



Making a deal on climate change work

Statement by Juan Somavia
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During the last phase of climate change negotiations leading up to the Copenhagen Conference, negotiators are aiming to put together one of the most politically and technically complicated set of international commitments ever.

This challenge is not underestimated by the representatives of the world of work – employers, workers and governments – who come together at the ILO. But their message to world leaders is that they are ready for the challenges that an ambitious package will pose to the transformation of jobs and employment patterns.

Over the last few years, understanding of the scale of the employment transitions has increased but so has recognition of the opportunities it creates for fairer and greener growth.

That there can be no going back to “business as usual” has become a mantra. One of the ways to make sure that we do not, is to invest in a new balanced approach to global sustainable development.

The crisis has highlighted the importance of strong action to prevent the global jobs crisis lingering long after a turnaround in other economic indicators. Mounting concern over jobs and the state of the economy are threatening to eclipse other priorities. But we cannot afford to wait in addressing the climate challenge until economies and labour markets have recovered.

We have to tackle both climate change and the jobs crisis together. And we can.

An ILO survey of government policy responses to the crisis has shown that many countries have included green jobs components in their recovery measures, for example, through stepped up training and infrastructure investments. More needs to be done by more countries but we can see the potential and the demand.

Governments, employer and worker organizations of the ILO’s 183 member countries underscored this at the International Labour Conference in June this year when they focused on a productive and people-centred response to the economic crisis. They adopted a [Global Jobs Pact](#) which includes a shift to a low-carbon, environmentally friendly economy as part of a comprehensive and coherent set of policies that will help accelerate jobs recovery, recuperation of income levels and sustainable growth of enterprises and economies.

The economic and jobs crises can be turned into opportunities to speed up the transition to low-carbon, high-employment, poverty-reducing economies. The green components of the economic recovery packages which many countries are implementing are helping to reduce emissions and to quickly generate large numbers of green jobs in the process. The short-term green stimulus measures as well as the longer-term policies adopted in a growing number of industrialized, emerging and developing economies demonstrate that targeting economic growth and action on climate change can be mutually reinforcing.

There is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to mitigate climate change can create millions of green jobs in countries at all stages of development; through energy efficiency in buildings, in industry and in transport, in sustainable agriculture and forestry and through a shift to low-carbon renewable energy. These gains in green jobs and in greener, sustainable enterprises far outweigh those that will be lost or transformed in emission intensive sectors.

Similarly, coherent policies and integrated strategies can turn the need to adapt to unavoidable climate change into an opportunity to create jobs and generate income in areas like water management and climate-proofing infrastructure. Policy instruments like NAMAs (Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions) and adaptation strategies like NAPAs (National Adaptation Plans of Action) as well the financial flows and institutional arrangements for the implementation of a new deal can reflect this.

By contrast, inaction on climate change is the worst option. It is certain to be to the detriment of labour markets and will destroy many jobs and enterprises.

Large as some of them are, investments in a green recovery are just the beginning of a longer-term programme of structural change. Broader and continuous efforts are needed to put the world on track for a lasting recovery from the crisis and sustainable growth and development, enabling all countries to create productive employment and decent work for all, to overcome poverty and to preserve the natural environment.

Coherent policies underpinned by a comprehensive international agreement can ensure that all countries pursue sustainable development and promote equity between and within countries. An important part of such a package must be resource transfers to support investments in a low-carbon growth path in the developing world.

Such an approach can help direct investments and benefits to those who need them most, in particular the poor and vulnerable groups. They can provide for a just transition for those who are bearing the brunt of the need to adapt to climate change and those whose jobs may be lost in the transformation to a low-carbon economy.

The ILO tool of social dialogue with industry and trade unions is a vital mechanism for building coherent and effective policies for the transition.

A global climate agreement that factors in the social and economic transformation it will bring about and that brings on board the relevant actors can put the world on a path towards a greener, fairer and sustainable global economy. A forward looking deal in Copenhagen in December 2009 will of course only be the start of a long process. The ILO looks forward to being part of the follow-up to making the deal on [climate change work](#).

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