

Hello everybody,

My name is Laura Martín Murillo, I am from Sustainlabour Foundation and the first thing I want to do is to thank everyone of you for coming, for taking the time to participate in this conference, I appreciate very much your effort and your collaboration during the preparations.

I have been working for almost more than two years for Sustainlabour. As I was there from the beginning this is the old we are. It has been two years since we have started this project to involve trade unions in environmental debates, two years of trying to have labour issues treated on the environmental agenda.

This was an initiative established by a group of trade unions around the world (Spain, South Africa, BRASIL, Canada, Norway, and Malaysia) who were working in the sustainable development agenda and thought that they need a tool to support their work and maintain a continuous work between the different meetings they attended. The idea was first developed in this city Johannesburg, during the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Now we have a direction with members from ICFTU AFRO, COSATU, CUT Brazil, the ETUC, ICFTU APRO, and ICFTU regional body for Asia, ORIT, ICFTU regional body for the Americas, Lo Norway and CCOO Spain.

I am completely happy to be today at COSATU house and together with AFRO and COSATU organizing the first African Conference on Labour and Environment. This was really our first aim, our first dream, since we were born as an organization: to hold a conference in Africa. We have talked of this project for a long time now with COSATU and AFRO. We have already discussed how to do it back in 2004. In this long process I have met a lot of warm people

that have supported us, some of them are in this room, and they make me feel at home today.

I think we have discussed like hundred dates for this meeting, we have postponed it and advance it and I have to thank COSATU and AFRO for their patience and understanding all this time. It is because of that why the actual call of this meeting has been so satisfying.

We have heard around 70 participants, 36 from outside South Africa, from 22 different countries, and the rest from the three South African confederations: COSATU, FEDUSA and NACTU. Thanks to all of you for your participation.

What is all this about?

We at Sustainlabour believe that the protection of the environment is not a barrier to economic development, we believe that the extension of labour rights are not a barrier to economic development, we believe that in fact, creating decent jobs environmentally responsible is the only way to guarantee the livelihoods of the millions of workers that live today in this planet.

This last year we have been working hard to open spaces for trade unions debates around environmental crucial debates as climate change, chemicals hazards or participating on ongoing trade union actions as the campaigns for equitable access to resources.

If I have to give concrete examples of what do we aim at:

We will be happy if we manage to include the recognition the “just transition” needs for workers when decisions about environment are taken. The limits of the environment and the decisions taken by governments or companies as a consequence of this fact will affect workers and poor people the most. And we would like to have the interests of those people taken into account when coming to decisions.

We will be happy to have workers aware and properly informed of what is going on in this field to enable their participation, to enable them to come with their own proposals for a sustainable development.

We will be happy when we could see more and more workers convinced that environment it is not something for others to take care of, that it is also our task and responsibility to promote a new kind of development respectful to environment and workers.

Last January we have organized together with UNEP and the ICFTU the First Trade Union Assembly on the Environment.

This has been the first time that trade unions at Global level come together to discuss mainly environmental issues and brought their labour background, their social concerns into environmental debate. It was a thrilling experience with more than 160 participants from around the world.

I must say that representatives from UN organizations, governments and NGOs were amazed of the initiatives that trade unions presented there, carried out at local or national level, with a considerable effort and honesty and sometimes quietly.

We were especially happy to organize an Assembly with almost 60% of delegates from developing countries, a lot of them from Africa that was the region with a most numerous delegation.

In April we have organized together with ORIT the first Latin America Regional Conference on Environment with more than 70 delegates. It had a different approach from the Nairobi Assembly with more space for awareness rising on environmental challenges of the region and groups to agree on sub-regional strategies.

Now it is time for the African conference, as I told you the first one thought and wanted and you never now for what reasons the third one being held. Now it is your time for debating, it is the time of thinking what do you want out of

this meeting and how do you want to address these issues in this part of the world where you have to deal with the most.