



**European Economic  
and Social Committee**

**Civil Society Organisations' Group**

**Ensuring a sustainable and just transition through people-centred climate and biodiversity action**, with **Humberto Delgado Rosa**, Director for Biodiversity, Directorate-General of the Environment Department of the European Commission, **Hans Bruyninckx**, Professor of Environmental Governance, University of Antwerp and former Executive Director of the European Environment Agency, **Friedrich Wulf**, international biodiversity policy campaigner at Friends of the Earth, **Anabella Rosenberg**, senior advisor on just transition, Climate Action Network International (remotely), **Pegah Moulana**, Secretary-General of the Youth and Environment Europe, **Dirk Bergrath**, rapporteur of the opinion NAT/933 Towards a just

transition legislative proposal and EU policy tools that enable a more social European Green Deal, adopted in December 2024 and **Maurizio Reale**, President of the EESC Sustainable Development Observatory

### **Speech by Civil Society Organisations' Group President Séamus Boland**

*EESC plenary session, 23 January 2025*

Esteemed speakers,

- The topic of human-centred sustainable and just transition is one which is very close to my heart, having spent the majority of my adult life working on the **cessation of peat extraction in the Irish Midlands**;
- What we have learnt over the years, is that the transition to net zero emissions in the Irish Midlands required **profound changes in vision, attitudes and perceptions of the future**;
- The greatest challenge has been how to deliver a **just transition for the many and not only for the few**;
- First and foremost, all just transitions must be about **people, place, respect and partnership**;

- They are about building on the **deep historical connections** - in our case of peatland communities with the bog - and directly involving and **empowering local communities** in the long-term planning for the **regeneration** of the **region**;
- It is essential that **all local stakeholders** are directly involved in a **bottom-up process**, identifying challenges and opportunities, jointly developing **creative** and **sustainable solutions** and actively participating in the **decision-making** and **implementation** of these solutions;
- **Civil society organisations** are always **key to delivering the just transition**, through their interactions with local government and by their capacity to bring the topic out of the policy arena and into communities;
- **Respect, partnership** and **honest communication** with communities on possible future options, must underlie this joint approach, which should aim to **reduce, share** and **manage the risks of the transition in a just and fair way**;
- In the Irish Midlands, we came to learn that if not well managed, the transition to carbon neutrality through the cessation of peat extraction could lead to **long-term** and **trans-generational disadvantage** and **marginalisation**;

- Consequently, it is imperative that the just transition does **not leave behind any individual, community, economic sector or region**;
- It is also important that the environmental dimension of the just transition is addressed under the **all-encompassing objective of the SDGs**, of which **poverty eradication is the principal objective**;
- This will necessitate **specific and targeted actions**, e.g. **adapted life-long learning, re-training and upskilling opportunities**, which should offer **real economic opportunities** and allow local communities to **sustainably support their livelihoods**;
- In our region, we are also focussing on **economic diversification**, e.g. in tourism (recreation, heritage and biodiversity), in order to effectively manage the just transition;
- The overall objective should be to **create and attract a significant number of new jobs**, as well as to successfully **integrate into the labour market** both **young people and women**, as well as vulnerable individuals, such as **persons with disability** and the **long-term unemployed**.
- Ladies and gentlemen, anyone who tells you that the just transition, for any community, will be an easy and smooth process is **quite simply lying**;
- It takes **patience, perseverance** and **many conversations** with the people involved;

- It needs a **vision, sustainable funding** and **long-term inclusive strategies** to shape the future for all concerned;
- But persevere and it can be **successfully and fairly managed!**
- Thank you for your attention.