



**Statement of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) towards climate change negotiations at COP 26
October 2021**

Context

The pandemic has highlighted the failure of neoliberal policies. It exposed many negative consequences in terms of inequality, social protection and social justice. The crisis and the impacts of the pandemic must serve to prioritize the great threats to life implied by the environmental crisis and reinforce the transversal nature of the dispute for the production and consumption model. This situation offers one more reason to modify our relationship with nature.

The consequences of the pandemic in terms of employment, GDP fall, and inequality is unprecedented. The impact in terms of employment is most profound for those self-employed and informal workers. These workers represent a significant and broad portion of the region's labour force without access to social protection, public services, health, education, decent housing, excluded from labour rights, collective bargaining and with no trade union organization. This portion of the working class is going through this crisis with even greater deprivations that affect the right to life and food. The exposure of these workers to the environmental crisis is even greater.

The recovery plans proposed, as well as the current commitments, are insufficient to promote the transition to a different economy, socially and environmentally sustainable. Multilateralism has advanced in written and formal commitments that are still deficient, without effective mechanisms to ensure the binding nature of agreements. The Paris Agreement was an important achievement since it included in the preamble the demand of workers and social movements: the just transition. However, the proposals that are advancing for a transition and for mitigation and adaptation do not meet these principles.

Finally, we must remember the links between the setbacks and attacks on democracy and the environment, of which the genocidal and denialist government of Jair Bolsonaro is a faithful representative. These attacks pose a threat to the working class that is not limited to Brazil and impacts regionally and internationally.

Structural changes for structural problems

In the region of the Americas, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, the working class is on the front lines of those affected by the health, social and employment crisis unleashed by the pandemic.

The working class is also on the front lines of being affected by the consequences of the environmental and climate crisis. The way in which the environmental crisis affects the working class is associated with pre-existing vulnerabilities resulting from inequality, oppression, and discrimination. For this reason, we need to make visible the situation and greater impact of the environmental crisis on women workers, workers from black communities, Indigenous Peoples, migrants and LGBTIQ+.

Since its founding as TUCA, trade unionism in the Americas has raised the need to rethink the development model. TUCA's proposal for sustainable development with social justice involves disputing the dominant economic order, the commodification and financialization of the commons, and the inequalities that underpin the system. Today, in light of the recent Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), union's demand for structural changes in the basis of the economy becomes urgent and indispensable.

The IPCC report is clear that changes are needed if the worst impacts and the deepening of the environmental crisis are to be avoided and warns that there is little time left to prevent the increase in the global average temperature from being irreversible. We believe that these necessary changes must target the structural causes of the crisis, otherwise they will continue to reproduce the worst consequences of it.

Commitments in climate negotiations and just transition

The COVID-19 pandemic has reaffirmed once again that we must change our relationship with nature. The devastating spread of zoonotic diseases has become possible due to the destruction of biodiversity and the advance of mining-energy extractivism in the territories. This reality is increasingly evident in many regions of the world and episodes of health crises resulting from human interventions that promote both extractivism and the privatization of nature will become increasingly frequent.

Responses to the climate crisis must start from understanding these causes and responding to them.

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are non-binding commitments that countries have set out to step up their actions and tackle climate change and must ensure justice, participation, transparency and social dialogue in both their development and implementation. Unfortunately, and beyond the weakness of the concept of NDCs and the lack of ambition in most of them, we observe that in countries such as Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica or the Dominican Republic, the contributions, although they speak of Just Transition, in practice, were elaborated by the sectors related to the governments, omitting the processes of broad social dialogue and excluded the participation of trade unions.

The just transition necessarily implies dialogue with unions and communities as these actors will be affected and will be directly impacted by the policies and initiatives carried out by governments.

All countries should introduce just transition measures and policies into their national climate plans and policies and should do so with the effective participation of all social actors, especially trade unions, as set out in the principles of just transition. Those countries that have not established their NDCs or that have done so without convening effective social dialogue with participation of trade unions and social movements, should consult unions on the measures and plans established, before implementing them.

The abrupt decrease in the spaces for the participation of trade unions and other social movements is a clear signal from those who do not want to discuss the Just Transition proposed in the preamble to the Paris Agreement. This deficit of union participation is reiterated in several countries where the NDCs make up for social dialogue with a selective call leaving out the workers.

We must demand that countries commit to trade union's participation. They cannot make voluntary announcements by calling unions in some cases just to legitimize their positions, without taking into account the proposals and contributions of trade unionism. That is not just transition.

Financing to tackle climate change

Financing to address climate change through mitigation and adaptation policies must be based on principles of justice, transparency and democracy.

Access to finance and technology transfer for countries of the Global South is imperative to tackle climate change. Financing must focus on changing the production and consumption model and not only on a superficial decarbonisation approach, as seems to be the trend in institutional debates.

Financing cannot become another form of indebtedness for countries of the Global South. Technology cannot mean new forms of dependence. Funding commitments by developed countries must be effective and based on dialogue, respecting the autonomy of countries in defining their policies. The commitment to "mobilize" 100 million dollars a year, which has been raised since COP15 and is part of Decision 1 of COP21, not only remains unsalted, but the ambiguity of the term "mobilize" opened the possibility of transforming financing into debt. COP26 cannot ignore, less in this context of pandemic, the resounding failure that the decades of application of neoliberal policies have meant and their effects on the external debt of countries, on public policies and on the guarantee of rights.

In this context and in a global scenario where the external debt crisis feeds back into the systematic crisis in which we are immersed, we believe that the proposals for the exchange of debt for climate must be deeply studied and decided at the collective level through transparent participatory processes that include all voices, since they can become instruments that legitimize external debt illicitly contracted by countries, promote the privatization of common goods and allow interference and conditioning, on the part of creditors, in the definition of public policies for adaptation and mitigation.

Over the past 30 years of multilateral negotiations on development and climate, it has been shown that access to finance and technology continues to be captured by neo-colonial logics that restrict the possibilities of countries of the Global South to effectively access substantive changes that face climate change and, in many cases, translate into new forms of indebtedness. If development cooperation imposes conditionalities and remains based on neocolonial strategies and as long as technology (its control, ownership and application) remains in the hands of transnational corporations that impose patents on its access, the real change required to face the environmental and climate crisis will remain very difficult. This is also crossed by trade and investment rules that establish restrictions on access to and exercise of public policy for fighting against climate change.

For these reasons, we understand that the debate on access to finance should include the question about ownership and in particular the permanent waiver of intellectual property rights, the liberation and universalization of knowledge and processes related to fighting against climate change. To this end, it is necessary to broaden our gaze and consider the effects that trade, and investment liberalization can have (and will have) on the policy space for facing climate change effectively and comprehensively, especially in the implementation of active policies of reindustrialization, transformation of the productive matrix, transition and energy democratization.

Industrial policies to address the environmental crisis and sustainable development

Industrial policies and investment cannot be restricted to carbon neutrality schemes based on market mechanisms. The facts show that these types of mechanisms and measures do not actually are effective in reducing emissions but reproduce the same inequities of the system and therefore deepens the climate and environmental crisis.

It is key that any climate-friendly investment promotion policy addresses the need to respect for human rights. Promoting investments without evaluating the consequences they may have on the loss or limitation of labor rights is unacceptable.

A change in the productive matrix implies rethinking industrial policy and the role of the State. Thinking in terms of production and consumption includes thinking about a regional productive integration, of greater breadth and density, in policies to promote diversified productive matrices, rethinking privatizations and moving towards public control of strategic infrastructures, as well as the appropriation of greater policy spaces to make the necessary changes.

Public policies for industrial development cannot be designed from a deterministic technological conception that assumes that the application of an instrument successfully tested in one country or region will have the same results in another. Achieving a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (GEI) requires a transition of production systems that cannot occur at the same speed or with the same formulas in all countries, therefore, it is essential not to omit the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and the respective capacities and needs those countries have, as specified in the text of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate

Change (UNFCCC). The right to energy must be guaranteed for the entire population, the answer to the climate crisis cannot be more austerity, which deepens inequalities.

It cannot be ignored that the sectors that must reduce more emissions are key in trade negotiations and strongly demanded by countries of the Global North. If we do not address the links between the environmental crisis and international trade in terms of products traded, how they are traded and the impacts they have, we would be looking at only part of the problem.

The free trade and investment agendas condition the responses that can be given to the climate crisis. They restrict the policy space of States for implementing strategies aimed at transforming the production and consumption model and allowing countries from our region to move away from raw materials based economies.

Social justice, human rights and environmental crisis

COP26 must recognize that climate justice and social justice are closely linked and that responsibilities are common but differentiated. This recognition must be translated into concrete and binding demands and commitments and monitored with transparent mechanisms.

Respect for and promotion of human and labour rights are particularly relevant in climate negotiations in all their aspects and constitute fundamental factors to be considered in national and multilateral policies that are developed to address the climate and environmental crisis: financial, mitigation and adaptation, attention to loss and damage, gender equity and impacted vulnerable populations, just transition, among others.

As far as market mechanisms implemented, designed or proposed to support mitigation actions are concerned, we see that, in practice, they behave like pollution rights where GHG emissions are not reduced, but only compensated. Emissions trading is an expression of the commodification and financialization of the environment and nature since it creates a commodity (GHG emissions), gives a price to the right to pollute a common good, which is the atmosphere, developing a financial market of those "rights".

Promoting carbon markets is reproducing the same logic that originated the current systemic crisis, perpetuating a model that excludes and subdues the most vulnerable.

These types of mechanisms that we define as false solutions are often the causes of the aggravation of violence in the territories and contribute to growing environmental and labor conflicts.

Actions undertaken and agreed within the framework of the UNFCCC negotiations should respect, promote and consider obligations on the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities and international conventions relating to labour rights. These obligations should be considered an intrinsic part of the agreements and their compliance should be monitored.

COP26 must ensure security, transparency and equitable and effective participation

Participation can be equitable and still not be effective because it does not establish clarity in the ways for participation, because (in the best of cases) they are heard, but the demands of organizations and social movements are not met, because previously public sessions are now closed or because there are technological restrictions on the access to internet platforms. In this particular COP, we must add to the already historical problems of travel costs and visa restrictions, the limitations on mobility imposed by the response to the pandemic.

Before the pandemic, negotiations were restrictive and transparency was not assured.

It is also a problem of justice because one of the main barriers to people's mobility and health security is inequitable access to vaccines. It is not enough just to transmit the sessions virtually. It is about developing mechanisms that allow effective participation, even for those who cannot be in person in Glasgow.

Decarbonizing is not enough, the "green" economy is not a solution

Despite the efforts of trade unions, social and environmental movements, more action is required and the recognition that it is not possible to solve the problem with false solutions, reproducing market mechanisms for companies to conduct their business and imposing corporate transitions. Mitigation and adaptation plans need to go much further than thinking in terms of decarbonizing energy sources. It is urgent to see the system in a complete and non-biased way. The decarbonization of the economy must lead us to a comprehensive change of the energy system, the productive matrix, consumption and distribution, it must aim to change the system of social relations and strengthen the link of societies with nature.

It is not possible to speak of a natural cycle of "zero carbon". This narrative conceals the use of technologies and market mechanisms or technological manipulation with negative impacts on workers and communities. In addition, it is a demand and a proposal anchored in perspectives of the Global North that seek to stop extracting coal in these countries to demand it from other countries of the Global South. The problem cannot arise in terms of producers and consumers without considering the responsibility of those who set the demand. The Global South will stop producing coal when there is no more demand from countries, when it is not the only alternative for income generation and when there are real, effective, and dignified responses that enable a just, popular, consulted, participatory and symmetrical transition that recognizes the responsibilities of the Global North.

Carbon capture and storage technologies are not an effective solution, they require expensive technology and facilities and their impacts, considering the life cycle, cannot be exhaustively evaluated due to lack of experience. It is highly likely that carbon capture projects involve land grabbing processes, so it is important to continue to highlight that they are not real solutions.