

Presentation by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) representative Mr Agni Deo Singh at plenary of the 3rd UN Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Conference on Tuesday 2nd September 2014.

Mr President, your excellences, delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Agni Deo Singh, I'm the General Secretary of the Teachers' Union in Fiji, and I'm speaking here on behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

I maybe the last speaker for the day, but I intend to add a new dimension to this debate.

Mr President, let me begin by thanking and congratulating the government and the people of Samoa for being wonderful hosts and according the unique pacific hospitality to all of us, and also for the excellent preparation. Let me also, thank the United Nations (UN) for recognising and providing ICTUC the opportunity to attend and to address this august body.

The ITUC, represents 176 million workers from 325 national affiliates in 161 countries. Many if not all of us in this conference would have benefited from better terms and conditions negotiated by our unions in our working lives. Apart from representing the organised sector the trade unions represent the unorganised through participation in social dialogue and influencing improvement in national labour legislations. A large number of these workers are also identified as maganised such as women and youth. Minimum wage, minimum working age, safety and health and alike are some of the benefits that the unorganised workers receive through the intervention of the trade unions.

Mr Presidet, the SIDS conference has identified critical topics for the future of workers in small islands developing states. If the realities in our countries can be very different, we all face dramatic consequences of the impacts of climate change, we all need to address the challenge of growing decent jobs and succeeding our transition to sustainability, including through the better protection of our marine environment.

The decent work deficit in our countries is daunting. As the International Labour Organisation (ILO) indicates in its report for this conference, the Pacific region suffers from significant unemployment and under-employment, particularly amongst the youth, who form a significant part of the population. Unemployment in the Pacific is estimated at 23% and in some countries, more than half of young people looking for a job are unable to find one.

To this already difficult situation, we deplore the aggravation of climate change and the bleak prospects it puts on our communities.

What can we do?

Mr President,

The trade union movement considers it fundamental to re-orient public action to secure the protection of all citizens through strengthened social protection system, pro-active employment

creation programmes, all underpinned by the four pillars of the decent work agenda. This would have a positive impact in reactivating local income and domestic demand, and therefore making us less dependent on foreign flows such as tourism, which is facing difficulties due to the economic crisis. Improving working conditions for those who have a job so that they can fully participate in the economy of their countries is also critical. Finally, we are promoting, in solidarity with all the international labour movement, the need for securing a fair and ambitious climate deal in Paris in 2015, which will give our countries a chance to develop.

Mr President,

Allow me to share with you a final thought. Our sustainable development does not only depend on social progress, economic prosperity and environmental protection. It also depends on our governments capacities to realise human and labour rights and democracy. Only if citizens are fully able to decide about their future, only if workers are able to protect their rights and improve their working conditions we will be able to build the prosperous and sustainable societies we all deserve in small island states.

We, as trade unions, are looking forward for a fruitful negotiation here in Samoa and stand ready to support you in this endeavour.

Thank you.

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