BRIEFING NOTE: THE JUST TRANSITION FOR ALL AND A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO CLIMATE ACTION: 8 NOVEMBER 2017

This event convened on 8 November 2017, in Bonn, Germany, on the sidelines of the 23rd session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 23) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The event was organized by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Programme (WFP) and UN Women. The objective of the event was to discuss a human rights-based approach to climate change in relation to climate justice.

OPENING

Moustapha Kamal Gueye, ILO, moderated the event. Claire Harasty, ILO, reflected on how the transition to a low-carbon, climate resilient economy will affect employment, with jobs being simultaneously created, reallocated and eliminated. She noted that figures suggest that up to 60 million jobs could be created globally if the right policy mix is in place, underscoring the importance of focusing on the quality of these new jobs, as well as the timeframe in which they will be created.

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Emmanuel de Guzman, the Philippines, elaborated on how his country is addressing the transition from a policy perspective, and provided an overview of its Green Jobs Act. He said the law stipulates standard setting, accreditation and certification of green practices in the workplace. He noted that the Green Jobs Act was one of the first in the world to adhere to the ILO’s policy guidance on a just transition to a green economy, observing that social dialogue plays a vital role in building consensus on the development pathway.

Bert de Wel, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), explained that the ITUC is working with other civil society organizations to lobby the UNFCCC for the recognition of the role of workers, and the impact of climate change and climate change policies on them. He emphasized that a “mind shift” is needed to place the protection of human rights and social justice at the center of climate policy, instead of seeing it as an “add-on.”

Peter Glynn, Bond University, observed that both public and private sector workers will be the ones to deliver climate action and the just transition. He provided examples of coherent public policies targeted at the transition to a low-carbon economy, saying that this transition provides an opportunity to introduce new behavioral frameworks into the labor market.

Alan Miller, Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, provided an overview of activities conducted by national human rights institutions globally, including advising governments on the implementation of human rights policies, monitoring the level of implementation and reporting on it to the UN. He expressed hope that the UNFCCC would establish a focal point on human rights to strengthen its integration into the negotiations, rather than relegate it to side event discussions.
Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, University Louvain-la-Neuve, elaborated on how the draft Declaration of UNESCO’s Ethical Principles in Relation to Climate Change apply to the just transition, and the role it could play in the UNFCCC process. He then outlined the Declaration’s six principles, namely the prevention of harm, the precautionary approach, equity and justice, sustainable development, solidarity, and scientific knowledge and integrity in decision-making. He discussed how the principles could support workers in achieving a just transition to a low-carbon economy.

During the ensuing discussion, in response to a question on an inclusive transition, Bert de Wel said “policies for the poor often become poor policies,” and pointed out that policies should be framed with social justice at the center. Other questions focused on: the regional distribution of effects of the economic transition on the labor force; how the Philippines is supporting a just transition, taking into consideration the significance of coal to its economy; the role of young people and intergenerational equity; and what a just transition looks like on the ground, and how trade unions would support it.

**CLOSING**

Cristina Martinez, ILO, closed the event by saying that climate justice is about finding opportunities for green employment, highlighting the vulnerability of some regions to polluting “mono-economic activities,” and encouraging participants to grasp the opportunities that the transition can bring for green jobs in the future.