



Just Transition and Energy Democracy

Proposal from Workers Ahead of the First International Conference on the Transition Beyond Fossil Fuels

Santa Marta, Colombia — April 27, 2026

Political Context

The “**First International Conference on the Transition Beyond Fossil Fuels**,” organized by the governments of Colombia and the Netherlands and taking place in Santa Marta, Colombia, is unfolding against an international backdrop far more complex than anticipated when it was convened in November 2025, following the conclusion of COP 30 in Belém. We are facing an unprecedented civilizational crisis, the result of a capitalist model that prioritizes profit over life. This civilizational crisis—which is economic, one of poverty, inequality, war, and also climate-related—originated by the unlimited exploitation of nature to benefit a global minority, has generated profound economic, social, gender, and environmental inequality that today threatens the very foundations of our subsistence.

Extreme weather events are transforming the world of work by disrupting essential economic activities, imposing changes on work processes, and increasing occupational risks. Sectors such as agriculture, construction, and transportation, as well as public services—including solid waste collection, natural resource protection, and disaster response personnel—face growing dangers such as heat stress. Public service workers are laboring under increasingly difficult and intense working conditions as the demand for services rises, for example in the health and social care sectors. This reality hits those working in the informal sector—street vendors, recyclers, and caregivers—particularly hard, and is also driving forced migration for communities that must abandon their territories due to the loss of their livelihoods.

Since early 2026, the situation has been exacerbated by a violent geopolitical struggle for control of energy resources, both fossil fuels and other sources. The far right, at the helm of imperialism and neocolonial powers, uses war and interference to maintain its hegemony, threatening the sovereignty of nations and the self-determination of peoples. This scenario coincides with the rise of a far-right that promotes climate denial and corporate governance as tools for the plundering of the commons, leading the world into a state of constant tension that jeopardizes global peace.

This era of total impunity began with the intensification of the Israeli genocide against the Palestinian people, which continues to this day, is broadcast live, and still enjoys the support of the world’s major powers. A critical milestone in this escalation for control of energy sources was the U.S. military operation in Venezuela and the kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro on January 3, 2026, which set a dangerous precedent of direct imperialist aggression, violating sovereignty and using military might and technological superiority



to subjugate nations and appropriate their resources. A direct effect of this military action against Venezuela has been the radicalization of the blockade against Cuba, imposing a total energy blockade on the island.

The joint aggression by the U.S. and Israel against Iran, carried out since February 28, 2026, resulting in loss of life and destruction of infrastructure throughout the Middle East, is also part of these wars for control of oil and gas. These events have strained the entire global energy system, demonstrating how dependence on fossil fuels is used as a weapon of war and a factor in economic collapse.

From the perspective of the international labor movement, we recognize that the world is experiencing a collapse of the multilateral system, which is incapable of halting the multiple conflicts around the globe and the paralysis of institutions for the protection of human rights, humanitarian aid, and other agencies—a situation that has facilitated the advance of warmongering, hateful, and racist agendas. We express our solidarity in particular with the cause of the Palestinian people, denounce the ongoing genocide in Gaza, and condemn all forms of colonialism, interference, and blockades against sovereign nations.

Amid this scenario, the challenge of the Santa Marta Conference lies in addressing the contradiction between the capitalist system's need to maximize the use of fossil fuels to sustain its profits and the global population's urgent need to find solutions to overcome the climate crisis and move toward low-carbon economies through transformative processes aimed at social justice. The transition away from fossil fuels is essential to counter the climate crisis and reduce the causes of conflict over resource control, colonialism, and exploitation. The trade union movement reaffirms that this transition cannot be a mere technical adjustment, but must be a process that guarantees sustainable development, with social, fiscal, gender, economic, and environmental justice, based on democracy, transparency, and participation.

In this regard, we affirm that the fight against tax evasion to secure extraordinary revenues and the promotion of mandatory investment bonds for peace with nature must become legitimate sources of international financing. This requires a new global governance that confronts tax havens, controls capital flows, and recognizes the rights of nature as a limit to market power. There will be no real just transition if profits are privatized and costs are socialized; climate justice demands fiscal justice, union power, and a definitive break with the capitalist logic that turned life into a commodity.

We reaffirm our commitment to a just transition, based on respect for and the promotion of the ILO's fundamental labor rights, capable of generating and guaranteeing sustainable development, with decent work—universal social protection, freedom of association, collective bargaining, social justice—gender equality and equity, food and energy sovereignty, the conservation of the commons, and the self-determination of peoples, territories, and nations. We reaffirm that, together with allied social movements in the region and around the world, we will continue to advance and champion the agenda of workers, to build justice in all its dimensions.

Finally, we, the trade unions, come to this conference reaffirming that only through peace, disarmament, regional integration, and democracy will a truly



just transition. We oppose increased military spending and the rearmament of industry. We demand a model that addresses the asymmetries between social classes and between the nations of the North and the South, guaranteeing the right of all peoples to development that preserves the commons. We will continue to promote an agenda where decent work, sovereignty, and self-determination are the pillars of a sustainable future for the working class.

Declaration of Principles and Political Vision

The international trade union movement maintains that the Just Transition must be understood as a profound systemic change, rejecting any process that shifts the costs of the crisis onto the working class or widens the gaps between the Global North and the Global South. The Global North must assume its own reparative responsibilities by canceling debt owed to the Global South, accelerating the phase-out of fossil fuels, and transferring technologies and financial resources for mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, and the Just Transition to countries in the Global South.

In this regard, we propose placing “the public” at the center, managing energy as a common good and a human right under participatory public ownership, management, and provision, and promoting community-based management alternatives, while combating its treatment as a commodity for corporate profit. This vision demands a sovereign integration of peoples, based on the consensus of social movements and free from models imposed by neoliberal agendas that disregard territorial autonomy.

Likewise, we denounce the corporate capture of climate agendas and reject “false solutions” such as carbon markets, geoengineering, and “net-zero” mechanisms that allow transnational corporations to continue polluting under a veneer of sustainability. Our proposal is a counter-hegemonic vision that breaks with the logic of “green capitalism,” prioritizing life over the accumulation of capital and unmasking the current extractivist model. This approach must take into account the current context of war over control of resources and the crisis of regional democracy, fully integrating the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda and guaranteeing freedom of association and collective bargaining as indivisible pillars of the process.

Pillar 1: Overcoming Economic Dependency and Territorial Restructuring

The decarbonization of our economies must be a planned process that guarantees the stability of territories and the well-being of their inhabitants through a binding social dialogue, as defined in the ILO’s just transition guidelines. This process must also be open to the democratic participation of communities, indigenous peoples, and social movements, and be grounded in criteria for social transformation that reduce inequalities and are redistributive, rather than concentrating resources and power.

We propose the creation of permanent, institutional tripartite spaces where trade unions have real decision-making power over Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and sectoral plans, ensuring that these dialogues are on an equal footing and harmonize the national, regional, and local levels. We will not accept



merely consultative processes that leave workers at the mercy of market forces following industrial closures and do not aim to be binding on companies.

To achieve effective restructuring, we demand structured technical training and job relocation programs with a guarantee of decent employment. These universal social protection systems must be financed through resources grounded in fiscal justice. Another necessary measure is the implementation of policies that include health rehabilitation for those affected and the recognition of chronic occupational diseases to enable early retirement.

These policies must include structured, coherent programs with allocated budgets to become true state policies, involving all ministries and public agencies, so that they transcend changes in government and guarantee income security and access to healthcare at all times.

We demand that multinational corporations and mining companies ensure their closure and withdrawal processes from these territories are fair, participatory, and locally focused, guaranteeing full reparation for the social, labor, environmental, and cultural harms caused by extractivism, as well as measures for restoration, economic transition, and guarantees of non-repetition, and the government must act as the guarantor of these measures.

High-quality, universal public services—funded, managed, and delivered with public funds—are essential for economic diversification. New development strategies, whose primary goal is to address structural inequalities, cannot emerge without strong public institutions and services that ensure effective planning and focus on meeting needs rather than maximizing profits. Furthermore, the quality of public services is vital for building a more resilient and equitable society by addressing the needs of communities, strengthening their resilience, and helping them withstand the impacts of the climate crisis.

Pillar 2: Transformation of Supply and Demand (Democratization)

The just transition represents a historic opportunity to democratize the energy system, ensuring that energy is a fundamental right led by public enterprises and forms of management with social and community participation. We propose that state-owned enterprises function as engines of the just transition, with legal mandates to expand public renewable energy, distinct from the participatory management of community-owned enterprises. This includes policies for research and development of clean energy technologies and the role of the state in this process.

It is imperative to repeal privatization laws and other forms of private control over companies, to restore the social and public ethical function of these entities and develop bioregional architectures that promote socially controlled microgrids.

This democratization requires a technological adaptation that incorporates tools into local realities and the non-monetary ways of life of indigenous peoples, ensuring that key infrastructure, such as railways and local public transportation, serves to



transforming the production model without creating new dependencies, and recognizing sustainable mobility as a universal right.

We demand a ban on energy exports that fuel genocide, wars, and other crimes, and hold energy companies accountable for their crimes throughout the entire supply chain, from extraction to final consumption.

Following ILO recommendations, promote cooperatives and social economy enterprises to give communities control over production and prices, integrating public procurement to stimulate local MSMEs.

Pillar 3: International Cooperation and New Global Governance

The international architecture must be substantially reformed to enable a just transition worldwide, and especially in the Global South, that is legally binding and subject to union oversight, beginning with a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty and continuing with planning for the phase-out of fossil fuels to meet the 1.5-degree target. We demand the elimination of the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) regime, which grants transnational corporations the power to challenge measures taken democratically and sovereignly in the public interest.

We propose financing based on common but differentiated responsibilities, delivered through grants and debt-for-climate swaps, anchored in principles of fiscal justice that directly combat tax evasion, tax havens, illicit financial flows, and the reorientation of fossil fuel subsidies, while taxing the windfall profits of energy corporations, ensuring that the cost does not fall on household bills or public debt.

Cooperation must ensure that technology transfers do not generate debt, leave behind installed capacity, and are not conditioned by patents, adapting to national energy conditions and needs and establishing quotas for worker participation in new sustainable industries through the creation of decent work. It is essential to apply binding ILO due diligence standards throughout the clean energy value chain to prevent precarious work.

Furthermore, we promote national Decent Work plans and the Global Accelerator for Employment and Social Protection for Just Transitions to mobilize coordinated resources that support national decarbonization processes with social justice.

Final Considerations

The sustainability of any just transition process depends on regional and global integration and cooperation, because no country acting in isolation will be able to confront transnational market dynamics and corporate control of energy. It is also necessary to adopt a people-centered, inclusive, and feminist class-based approach that recognizes care work and gender parity in decision-making. It is necessary to eradicate anti-union culture and guarantee absolute respect for the ILO's fundamental labor rights,



including the rights of indigenous peoples, with prior and informed consent in accordance with Convention 169.

The effective participation of trade union organizations, alongside urban and rural communities, indigenous peoples, and other affected sectors, is one of the guarantees of legitimacy and political viability for achieving global climate justice that ensures decent livelihoods for the entire working class.