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**MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

KEYNOTE SPEECH

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FOR

**BUILDING AND WOOD WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (BWI)
REGIONAL SEMINAR ON CLIMATE JUSTICE**

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**GRAND BALLROOM, SERI PACIFIC HOTEL,
KUALA LUMPUR**

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and Salam Malaysia Madani

Esteemed Guests, BWI Leaders, Trade Union Leaders from Across the Asia-Pacific Region, and Fellow Advocates for Climate Justice,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION

1. A very warm welcome to Malaysia. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to BWI Asia-Pacific for honouring me with an invitation to be the keynote speaker for this *Regional Seminar on Climate Justice: Advancing Workers' Voices in BWI Industries*.
2. I am pleased to share this platform with BWI, an organisation that stands out among Global Union Federations for its unwavering commitment not only to workers' rights but also to climate action advocacy. BWI has been a pioneer, positioning Climate Justice as a key pillar in its strategic plan, and has developed the *BWI 100 Climate Actions Report*, which captures both the challenges and opportunities that workers face due to climate change. On that note, let us all give BWI a well-deserved round of applause.
3. The reason I stand before you today is simple yet profound: too often, the voices of workers are neglected in the global discourse on climate change.

4. We talk about emissions, technology, and policies, but we forget that the true engine behind all progress is the workforce—people who, day in and day out, build our economies, sustain our societies, and are the first to face the brunt of climate impacts.
5. What I would like to do is to delve into the challenges and opportunities that climate change presents to workers. We will explore how integrating labour, human, and environmental rights into our just transition efforts can not only protect workers but also empower them. Together, we can promote a Just Transition that truly leaves no one behind.

Ladies and gentlemen,

CLIMATE IMPACTS ON WORKERS

6. Climate change is an existential threat to humanity, and the Asia-Pacific region, and Malaysia, is no exception. Extreme weather threatens water supplies, food security, human migration, health, and job security. However, the most vulnerable to these threats are undoubtedly workers and marginalised communities. Again, let us consider how climate change impacts workers.
7. **Extreme Heat Stress:** Extreme heat has severe consequences worldwide, leading to multiple heat-related deaths, school closures, and severe heat warnings in countries including India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Malaysia.

Outdoor workers, particularly in sectors like construction and agriculture, are at high risk. Temperatures above 30°C increase the likelihood of work-related accidents by 10% to 15%. Prolonged exposure to heat stress also exacerbates medical conditions such as heart disease and high blood pressure.

8. **Health Risks:** According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), more than 70% of the global workforce—2.4 billion people—are now at risk of extreme heat. Heat stress is linked to a rise in heat-related deaths, with projections indicating a 370% increase by 2050 if temperatures exceed the 1.5°C threshold. Public health systems, especially in South Asia and Africa, are struggling to cope with the growing burden of heat-related illnesses. Repeated exposure to extreme heat can lead to long-term health issues, including increased risks of cancer, immune system dysfunction, eye diseases, heatstroke, dehydration, and cardiovascular diseases. Additionally, changing climate patterns contribute to poorer air quality, exacerbating respiratory conditions.
9. **Economic Impact on Jobs:** An ILO report on heat stress highlighted that the equivalent of 80 million full-time jobs could be lost by 2030 due to extreme heat, either because it is too hot to work or because workers must work at a slower pace.
10. Certain industries are likely to experience significant disruption due to climate-related changes. Agricultural workers, for example, face uncertain job futures with shifting crop viability zones and altered growing seasons.

Similarly, workers in coastal regions are at risk due to rising sea levels and increased storm intensity, affecting fisheries and tourism industries. Extreme weather events, such as floods, droughts, wildfires, and hurricanes, will also severely impact the building and wood industries by damaging business assets, transport routes, and infrastructure, leading to job losses.

11. **Migration and Displacement:** People will be displaced as certain regions become less habitable due to severe weather events or rising sea levels. This displacement often results in economic migration, where workers are forced to leave their homes and seek employment elsewhere, disrupting local labour markets and increasing competition for jobs in more stable areas.

12. **Energy Transition and Skills Gaps:** The transition to a low-carbon economy, accelerated by digitalisation and climate change adaptation, is rapidly evolving job roles and skills. Certain skills and jobs will need to be retired as they become irrelevant in this new economy, which may be offset by the emergence of new jobs. However, the energy transition is disrupting carbon-intensive industries, particularly in terms of job losses. As the renewable energy sector expands, disparities in its impact on workers are growing, given the skill gaps. Communities reliant on the fossil fuel industry for employment may also face retrenchment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

JUST TRANSITION AND MAINSTREAMING LABOUR RIGHTS

13. Climate change is a real and imminent threat with adverse impacts on humanity. As I have always emphasised, climate change will destroy us if we delay or do nothing to address it. To address these challenges, we must embrace the concept of the Just Transition—a transition that not only protects the environment but also safeguards human rights.
14. The Just Transition is rooted in the fundamental principle that our move towards a low-carbon, sustainable economy must be both inclusive and equitable. This is not simply about reducing emissions or adopting new technologies; it is about ensuring that no one is left behind in the process, particularly workers and marginalised communities.
15. At its core, the Just Transition integrates labour rights, environmental rights, and human rights into one cohesive framework. This integration is essential because the shift from carbon-intensive industries to greener alternatives can have significant socio-economic impacts, especially on workers and marginalised communities.
16. **Labour Rights:** Labour rights are at the heart of this transition. As we move towards a greener economy, we must ensure that workers' rights are protected. This means guaranteeing decent work, fair wages, safe working conditions, and social protection for all, particularly for those transitioning from fossil fuel industries to green jobs.

17. **Environmental Rights:** Environmental rights must also be upheld. As we strive for a sustainable future, it is crucial that communities have the right to a healthy environment. This includes protecting ecosystems, reducing pollution, and ensuring environmental justice for those disproportionately affected by environmental degradation.
18. **Human Rights:** Meanwhile, human rights serve as the overarching framework that ensures every individual, regardless of socio-economic status, has access to the benefits of this transition. This includes the right to participate in decision-making processes, access education and training for new jobs, and be protected against discrimination and exploitation.
19. Globally, the Just Transition acknowledges the need for climate justice, recognising both historical responsibilities, particularly from the Industrial Revolution, and current inequalities. Developed nations must support developing countries in their transition, while within nations, we must prioritise vulnerable groups. This is not just a matter of fairness; it is a necessity if we are to succeed in our climate goals.
20. The importance of a Just Transition in climate action cannot be overstated. Without it, our efforts to combat climate change risk deepening existing inequalities. Preventing inequities is one of the primary reasons why Just Transition is so vital. Workers in carbon-intensive industries and marginalised communities could face job losses, economic instability, and social exclusion if their needs are

not addressed in the transition process. We must ensure that these groups are not left behind.

21. Moreover, a transition that is seen as fair and inclusive is far more likely to gain broad social support, which is crucial for the success of ambitious climate goals. By involving all stakeholders—workers, unions, civil society organisations, affected communities, businesses, and governments—we can build a consensus that is essential for sustained climate action.
22. The Just Transition also plays a critical role in ensuring economic stability. The shift to a low-carbon economy should not come at the expense of economic growth. By protecting jobs and creating new opportunities in green industries, Just Transition helps cushion the economic impacts of the transition and provides a pathway to sustainable development.
23. The Just Transition is closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to decent work, reduced inequalities, and climate action. It provides a framework that ensures our climate action contributes to broader social and economic development objectives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

KEY ELEMENTS OF JUST TRANSITION ALIGNED WITH ILO'S DECENT WORK AGENDA

24. As we look to the future, the concept of green jobs must be closely linked to the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. Green jobs should not only contribute to environmental sustainability but also meet the criteria of decent work, including fair wages, safe working conditions, social protection, and the rights to organise and participate in social dialogue.
25. As the economy transitions to greener industries, skills development becomes increasingly important. Providing workers with the skills needed for green jobs ensures that they can benefit from new opportunities, rather than being left behind. This includes upskilling and reskilling programmes that are accessible to all workers.
26. Social protection and rights must also be integrated within green job policies. We must ensure that workers transitioning to these new roles do not lose their livelihoods or rights. This includes making sure that green jobs are covered by labour laws and that workers have access to social protection during periods of transition.
27. Effective social protection, such as unemployment benefits, healthcare, pensions, social insurance, and even worker protection against climate change induced occupational health and safety risk such as heat stress, is essential to support workers during the transition. The adequacy and accessibility of these measures will indicate the extent to which Just Transition is being achieved.

28. The involvement of all stakeholders, particularly workers and marginalised communities, in the decision-making process is a key indicator of success. This includes having platforms for social dialogue, collective bargaining, and community consultations.
29. Strong safeguards are needed to protect communities and ecosystems from the negative impacts of the transition. This includes measures to prevent pollution, protect biodiversity, and ensure that communities have access to essential services.

Ladies and gentlemen,

MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT IN JUST TRANSITION & GREEN ECONOMY

30. The Malaysia MADANI framework, introduced by the Unity Government, emphasises core values such as sustainability, justice, and inclusivity. These values align closely with the principles of the Just Transition, which aims to ensure that the shift toward a low-carbon economy is both equitable and inclusive.
31. The MADANI vision focuses on creating a just and sustainable economy. Within this framework, the Just Transition plays a critical role in balancing economic growth with environmental protection and ensuring that workers, especially those in carbon-intensive sectors, are not left behind in the transition to green industries.

32. Besides that, in the Mid-Term Review of the 12th Malaysia Plan (RMKe-12), the government reiterated our commitment to socio-economic reforms with a focus on sustainability and inclusive growth. The "Big Bold" measures were introduced aimed at accelerating green growth, reducing inequalities, and protecting the well-being of Malaysians, which are key aspects of Just Transition. The plan also outlines strategies for economic restructuring, particularly through high-growth, high-value industries, ensuring that workers in carbon-intensive sectors have opportunities for retraining in greener industries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT IN SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

33. As we strive to meet our climate targets and pursue more sustainable development pathways, we must not overlook the critical role forests play in maintaining global climate stability and addressing the effects of climate change. Each year, forests absorb approximately 2.6 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide, accounting for one-third of the CO₂ released from burning fossil fuels.

34. Malaysia remains committed to maintaining at least 50% of its land area under forest cover, a pledge made during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. Currently, 54.58% of

Malaysia's land area, is covered by forests and tree cover, reflecting our ongoing dedication to this commitment

35. In May this year, at the 19th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF19), I emphasised the importance of international financial support from global financial institutions like the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Such support is crucial for UNFF member countries, particularly developing nations, in implementing Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) initiatives through technology transfer and capacity development, enabling them to preserve and conserve their invaluable forest resources.
36. I also proposed that the UNFF be strengthened from a voluntary and non-legally binding instrument to a more formal framework, potentially in the form of a convention. This would bolster countries' commitments to the management, conservation, and sustainable development of forest resources.
37. As a developing country, Malaysia's economic development is guided by the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). In line with our commitments under various Multilateral Environmental Agreements, I assure you that Malaysia will continue to play a vital role in preserving and maintaining our natural resources for future generations.
38. Sustainable forest management is not solely about maintaining forest cover; it also involves producing sustainable products and adhering to core labour requirements, including the right to employment, the right to organise, and freedom of

association as outlined in the forest certification schemes by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). Forestry and timber workers, in fact, are the guardians of sustainable forest management.

CALL-TO-ACTIONS

39. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability (NRES) has undertaken numerous initiatives to help the country become more climate-resilient and committed to global climate action for a sustainable future. These include:

- i. Drafting the Climate Change Act, expected to be completed in 2025.
- ii. Developing the National Carbon Market Policy, to offer direction on carbon market mechanisms.
- iii. Preparing the Nationally Determined Contribution Roadmap (NDC Roadmap) and the Long-Term Low Emissions Development Strategy (LT-LEDS).
- iv. Strategically formulating the National Adaptation Plan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

CONCLUSION

40. The path to a sustainable future is not an easy one, but it is a path we must walk together. By integrating labour, human, and environmental rights into our Just Transition efforts, we can ensure

that this journey is just, equitable, and inclusive.

41. With your continuous engagement and the spirit of cooperation that defines this gathering, I am filled with optimism for our shared mission. Let us commit to working together, supporting each other, and building a future where every worker has a voice, every community is protected, and every nation is resilient.
42. Together, we can overcome the formidable challenges that lie ahead, and we will chart a course towards a sustainable, prosperous, and resilient future for all. Thank you, and I look forward to a productive and impactful seminar.