sustainable investments for growth.

This is the only way towards the future of jobs and the respect of our planet.

We and the workers we represent should never forget that pushing the planet to its limit in consuming energy and natural resources at an unsustainable rate is not just damaging for today but above all for future generations.

Unfortunately, economic uncertainties are playing their part in making people less concerned about the environment and climate change.

For a sustainable growth policy to be implemented, we need protection for workers in industries going through major changes. They need to be involved, to understand the challenges and to feel they are part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

Tomorrow's jobs will not be today's jobs; this is why we need funds for training and reskilling.

Trade unions have a key role to play in order to achieve this fundamental change.

The ETUC members are playing their part at national level in their negotiations with employers and governments. You are doing the same in South Africa.

We also need to be practical and provide workers with tools to build union activism and action for a sustainable recovery. This is what we have undertaken within the ETUC.

Sustainable development is also linked to health, safety and environmental regulations. A few years ago, we fought for such EU environmental regulations of the chemical sector (REACH). We are not going to let it go.

We must continue this legacy to defend our well-being in the future.

This means changing the way we produce and consume goods and services, to conserve resources, improve work organisation and avoid destroying vital ecosystems provided by our seas and forests.

It means urgently finding alternatives to fossil fuels – oil, gas, coal. We need investment in new technologies of the future and the jobs and skills that go with them - solar and wind power, electric vehicles and trains, capturing and storing carbon emissions, saving energy at home and at work.

Climate change and planet boundaries require energy and resource-efficiency development.

We should turn to new models, such as the model of "circular economy" based on designing products that can be broken down and reused at the end of their life.

Consumption of materials and energy should be reduced, recycling and reusing waste as a raw material for new production should increase.

The trade union challenge is to make the most of the potential for job creation and social cohesion for workers and their families, but also to avoid the negative consequences wherever they may arise.

This is why we have consistently called for a 'Just Transition' to the energy and resource-efficient model we need.

Our 'Just Transition' rests on five pillars:

Participation and dialogue at all levels.

Investment in job creation and transformation, through low carbon industrial policies and infrastructure investment.

Effective and publicly-driven training and skills programmes, including an individual right to training for all workers regardless of contract.

Respect for trade union and human rights. No job can be a green job if it is not a decent job.

Social protection safety nets for workers negatively affected by the transition, with active labour market policies and well-financed social security systems.

The ETUC is committed to an inclusive approach.

Friends, in a sustainable world, finance works for the common good. It does not speculate to make money out of money building financial bubbles which destroy fragile economies.

We need an international financial transaction tax.

We are confident that Europe will take the lead in implementing a financial transaction tax. Eleven countries have agreed to go ahead with it in the EU. We want the income of this FTT to compensate for the damage of speculation and help finance sustainable growth.

We hope that countries like yours will push for this tax to become an international obligation.

Many tools are already available, many examples of union 'good practice' exist. We want to share them with colleagues from outside Europe and learn from their experiences. This is why we welcome and support the ITUC's call for mutual exchange on climate and social justice, like the one we are participating in today.

Friends, you kept the talks alive in 2011 in Durban, next time it will be in our Continent (Warsaw 2013). We are working to ensure that progress is made towards the international agreement we all want and need.

Unions are Agents of Social and Environmental Change: Let's act like it!