

11. Protecting our environment

11.1 PSI believes that:

One of the biggest threats to a peaceful, prosperous world is the rate at which human activity is changing the climate. Since 2007 there has been a remarkable surge in global public consciousness resulting from the near-consensus amongst the scientific community that proactive response is required. Tragically, that consensus has yet to result in significant global action.

- a) Global binding agreements on reduction of climate change are an indispensable prerequisite for limiting further damage to the environment. The approach must be based on the scientific recognition that annual global emissions of greenhouse gases must be no higher than current levels by 2050 to limit global warming to 2° and thus keep it under control. This calls for commitments from industrial nations and also from the larger emerging economies.
- b) Commonalities exist between resolving global labour and climate issues, such as the need for global solutions that enfranchise the developing world, functional international institutions and public, not market-based, solutions.
- c) Public service workers and their unions have a unique perspective and role to play on climate change.
- d) Quality public services are essential for addressing climate change, particularly through public procurement, urban planning and public transport, regulating the private sector and in redistributive programmes to alleviate poverty.

Addressing climate change – mitigating or reducing carbon emissions

- e) The energy and transport sectors that PSI represents play an important role in reducing carbon emissions. One key to effective reduction of greenhouse gases is to use the potential for savings, in increasing the efficiency of energy conversion, in generation, distribution and with the end user for electricity, heat and transport. Energy, transport, service and industrial policies based on environmental considerations offer great opportunities to national economies. It will both maintain and create many skilled jobs.
- f) Effective climate protection calls for great efforts. The burden must be shared according to the polluter pays principle. All polluters will take on the currently unmet – or external – costs of climate, environment, health and security. We must also recognise the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), whereby industrialised countries which have become rich while emitting greenhouse gases for two centuries have additional responsibilities
- g) Significant policy changes in these sectors will have a large impact on the workforce. The labour movement, and not just industry, must be involved in the decisions governments need to make.
- h) Workers who are negatively impacted by the necessary policies on climate change mitigation or adaptation must be supported through *Just Transition*¹ mechanisms that include retraining, re-skilling, mobility to new jobs, and income support.
- i) Governments must take the lead in setting binding energy conservation targets, supported by dedicated funds, in homes, factories, offices and transportation in both the public and private sectors.
- j) Significant potential exists for energy conservation through worker involvement at the workplace, and collective bargaining can be used to achieve this.

¹ See “Climate change and labour: The need for a “just transition”, *International Journal of Labour Research*, 2010, Volume 2, Issue 2 (318 pp.).

k) Inequitable access to energy in the developing world must be addressed.

Adapting to the inevitable impacts of climate change

- l) The sectors represented by PSI in emergency services, health, energy and water will play a major role in adapting to the consequences of extreme weather events caused by climate change. These will include disaster prevention and response preparation, shifts in the incidence and prevalence of disease, and water management issues.
- m) Public service workers are skilled first responders in times of crisis. Emergency services, health care, water and energy workers risk their health and lives on the frontlines in the service of their communities.
- n) These workers require adequate tools, training and support (including sufficient personnel) to safely and adequately respond to emergencies.
- o) Governments must invest in strong public safety regulations, well-trained and properly equipped public service workers to ensure effective disaster readiness, risk reduction, response and recovery. Workers must be able to engage with the community far in advance of extreme weather events, so that residents are trained in emergency responses.

11.2 PSI will play its part in addressing climate change by:

- a) Calling upon affiliated unions unequivocally to encourage States to enter into ambitious and binding commitments on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions as part of international agreements, and immediately to debate, adopt and implement aggressive national policies and programmes.
- b) Ensuring that affiliated unions exchange information on their national efforts to reduce greenhouse gases.
- c) Exploring worker involvement in conservation through collective bargaining.
- d) Encouraging local unions to seek alliances with local governments and civil society organisations where it is clear that solutions to the challenges of climate change and sustainable development will be implemented at local and municipal levels.
- e) Supporting renewable energy initiatives, including public ownership and management, decentralised to municipal and local levels.
- f) Supporting civil society allies working on forests, agriculture and other areas focused on ecosystem protection.

11.3 PSI will support the ability of workers in public services to deal with the effects of climate change on their work by:

- a) Supporting the ITUC *Just Transition* policy.
- b) Developing climate change policy for the health, energy, water and municipal sectors.
- c) Building coalitions at the international level on work and climate change.
- d) Working jointly with the WHO and the ILO on climate change and health.
- e) Promoting positive examples of strong government intervention and cooperation with trade unions in improving the carbon footprint of existing infrastructure.