

REMARKS BY JAMES HOWARD
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AT G8 Environment Ministers Meeting 2008

“Dialogue with Stakeholders”

Kobe, Japan, May 24, 2008

On behalf of the ITUC, representing 168 million workers in 155 countries around the world, thank you for this opportunity to convey our members' views to the G8 Environment Ministers in 2008.

Chair, this meeting comes just two weeks after an international trade union delegation led by Mr. Takagi had the opportunity to convey our views to G8 Labour Ministers, meeting in Niigata, and shortly afterwards to the Prime Minister of Japan hosting the 2008 G8 Leaders' summit, Mr. Fukuda.

Many of the same issues were raised in the trade union interventions in Niigata that I would emphasise to you now. We believe there is a major need to transform the challenges of countering climate change into an opportunity for job creation and sustainable development through the creation of what we call “green jobs” within key sectors, especially in alternatives for energy supply; creating energy efficient buildings; and bringing about shifts in transportation modes, agricultural production, managing the food system, and in the greening of industry, overall. Research being published by UNEP with the ILO and trade unions, in a book to be released later this year, shows that green jobs have significant employment creation potential.

Green jobs can therefore be both a partial solution to economic problems and a way of advancing action to counter climate change. To that end, we believe the G8 must design and engage mechanisms for consultation and joint action with the social partners on national climate change strategies.

The G8 must also ensure the transfer of resources and clean technologies to developing countries.

We were pleased therefore that in the Chair's conclusion of the G8 Labour Ministers meeting in Niigata, there was indeed a new element in the conclusions - a focus on the link between environmental issues and climate change on the one hand, and employment and workplace issues on the other. This represents the core of the “Niigata Global-Balance Principle”, based on social dialogue and cooperation beginning at the workplace, that the Labour Ministers addressed to the Toyako summit.

Moreover, the Labour Ministers declared their intent to contribute to addressing employment and social challenges arising from environmental concerns and issues in order to realize a resilient and sustainable society. They stressed, in particular, the importance of assessing possible impacts of 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 resource use and conservation in workplaces.

It was also significant that the Labour Ministers recognised the Green Jobs Initiative supported by the ILO as an interesting and potentially valuable strategy, and said that it was a coherent, tripartite way of addressing these challenges.

We strongly support all those elements of the Niigata Labour Ministers conclusions. What we want now – as stated clearly in the trade union statement to the G8 Summit in Toyako – is follow up and implementation of those conclusions.

In this regard, and particularly in the context of today's meeting of Environment Ministers, we believe there must be the closest coordination between Labour Ministers and Environment Ministers.

Chair, Honourable Colleagues, these, we believe, constitute key elements in our effort to obtain effective action to meet the challenge of climate change in an equitable way that can achieve broad-based support. Therefore we believe it is essential that these elements should be reiterated once more in the conclusions of this Kobe Environment Ministers Meeting, and in July we would like to see them supported also by G8 Leaders at Toyako.

Thank you.