

SPEECH DELIVERED BY MR BEKI NTSHALINTSHALI, DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY, CONGRESS OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS

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Programme Director Mr. Nosipho Ngcaba
President Kgalema Motlanthe
Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk
Minister for Climate and Energy, Denmark, Connie Hedegaard, Minister Jeff Radebe
Minister Buyelwa Sonjica Minister Lindiwe Hendricks Professor Rajendra Pachauri,
Chair Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Councillor Amos Masondo,
Mayor of Joburg, Chairperson of SALGA Mister Jerry Vilakazi, CEO, Business Unity South Africa
Mister Richard Worthington, Climate Change Network, South Africa
Invited Guest, Colleagues, Friends and Comrades

It is a great honour for me to be invited to this great event to share the platform with the highly distinguished speakers on this very important subject of climate change, I congratulate the government for its leadership in organising such an important event and bringing together people with different experiences in an attempt to find workable solutions not only for South Africa but for the world.

Let me hasten to say that we at COSATU, and also at an international level, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), recognise and appreciate the role the South African government is playing in the negotiations at UNFCCC, especially its commitment to social dialogue and its influence in the G77 countries.

The leadership, under the stewardship of Minister van Schalkwyk and his team, and the policies they are pursuing, are appreciated by civil society. This is not a departmental responsibility but one in which the whole government is involved.

The world is facing many serious crises - accelerating climate change, the economic meltdown and the poverty and food crisis. In all cases, the root causes are the same - a lack of commitment to regulation, a push towards free market economics and an international system that has underperformed, sometimes very badly, in exercising governance of globalisation. All these crises punish the worse-off and most vulnerable, those who did little to cause the problems.

This is not time for government to back away from bold action to tackle global warming. This is the time to take the opportunity to repair and rebuild national economies on the basis of socially and environmentally responsible investment, which will create jobs, stimulate economic growth and reduce Green House Gas emissions.

The consequences of an uncontrolled proliferation of GHG emissions are obvious and predictable. It is urgent and imperative, as we approach the

negotiations, to reach a strong international agreement, which takes into consideration the needs and aspirations of all, an agreement that will effectively shape the framework for the type of society we wish to build and pass on to the future generations.

For COSATU, a viable solution to climate change will not be found unless we also combat social injustice; it requires a more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable society. Without a strong and innovative multilateral solution, the main victims of climate change will be the poor (as we have seen in the recent floods in KZN floods and Soweto) and workers, particularly in developing countries. Their sole responsibility for their plight is to have been born poor in the most fragile parts of the planet.

Equity, human and workers' rights, and environmental action all must be tackled in order to resolve this situation. Climate change, Mr. President, raises important questions about social justice, equity and human rights across countries and generations. We call for commitment, solidarity and action.

We call on governments, especially those of the developed countries, to respect the Convention's mandate, which is to firmly commit to emission reductions on the basis of their different responsibilities and respective capabilities. No longer can emission reductions be considered a barrier for growth. No longer can they be accused of hindering employment creations. No longer can they be postponed.

COSATU and its members are well aware of that transitions are by no means easy processes (remember the introduction of the legislation on plastics bags). Moving towards a low-carbon economy so as to develop in an environmentally responsible manner represents a difficult task, and that the poorest must not end up paying the highest price. Therefore we stress the need to support and assist those who are most vulnerable during the transition process.

As representatives of workers, trade unions are part of the solution. Fully aware of our responsibilities towards workers and future generations, we have undertaken actions with a dual commitment towards the environment and society. Trade Unions will discuss not only urgently needed emission reductions but also how we can change the way we produce, consume and interact, on the basis of solidarity and mutual respect.

For developing countries to achieve GHG emission reductions, stabilisation or controlled increases, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities must serve as a framework for action.

We are calling for an equitable sharing of the responsibilities for climate protection and emission reductions. There must be provision for the fair

distribution of the cost associated to emission reductions, so that the poorest will not carry the heaviest burden.

Trade Unions are calling for a just transition based on the promotion of the opportunities offered by the Green Economy (the promotion of green and decent jobs and the greening of workplaces, based on sustainable industrial development and an equitable share of the responsibilities and gains) and on the design and implementation of accompanying measures for all the productive sectors that will have to adapt to the constraints arising from a low-carbon economy.

The Green economy must have a socially-just base. Democracy, social partner participation in decision-making process and respect for human and labour rights form the baseline conditions to ensure a smooth and effective transition towards a sustainable society.

In 2008 the G8 Labour Ministers stressed the importance of assessing possible impacts on environmental change and policy responses on labour markets; helping displaced workers make a transition to new jobs; encouraging skills development that responds to environmentally- friendly innovations and industrial changes, and promoting environmentally-friendly ways of working by adjusting to new patterns of natural resources and conservation in workplaces.

Green jobs can make a major contribution to clean economic growth, development and poverty reduction. The Stern report reminded us that climate change represent the biggest market failure in history. We cannot trust the same failed market mechanism to successfully steer us out of the crisis. The problem has to be solved through regulation, democratically decided and implemented public policies and, most importantly, political leadership.

We support the need for ambitious and effective emission reduction targets, while agreeing on ambitious targets for mitigation as an important first step. Trade unions are aware of the difficulties of transforming such targets into policies. We are aware that most nations of the world have failed or never attempted to achieve sound justice in their economic restructuring.

We call for the importance of widening the discussion and analysing social and economic consequences of emission reduction within different areas of the economy, for example the effect of mitigation measures on poverty, incomes, equity and gender equality.

A commitment to eradicating poverty, promoting equality and realising sustainable development while reducing emission necessitates concrete steps to incorporate a social dimension during the implementation phase of the Clean Development Mechanism and the Joint Implementation.

Poor communities in developing and developed countries are already suffering from the impacts of climate disruption. Yet they are at risk because they are poor. The socially-advantaged have a freedom of residence and movement which socially-disadvantaged do not have. This makes it clear that the struggle to adapt to climate change should not and cannot be separated from the fight against poverty and in favour of a more just and egalitarian society.

As trade union movement, we have never accepted the violation of human right which allows fellow human beings to die of hunger or preventable diseases. We will not accept now that human beings die because of climate change.

Climate change feeds into a vicious circle of poverty by adding more barriers to development. Environmental events generate huge amount of stress for poor households. Droughts, resource depletion and floods, among others, are either at the source of, or reinforce, their already critical social and economical situations. Resource depletion aggravates unemployment, which reinforces migration, subsequently contributing to a loss of human resources and endangering rural economies.

Therefore the challenges of poverty and climate change have to be tackled in a mutual reinforcing manner. Quality public services and strong public sector leadership at all levels of government must be at the heart of the global response to climate change. Public to public partnership for technology transfer in the utilities sector should be encouraged and financially supported. Public procurement contracts should include specifications for labour and environmentally sustainability standards.

We stress the role of public services in areas such as education, health and transportation, and access to energy to cover basic needs, among others. Efficient climate change policies will require a highly qualified workforce, researchers and engineers. A reduction in GHG emission will be facilitated by more public transport which at the same time would increase access to mobility for the poor.

Further, the trade unions believe that climate change cannot be achieved without gender justice. Principles of gender equity must be adapted from research to analyse the design and implementation of mitigation and adaptation strategies, because climate is not gender neutral. Women are generally more vulnerable and represent the majority of the world's poor and powerless. Their livelihoods are more dependent on natural resources that are being threatened by climate change. Women are a potential source of innovative adaptation strategies and must be empowered to play a central role at all decision-making levels on climate change.

Once more Programme Director, COSATU will play its role and make contributions to this important subject. Government has to communicate more on

its Climate Change programme, be it the Bus Rapid Transport or the greening of the stadia for the 2010 World Cup. If we were in the USA I would have said 'YES We Can' but in South Africa our slogan which should be the next UNFCCC slogan in Copenhagen should be 'Working Together We Can Do More'.