

# The trade union perspective on sustainable development, a just transition, and common goods in the Caribbean

**Francisca Jimenez – Vice-President of the  
CSA**

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## Multi-crisis context

- Overwhelming evidence that the environmental and climate crisis puts life on earth at risk. Consensus that the rise in greenhouse gas effects generated by fossil-fuel based industrial and agro-industrial activities is one of the main causes of the crisis.
- Political concern that the consequences are increasing. The need to move towards a just transition and a change in the production and consumption model.
- The trade union movement and social movements defended the inclusion of the just transition in the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- The demands are to change the production and consumption model, to include climate and environmental justice, to regard energy as a right and not a commodity, and to guarantee the rights of workers and communities.

## Multi-crisis context

- Not all stakeholders or perspectives are in line with the demands of socio-political trade unionism.
- It is crucial to understand the just transition and the environmental and climate crisis in the context of the crisis of the model imposed by decades of neoliberal policies.
- Proposal from the trade union movement in the region: to back a change in the production model that centres on work and daily life. The environmental issue is a trade union issue, and it is expressed as such in the CSA's strategic documents: Platform for the Development of the Americas (PLADA), the three regional conferences on energy, environment and work (CREAT), and the resolution of our 4th Congress.

## Development in dispute

- Within the trade union movement, the concept of 'development' is in dispute.
- Development cannot be reduced to an economic issue alone.
- In the PLADA, the trade union movement in the region outlines four fundamental pillars of a proposal for an alternative sustainable development: the political dimension, social dimension, economic dimension and the environmental dimension.
- Within the environmental dimension, it is essential to take into account the concept of environmental justice, the protection and preservation of common goods (including the public and democratic control thereof), water as a human right, energy sovereignty and democratisation, the just transition, and the new model for production, distribution and consumption.

# Energy as a human right and common good

- The notion of 'common goods' is fundamental for the debate on energy as a right.
- Energy needs to be considered a fundamental human right. It needs to be decommodified, decentralised and democratised.
- Energy is a public service, therefore the demand for quality universal public services also applies to energy.
- It is essential to guarantee access for the whole population, and to maintain basic living and mobility standards. This implies disputing the ownership, use and control of energy. The transition is a process that goes beyond changing sources. It implies an energy system change.

## Structural causes of climate change

- Discussions at global level lack a structural analysis of the causes.
- False solutions are promoted that present the market as the answer. The market and transnational companies are the main causes of the climate and environmental crisis, and market-based solutions only deepen the causes and impacts.
- Solutions to the environmental crisis should involve the working class. The just transition suggests that trade unions be called upon to discuss countries' plans and commitments with respect to facing climate change and transitioning to new systems.

## **Attacks against democracy and the environment**

- Protecting democracy is still a priority in the region, and attacks against democracy are connected to the environmental issue.
- Under the just transition flag, trade unions and social organisations have highlighted the costs that the transformation of the energy system could have for workers and communities, as well as the costs in terms of human rights violations.
- Defenders of the environment are criminalised and assassinated on our continent. Trade unionists are the first line of resistance, and are killed for what they represent and report.
- Protests, peaceful mobilisation and attempts to demand rights can lead to death in the Latin American and Caribbean regions.

## Situation in the Caribbean

- Effects of climate change on the Caribbean as an island territory. The rise in sea levels is a risk for these countries, territories and residents, and for economic and social activities.
- They are increasingly exposed to extreme environmental phenomena (hurricanes, floods, severe droughts, etc.). A majority of countries in the Caribbean don't have protection systems in place to face this situation, and more and more vulnerable populations are becoming 'environmental migrants', which has social, economic and political consequences for those countries and regions.
- Migrant workers and their families have gone from being 'a problem' to being criminalised, becoming hostages and facing discrimination in their own territories and in the countries to which they had to flee, looking for ways to survive.
- Pressure from transnational companies to appropriate sources of fresh water and aquifers has affected access to water, a common good, and encouraged the irrational exploitation of these sources, causing serious problems for communities and a loss of state sovereignty.

## The Caribbean situation

- According to the directorate of meteorology in the Dominican Republic, between 1960 and 2020 there were approximately 3570 natural disasters with high vulnerability at Caribbean level.
- In 2015, 2016 and 2017 the region suffered long periods of drought. In the case of the Dominican Republic, in 2015 it did not rain for nine months. In the Caribbean, the deterioration of common goods has led to less water (dry rivers due to long periods of drought, tens of rivers with lower water levels).
- Water contamination caused by production and agro-industrial activities makes the water unfit for consumption, for agricultural purposes, for fishing and also for animals.

## Situation in the Caribbean

- We are witnessing various conflicts in the Caribbean island region between the interests of capital, often protected by governments, and communities.
- The situation in Haiti constitutes the most severe loss of a population's sovereignty over their territory and common goods. The irrational exploitation of sources of water, land and fish diversity have contributed to higher levels of exclusion and poverty in the country.
- This is an example of the failure of an international cooperation that is based on the interests of corporations and the privatisation of development aid. The international community is incapable of facilitating a sovereign solution to the structural crisis of the Haitian nation because international interests take precedence over the right and desire of the Haitian people to find their own sovereign and democratic solution without foreign interference.

## Situation in the Caribbean

- The trade union movement in the Americas is following the complex situation in Latin America and the Caribbean, defending the role of trade unions as actors for democracy. They represent their affiliated workers, but also the majority who live in informal living arrangements, with uncertain labour conditions, or who are unemployed.
- We, the trade unions, also claim our role as actors for development – with a central role in the diversity of economic activities in the countries of the region and also with concrete proposals, like those presented in the PLADA, which can be implemented in the countries in the region.
- It is for this reason that we, the trade unions, demand and are fighting for the full right to organise and to engage in collective bargaining in the countries in the region. We defend full and just democracies and are at the forefront in confronting those who attack and erode our democracy through economic projects supported by infinite profits, and through authoritarian and conservative political projects.

## Situation in the Caribbean

- From the workers' perspective, there needs to be a move towards changing the production and consumption model, ensuring a system that is socially and institutionally resilient in order to meet basic needs and guarantee a living and decent work.
- Sustainability is not a technical issue but a social and political debate with profound implications.



**Thank you**  
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