

Notes for RINGO from Just Transition Ministerial

COP 29, 18 November 2024 (15.00-18.00)

(the session was moved to a plenary room allowing open access)

The session was co-chaired by the climate ministers of Grenada (Karryne James) and Estonia (Yoko Alender, substituted by Vice Minister Kristi Klass for the second half of the session). There were brief opening remarks from CEO of the COP29 Presidency (Elnur Sultanov); Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC (HE Noura Hamladji), Chair of SBI (Nabeel Munir), and Chair of SBSTA (Harry Vreuls). These speeches referred back to the COP28 Global Stocktake, the Just Transition Work Programme (agreed at COP27), specific decisions 1/CMA.4 and 3/CMA.5.

(no reference was made to the specific status of negotiations during the session, but the outcome paper had been withdrawn at the request of China based on procedural issues).

Guiding Questions for the session:

1. How can Parties advance their just transition pathways in the context of preparation and implementation of the next round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)?
How can international and support on the full range of means of implementation assist Parties to advance their just transition pathways in the context of NDCs and NAPs?
2. What are the expectations of Parties with regards to the UAE just transition work programme, and how can it serve as an effective tool for assisting Parties in further defining and implementing their climate plans in the context of the just transition pathways that promote sustainable development and poverty eradication?

Interventions by environment ministers were then taken in turn and limited to three minutes each (although many were longer). They were taken in the following order: Colombia, UK, Kenya (on behalf of the Africa group), the European Union, Tuvalu (on behalf of the Association of Small Island States), Ethiopia (on behalf of the group of Least Developed Countries), Norway, Fiji, USA, Niue, UAE, Mongolia, South Africa, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Burkina Faso, Jordan, Guinea, Zimbabwe, Venezuela, Zambia, Egypt, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mexico, Moldova, Palestine, Solomon Islands, India, Turkey, Canada, Cambodia, Senegal, China, Russia, and Vietnam.

The interventions were wide ranging, but it is probably fair to say that they all generally embraced the diversity of the actions required for the Just Transition to become reality. It is now well-advanced from the worker focused definition of the Paris Climate preamble and the other groups mentioned included communities, indigenous peoples, small islanders, refugees, displaced people, as well as cross-cutting issues such as gender, youth, the economically marginalised, and various other forms of vulnerability.

Some nations (in particular those in the Global North) stressed more specific activities, whilst many in the Global South advanced the need for systemic and structural responses to reforming the global financial system; trade barriers, sanctions and tariffs, technology-transfer and the obligation of industrialised nations to transition ahead of lower carbon emitters.

The key substantive elements of the session might be summarised as follows:

(1) Whilst Just Transition remains undefined, there are clear foundations

Many ministers referred to the language of the Sustainable Development Goals and ‘leaving no one behind’ in climate action pathways. Just Transition is not a mitigation to climate action but a consequence of it. There was recognition that social complexity can be seen as ‘making a hard problem harder’ but is an unavoidable issue. The language of the COP28 Global Stocktake was repeated, in particular the transition needs to be ‘equitable’ as well as ‘just’. The fact that there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach was repeatedly stressed. The scale of the challenge was appreciated, it ‘has never been attempted before in human history’ stressed María Susana Muhamad González, the Colombian Environment Minister (a speech met with the second largest round of applause of the session).

(2) Just Transition needs to be about resilience, adaptation and loss & damage, as well as mitigation

Many speakers made the case for a stronger focus on the effects of extreme weather, sea-level rises, biodiversity loss and other climate challenges. The existential nature of this was strongly emphasised by the ministers of small island developing states (SIDS) - Fiji, Niue, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands - as well as the Caribbean – Grenada, Cuba. In addition to the importance of integrating the just transition into NDCs, the importance of NAPs was repeatedly stressed. Guinea stressed that biodiversity should be valued as an opportunity in climate transitions and as the basis for sustainable livelihoods.

(3) Financial barriers

The South African Environment Minister, Dr Dion George, reminded the Ministerial session that many African countries are charged up to seven times the interest rates of Global North countries for climate-related investments. The need to reform the global financial system was raised by many speakers, as well as the importance for concessional finance for lower income and more vulnerable communities.

(4) Trade and investment

Kenya spoke on behalf of the African Group and stressed many of their trade-related concerns relating to the just transition, reminding the audience that Africa is only responsible for 3% of historical emissions. Initiatives that might have social benefit in the Global North – such as CBAM in the EU and the IRA in the USA – can pose social challenges in the South through the impact of tariffs and increased costs for poorer

countries. Burkina Faso recalled the COP9 commitment on technology transfer and the need to support green growth opportunities and microenterprises worldwide. Cuba and Russia stressed the negative economic effects of sanctions and boycotts.

(5) Human rights and humanitarian issues

Two ministers (Norway and Moldova) explicitly mentioned the importance of human rights in framing the Just Transition. The Palestine Authority received the largest round of applause from the room when reminding the audience that humanitarian disasters and conflict pose very particular threats to any form of transition, and Jordan explicitly referenced the vulnerability of refugees within this context. Ethiopia stressed the fundamental importance of align the just transition with poverty eradication and basic energy needs.

(6) Training and green jobs

The more ‘traditional’ framing of the Just Transition around workers and social protection was not forgotten, and was stressed in particular by state parties such as the European Union, the UK, the USA, Mongolia, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Kazakhstan.

(7) Systemic issues and the political nature of the concept

The need to better align the global environmental systems (the three COP processes) as well as the systems of trade, investment, and geopolitical issues. The intervention from the Government of India stressed the complexity, as did Egypt and Mexico. The essential political nature of the Just Transition has to be recognised and the importance of the Ministerial track is to recognise this and ensure that all specific practices shared through the work programme are framed appropriately.

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