

'Rebuilding Economies, jobs and wages'
Opening address by ACTU President Ged Kearney to 2014 L20 Summit
Thursday, 13 November 2014
Emporium Hotel, Brisbane, Australia

Good Morning everyone,

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet the Turrbal people - and recognise that it continues to be sacred to them. I salute them - guardians of the earth and all that grows, of the seas, streams and rivers and of all living things - and I pay my respects to Elders past and present and to emerging community leaders.

I also want to acknowledge the tremendous support we have received from the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. FES has been a supporter of the involvement of unions in the G20 process for many years. Unfortunately, FES cannot be present this year as Julia Muller, the Director of FES Asia-Pacific Regional Cooperation Office, has had to cancel her participation due to health reasons. We thank the FES for its continued support to the L20 that, among other things, enables the L20 to convene and participants from various countries to attend. We wish that this support continues in the future as it has been fundamental for our work.

And while I am acknowledging people, let me thank on your behalf all the fantastic staff of this Hotel who are working tirelessly to make sure our Summit goes smoothly and your needs are met.

Comrades, on behalf of all Australian unions I offer you a very warm welcome to Australia - *Brisbane* in fact. Or as we from the other parts of Australia call it *Brisvegas* - anyone who arrived to the red neon lights of the Emporium hotel lobby last night will understand why we call it that! For those who haven't seen the lobby lit up you're in for a treat.

Brisbane has been readying itself for the largest gathering of international leaders to ever visit Australian shores.

Never before have the likes of Barack Obama, Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, Angela Merkel, Narendra Modi, Shinzo Abe, and Joko Widodo all set foot in Australia at the same time. Nor do I think that so many eminent world union leaders have gathered in our fair country at once. It is indeed an honour to have you all here.

The logistics of the G20 Leaders summit are mind-boggling: 4000 delegates, 3000 international media, 6000 police, 7000 hotel rooms.

It will take six workers eight hours simply to assemble the oval shaped table that will be used by the 20 leaders for the two day meeting.

But just as important, albeit lesser known, is our own L20 summit bringing together trade unions from G20 countries and global unions, convened so ably by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the OECD.

Over the next two days we will discuss priorities and prepare policy recommendations and key messages to G20 Leaders and Ministers. Those priorities will be captured in our L20 Statement to governments, and will provide a reference point for L20 advocacy under the Turkish Presidency next year, and beyond.

Our summit is one of unity and solidarity. Our summit gives a combined voice for the world's workers – a voice that says loud and clear that workers are an integral part of the economy, but that they are also people with hopes, needs, rights and very clear ideas about what makes a better world.

The L20 was born at the time of the G20 Leaders Summit in Washington DC at the peak of the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, when our ITUC leaders realised that organized labour needed a united voice and the ear of G20 leaders to argue for jobs and growth.

The L20 formulates key messages in a broad consultative process and confirms policy goals at the L20 Summit for each G20 presidency.

At all of its summits, the L20 has consistently pressed for investment to create quality jobs; for apprenticeships and skills; for the formalisation of work through minimum wages, labour rights and social protection floors; for sustainable, green and inclusive growth; for fair income distribution; and for greater financial regulation.

The annual dialogue includes speakers from international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, International Labour Organisation and the OECD, as well as many Leaders and Ministers from the G20 governments.

As the peak union body of the host nation, the ACTU is honoured to be chairing this year's L20 Summit, and we are looking forward to vigorous discussion and debate over the next two days. We have been very clear about the principles that need to be addressed.

The labour movement will be calling for the G20 to shift direction by committing to job creation and decent wages as the pathway to world economic growth.

ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow has previously described this as taking a stand against the American corporate model that is “destroying the social balance in the global economy”.

She has called on governments to “have courage to turn around the policies of austerity, to realise growth and jobs”.

Sharan will join me in welcoming you to the summit in a few minutes, but I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate her on her recent re-election as General Secretary of the ITUC and say thank you for the wonderful work you do for unions and workers worldwide every day.

Last weekend, the L20 made public the results of a tracking survey of the impact of previous G20 policy commitments on working families. This showed that more than half of those policies have had a marginal or negative effect in addressing the economic and social situation in G20 countries.

This year, the L20 is calling for real action – not just words – on jobs and wages, with no moving backwards on workers' rights; commitments on reducing carbon emissions and tackling climate change; stepping up the momentum on tax and financial regulation; and a range of commitments around trade and global supply chains, including purging them of forced labour.

As John Evans General Secretary of the TUAC said recently “We are calling on leaders to put an end to years of stagnation and bring about the type of structural policies for job-rich, sustainable investment that workers can support”.

As host country, Australia and Prime Minister Tony Abbott have a unique opportunity to shape this year's G20 agenda and the outcomes of the Leaders' summit.

We can conditionally support some of the global priorities announced: combatting tax avoidance, building infrastructure, setting gender participation targets, with an overall aspiration of 2% additional growth.

But we can't shrink our way to growth. We can't ignore inequality or climate change. And the fact is that good social dialogue makes for strong, sustainable, inclusive growth.

There have, over the years, been attempts by our detractors to lock unions out of meetings with G20 leaders and constrain the dialogue to big business.

Yet so much of the outcomes of the G20 impact directly on the people we represent: the workers of the world, and their families.

Do they think this will silence us? Do they think that by taking such actions our priorities will not be heard by the leaders? Who in their right mind could think this is a good idea?

If this is what they think, let me tell you it will not work - it will only make our voices louder! This will only make our resolve stronger. This will only make our summit all the more significant!

Comrades,

Welcome to Australia.

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