

From the summit to the shore a Himalayan sherpa carries a message from Mt Everest to the UN Climate Change talks in Durban

At 6:30am on the morning of 26 May, Dorje Khatri, Sherpa and trade union member planted his crampons in the snow and gripped his thick gloves tightly to the flag of the International Trade Union Confederation, as it fluttered in the breeze at 8848 metres.

The ascent to the summit of the tallest mountain in the world began 15 hours earlier when Dorje left Camp IV to guide his climber up the final steep face of Everest. But the journey of the flag representing the hopes of millions of workers for a global agreement on climate change had begun many months before.

Each pair, the climber and his guide, have a window of thirty minutes on the highest peak of the world, to savour the achievement that the brave attempt, but only the lucky achieve.

For many this is a once in a lifetime expedition where they have beaten the odds of altitude sickness, oxygen deprivation and the mental resilience of a two-month expedition. For Dorje this was a moment to tell the world how climate change is ravaging his mountain.

The expedition to send the ITUC flag began many years earlier, at the founding congress for the world's largest peak body, the international trade union federation, representing 178 million workers.

The international trade union movement has overcome national political differences between developing countries and developed, between energy intensive workers in coal mines, forestry workers, farmers, and nurses and teachers to take up the charge for a binding global agreement to reduce emissions.

They are steps that climate negotiators meeting nearly 20 years after a framework convention on climate change first transpired at the Earth Summit in Rio can aspire to.

The flag was entrusted by Sharan Burrow, now General Secretary of the ITUC, to the Nepalese Union GEFONT, and so began its journey.

Everest is known locally as Chomolungma – roughly translated as Goddess, Mother of the World. It is the highest mountain in the world standing at 8850 meters (29,035 feet).

As one of the most experienced mountaineers in the world, Dorje is a sherpa who one by one guides climbers to top of the world. His soft spoken skill and determination has helped adventurers reach Everest summit seven times, in each of the climbing seasons since 2006.

The visual effects of climate change are imprinted in many of our minds. Icebergs crashing into the ocean as rising sea temperatures destroy their core. Lone polar bears, cast adrift, having lost their hunting grounds.

Himalayan mountain guides can feel the climate destruction beneath their feet. The outer limits of the snow line are gradually receding. The ice that holds the rocks

together is melting, and the mountain moves under foot every time an altitude weighted climbing boot takes a step.

Tents that once could be pegged firm in the ice, now break free, lakes where mountaineers took on fresh water as they acclimatised to the shallow mountain air have dried up before their eyes.

This is the message that Dorje is taking to governments, save climate, save the Himalayas, deliver a deal for workers and the planet in Durban.

Dorje Khatri's plane climbed to 30,000 feet. The view was familiar from his times on the mountain, but it was the first time the Himalayan Sherpa had boarded a long haul flight. His destination Durban, an 18 hour journey to the UN Climate Change talks.

Negotiations for another years' climate talks are underway. Deadlines, delays, stunts and stilt-walkers have all been used to cajole negotiators into an agreement.

The spring climbing season will begin again in April 2012, and the next team of sherpas will guide their charges up the mountain. Unless there is a agreement in the next week, the only legally binding agreement to limit emissions, the Kyoto Protocol will expire at the end of next years climbing seasons.

Working together, people conquer mountains', governments and negotiators need to do the same in Durban. Activists, campaigners, workers are all here to help spur governments on to fill the \$100 billion Green Climate Fund, extend the Kyoto Protocol and keep negotiations on track.

Today Dorje is taking careful steps through the sand dunes in Durban to reach the sea for the first time. His bare feet and open toes gently subsiding in the sand. The ITUC flag in his hands, flies firmly in the sea breeze. His message from the top of the world delivered.