



Views of the Human Rights & Climate Change Working Group on the process for operationalization of a just transition mechanism

Submission issue: United Arab Emirates Just Transition Work Programme – process for operationalization of just transition mechanism

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About the submitter: The Human Rights & Climate Change Working Group is an informal group that brings together advocates and experts seeking to strengthen the recognition of the human rights dimensions of climate change and to secure adequate legal remedies for those impacted. It includes civil society organisations, Indigenous Peoples' and trade unions' representatives, scholars, and allies in intergovernmental organisations and national human rights institutions. The Working Group seeks to operate across traditional UNFCCC constituencies.

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Summary of proposals

The Just Transition Mechanism (BAM)'s operationalisation should do the following.

Operationalise human rights outcomes at COP30:

- Welcome effort to institutionalise years of dialogue and co-create clear, just and actionable pathways as well as address existing gaps, with the significant input of affected rightsholders and diverse experts.
- Move beyond recognition to meaningfully operationalise human rights obligations, principles and standards in practice, aligning guidance with recent climate advisory opinions.
- Embed meaningful and effective participation as a key priority and safeguard in the development of the Mechanism.
- Secure permanent, institutionalised representation of the UNFCCC constituencies on the Mechanism's operationalisation bodies to reflect representativeness and translate the whole-of-society commitment into the steering body's composition.

Consider a structure that allows the effective representation of parties, rightholders and experts:

- Deliver specific political and technical bodies to address the different axes linked to its mandate: Coherent and inclusive coordination; Multi-level and multi-sectoral knowledge development and exchange; and Technical and financial support.
- Create a "Permanent Committee" (Coordination body), and a "Technical Body", both considering a meaningful and effective participation of Parties and Non-Parties beyond the current constituency participation modalities.
- Be responsible, through the Permanent Committee and Technical Body, as the "operationalisation bodies", for the informed and effective deliberation of its members, considering regular meetings and at least one in-person meeting per year
- Enhance the current Just Transition Working Programme, ensuring an inclusive approach and an active participation of experts and rightsholders, to deliver specific inputs and recommendations in just transition processes, institutions and policies.

Deliver operational and tangible outcomes that can guide other UNFCCC bodies, and the implementation of just transition pathways on the ground:

- Give the Mechanism's Permanent Committee a formal mandate to transmit key findings and recommendations and to inform the CMA/COP and related UNFCCC bodies.
- Address the much-needed creation and circulation of guidelines in particularly needed areas that remain underserved by existing frameworks, be a space of knowledge-sharing, and map best practices of transitioning with meaningful respect to human rights.
- Actively create spaces for dialogue on a just transition grounded in human rights, generating new opportunities for exchange, learning and mutual accountability. Building on lessons from JTWP dialogues, the Mechanism has to ensure dialogues on deepening the understanding of just transition for specific sectors and regions.
- Maintain structured liaisons with external institutions that hold essential expertise.
- Deliver, through its operationalisation bodies, direct action and support to countries and communities through country-specific recommendations on aligning transitions to ongoing just transition principles; responses to concrete queries from government and

practitioners; and a publicly available database of just transition policies by countries.

I. Human rights outcomes at COP30 – and the way forward for operationalisation

A transition without human rights at its core will only reproduce business as usual instead of empowering people in the move towards a fossil-free future. The expansion of projects feeding into dependence on new forms of fossil fuels, but also the replication of extractivist patterns for resources employed in certain decarbonisation policies, would lead to new human rights violations instead of securing the long-overdue shift to a human rights economy that upholds human dignity as much as planetary boundaries. Moreover, this shift is essential to redress structural injustices across different segments of the current economic model that influence how transition policies are designed and implemented across different regions, blocking or delaying pathways aligned with the Paris Agreement.

The decision adopted at COP30 in the framework of the Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP)¹ was a breakthrough for centring justice in climate action, and a founding step to ensure the transition is fair and protects human rights for all and the environment. It put a vision of transition grounded in the international human rights framework at the heart of global climate negotiations – a vision that leaves no one behind but rather actively seeks the fulfilment of human rights, equality and non-discrimination principles.

The text includes the strongest human rights language ever in a COP decision, with key operational clauses recognising that transition pathways must respect, promote and fulfil all human rights and labour rights, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the right to health, the rights of Indigenous Peoples, people of African descent, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations, and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.² Moreover, the text rightly stresses that multi-stakeholder, people-centric, bottom-up, participatory, whole-of-society, whole-of-economy and multisectoral approaches are required to achieve the transition.³

The decision to develop a Just Transition Mechanism (or, as named by the cross-constituency proposal, “Belem-Antalya Mechanism” - BAM) and operationalise it by COP31⁴ is a welcome effort to **institutionalise years of dialogue and co-create clear, just and actionable pathways as well as gaps to be filled, with the significant input of affected rightsholders, workers and experts.** It will enhance international cooperation to accelerate and coordinate efforts to achieve a truly just transition with both the urgency and the human rights safeguards required, including in responding to the potential human rights impacts of transition decisions elaborated without preventive measures.

Critically, **the Mechanism must move beyond recognition to meaningfully operationalise human rights principles and standards in practice.** As anchored in paragraph 12 of the JTWP text and set forth in existing human rights and labour obligations, this operationalisation is essential to ensure that the Mechanism is co-built and informed by the voices and climate solutions of civil

¹ [Decision -/CMA.7 United Arab Emirates just transition work programme.](#)

² *Ibid.*, paragraphs 12H and 12I.

³ *Ibid.*, paragraphs 12C, 12 D and 12 F.

⁴ *Ibid.*, paragraphs 25 and 26.

society, workers, feminists, frontline communities and Indigenous Peoples – among many others – enacting a just transition at the local level. Operationalisation without compliance with human rights instruments and labour safeguards risks contributing to the systemic patterns of injustice and exclusion that have underpinned the fossil fuel-based model. In light of this, operationalisation is an opportunity to advance human rights through its work and modalities alike.

Finally, **the development of the Mechanism cannot be isolated from recent landmark climate advisory opinions**, which authoritatively and unequivocally affirm that States have binding obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil all human rights, including the right to a healthy environment, labour rights and Indigenous Peoples' rights, in their climate action. The opinions have further underscored the importance of procedural rights of access to information, meaningful participation, and access to remedy as integral to responses to the climate emergency.

II. State obligations on human rights in the Mechanism: A mandate for meaningful participation

The choice with operationalising the Mechanism is clear: to embrace human rights-based working methods that centre affected communities, workers, and other rightsholders and allow their priorities and solutions to be heard and implemented, or to risk perpetuating the very injustices that climate action must address.

The evidence shows that the meaningful and safe participation of human rights organisations and defenders has led to sustained transformation and alternative models of development that effectively implement a just transition while preventing or remedying environmental harm. But these essential changemakers are facing growing reprisals and restrictions on their work in both UN climate processes⁵ and their local realities.^{6,7} Additionally, as the workforce disproportionately shoulders the impacts of the economic transition, these defenders should be understood to include workers and their representative organizations⁸ who must be able to exercise their fundamental rights to organize and bargain collectively, without threat of retaliation, surveillance, or reprisal.⁹

⁵ OHCHR (2025), [COP30 note: The Right to Participation in the UNFCCC](#).

⁶ UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders (2025), [Report A/80/114 – Tipping points: human rights defenders, climate change and a just transition](#);

⁷ International Federation for Human Rights *et al.* (2025), [Human rights principles and defenders' role in just transition pathways](#).

⁸ UN Secretary General (2025), [Synthesis report on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people](#). A/HRC/60/52, para. 23, in addressing challenges and barriers to a just transition notes:

In line with the right to life, transitions must protect the life of all, including workers and human rights defenders. The rights to access to information and to free, active, meaningful and informed participation in public affairs are guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other instruments. The right to freedom of association and to form and join trade unions protects organized labour during transitions, as do the freedoms of expression and assembly.

Para. 47 adds:

Union organizing, which has historically been pivotal in advocating the right to work and to just and favourable labour conditions, should be protected in transition-related decision-making, planning and implementation, including through laws that enshrine the rights to strike and to join and form associations, including trade unions, and the freedoms of opinion and expression, and protect against anti-union discrimination.

⁹ The [ITUC Global Rights Index 2025](#) provides that the space for exercising labour rights is shrinking. Specifically in 2025, average country ratings deteriorated in three out of five global regions, with Europe and the Americas recording their worst scores since the Index's inception in 2014. The Index also notes that a growing number of state authorities are adopting legislation that criminalises civil society organisations –

Through a participatory Just Transition Mechanism, Parties have a unique opportunity to effectively strengthen civic space and meaningful participation in transition processes, upholding human rights protections and supporting the positive role of observers and defenders in climate action.

Within this context, meaningful, effective and inclusive participation must be a key priority and safeguard in the development of the Mechanism, including not only a citizen participation approach, but also specific participatory frameworks for rightsholders, such as social dialogue¹⁰, collective bargaining, and FPIC, among others. In that regard, **permanent, institutionalised representation of the UNFCCC constituencies in the Mechanism’s coordination structure must be secured to reflect representativeness and translate the whole-of-society commitment into the steering body’s composition.** This design is important for multiple reasons.

First, the strong presence of civil society as a whole in the Mechanism would provide a solid structure for dialogue and cooperation, offering effective space to raise and address new human rights challenges and opportunities linked to transition pathways. This is especially important to ensure the linkage between the work of an international space like the UNFCCC and the local contexts in which transition pathways are developed and implemented, with their related human rights and labour rights consequences. The knowledge-sharing, coordination and means of implementation addressed at the UN level should translate into concrete local outcomes, requiring civil society contributions to respond to local needs as much as universal human rights demands.

Second, such a participatory structure will lead to better, more sustainable outcomes overall. The shift toward a low-carbon economy is not only a technical challenge, but also fundamentally a participation issue: those most affected by climate policies have a direct say in shaping, implementing, and monitoring them, and they are also the ones who can secure durable societal buy-in for transition policies. Effective planning for a just transition only occurs when negotiations secured through social dialogue and meaningful rightsholder engagement occur.¹¹

Participation is not only procedural but a transformative tool, shaping governance outcomes and redistributing decision-making power – a premise of a just transition defined as such. Moreover, guarantees of participation, access to information, and transparency are matters of legitimacy for work that goes beyond the UNFCCC and JTWP confines, thereby leading to equity and empowerment for all. Crucially, this also provides space for significant exchanges on guardrail measures to prevent the negative impacts of transition measures on the most marginalised and exposed.

and, potentially, trade unions – as “foreign agents,” further delegitimising their role. Violations of the right to strike and the right to register a trade union remain at record levels, underscoring the intensifying crackdown on workers’ fundamental freedoms.

¹⁰ Social dialogue is both a means to achieve social and economic progress and an end in itself, as it gives people a voice and a stake in their societies and workplaces. See ILO, [Social dialogue and tripartism](#). See also UN Secretary General (2025), [Synthesis report on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people](#), para 58, which provides: “Collective bargaining, an important form of social dialogue, can lead to the incorporation of rights-enhancing measures into legally binding agreements, including regarding the impact of the climate on occupational health and safety. Social dialogue involving all workers regardless of status must be part of a just transition, in addition to stakeholder engagement.”

¹¹ UN Secretary General (2025), [Synthesis report on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people](#). A/HRC/60/52.

Third, procedural guarantees for the right to participation within the Mechanism would be reflective of obligations under international (e.g. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ICCPR) and regional (e.g. Aarhus Convention and Escazú Agreement) human rights law, but also international environmental law sources like the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC. Recent climate advisory opinions by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the International Court of Justice have further reiterated that public participation, access to information, and remedy are vital components of all environmental action and decision-making, drawing on existing norms and the specific challenges entailed in climate cooperation.

It is important to stress that participatory rights are also enshrined in several instruments and declarations linked to the rights of specific groups and peoples included in the aforementioned JTWP decision. That is the case, for instance, of consultation and Free, Prior and Informed Consent for Indigenous Peoples, social dialogue and collective bargaining for workers and their unions, and accessibility of information and processes for persons with disabilities.

As a result, securing a participatory Mechanism would reflect the international normative framework and its obligations, while fulfilling the JTWP's COP30 decision in its human rights components. It would also ensure that the knowledge, proposals, and concrete solutions arising from local realities inform and strengthen UN climate cooperation in the long term.

III. Structure of the Mechanism: Making meaningful participation happen

The cross-constituency proposal that led to the decision mandating the development of a Just Transition Mechanism includes a very specific, realistic, and ambitious structure for the Mechanism, including references to its functions, modalities, and outcomes. The COP30 decision and the reinforcement of human rights language as a key outcome of the negotiations should lead us to strengthen those proposals and understand them as a pathway to operationalise a human rights approach – through tangible institutions and processes that can change the reality of a just transition on the ground.

Regarding the functions of the Mechanism, the complexity and the “no one size fits all” nature of just transition requires the instrument's structure to enable diverse deliberation that allows for the implementation of differentiated transition pathways based on historical responsibility, capacity to act and development needs – while recognising common guidelines rooted in human rights and international cooperation.

Therefore, it has been clear that, to effectively and efficiently fulfill its mandate, a Just Transition Mechanism would need to address at least three main axes to effectively and efficiently fulfill its mandate: **1) Coherent and inclusive coordination; 2) Multi-level and multi-sectoral knowledge development and exchange; and 3) Technical and financial support.** Each of these critical functions would need to be linked to specific bodies to ensure timely, high-quality responses to them.

The coordination of the Mechanism would be one of the most challenging aspects of this institutionality. The diversity of the contexts, opportunities and challenges of each Party and rightsholders regarding the ongoing transitions will need a clear and robust steering role to identify the most urgent and strategic outcomes for this agenda. The Coordination Body will be in charge of registering all the existing just transition initiatives of its members, and ensuring that all the

examples (that will be treated as paradigmatic case studies and/or good practices) are aligned with the Paris Agreement, the human rights framework, and key principles of climate justice, such as the Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC).

The Coordination Body should take the form of a permanent and inclusive institution, such as a **Permanent Committee on Just Transition**. This Committee would need a structure that enables the **meaningful and effective participation of Parties and Non-Parties beyond the current constituency participation modalities**, including regular meetings (3-4 per year) and sufficient funding to hold at least one in-person gathering of its members each year. The participation of non-member parties would need to ensure representation of different sectors, levels of governance, regions, and the diversity of rightholders, including all the groups listed in the COP30 decision. A specific process would need to be developed for the election of non-party members, based on a demonstration of their active contributions to just transition pathways at the global, national, or local level.

The political guidance and leadership of the Permanent Committee would need to be complemented by a **Technical Body on Just Transition**, which could be responsible for organising the **instruments, processes, and technical inputs needed to support the Committee's informed and effective deliberation** (reports, events, expert invitations, case research, etc.). This Technical Body would need to have a similar composition to the Permanent Committee, but ensuring a stronger presence of technical experts in the areas to be addressed by the Committee. The Technical Body would operate more regularly than the Committee, without periodic meetings, but with a continuous workflow towards the Mechanism's several outcomes.

The technical and financial support function of the Mechanism would need to be addressed by these two bodies, which will combine their expert and political capacities to facilitate support in a variety of forms, from the identification of funding opportunities for just transition initiatives to mobilising public finance (ensuring a non-debt and economic justice approach, and avoiding reproducing dependency between regions or parties), technical capacity and technology transfer between Parties. Furthermore, the support should not be focused solely on project or infrastructure development, but also on supporting key institutional processes linked to just transitions, such as development planning, environmental assessment, governance structures, and, especially, ensuring the meaningful participation of rightholders in each of these processes.

Finally, the knowledge development and exchange function should be the main task of the current **Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP)**, adapting its structure to enable the generation of significant science-based information about the ongoing just transition pathways, and innovative approaches to fulfill the mandate of the Mechanism, **including specific inputs and recommendations to the operationalization of human rights in just transition processes, institutions, and policies**. Also, the JTWP will have to work in alignment with the Permanent Committee and Technical Body to develop in-depth and integral research of the highlighted cases identified by these bodies, to identify the core aspects behind the successes, failures, and overall good practices to enable just transitions at a regional, national and local level.

IV. Outcomes from the Just Transition Mechanism (BAM)

A just transition that is genuinely rights-based requires more than aspirational language – it requires institutional structures capable of producing concrete, accountable outcomes for the people most affected by the ongoing transition. As Parties move towards the operationalisation of the Mechanism, it is essential that its design reflect the full scope of what a just transition demands, including coherence across the international climate system, meaningful dialogue with relevant stakeholders, social dialogue with workers and their unions, robust guidance grounded in human rights, and clear accountability structures. For that, some outcome categories are central to the Mechanism’s mandate, although not exhaustive.

For the Mechanism to have a lasting impact, it should be coherently integrated into the existing UNFCCC architecture rather than operating as a parallel or isolated body. The Coordination entity (Permanent Committee) would benefit from a formal mandate to **transmit findings and recommendations and to inform the CMA/COP and bodies directly related to just transition pathways, such as the Katowice Committee of Experts of the Implementation of Response Measures (KC), the Adaptation Committee and the Technology Mechanism.** The Warsaw International Mechanism offers a useful precedent in this regard: its Executive Committee was constituted with representatives from across the Convention and given a mandate to provide information and recommendations to the COP.¹² A similar approach to the Just Transition Mechanism would help prevent the institutional siloing that has limited the reach of comparable mechanisms and ensure that just transition is treated as a cross-cutting concern throughout the Convention system.

A second critical function of the Mechanism should be the **creation of guidelines, knowledge-sharing reports, and analysis of best practices.** Decision 2/CP.30, Article 12 affirms human rights as foundational to just transition. Translating that affirmation into operational guidance is one of the most significant contributions the Mechanism can make. To that end, the improved version of the JTWP should systematically map and document cases from countries already conducting transitions that meaningfully respect, protect and fulfil human rights, drawing on national experiences, subnational initiatives, and sectoral processes. Complementing this, specific, process-level human rights safeguard guidance is particularly needed in areas that remain underserved by existing frameworks, such as critical mineral extraction and supply chains, renewable energy deployment with real benefit-sharing and energy justice considerations, agricultural and food systems transition, and a fossil fuel phaseout.

Guidance outcomes should be developed through structured, meaningful engagement with all nine official UNFCCC constituencies, with defined pathways for constituency inputs through the Permanent Committee, to shape the work programme instead of simply receiving guidelines. The Mechanism’s knowledge function should equally be designed with political uptake in mind: commissioning country case studies, reporting on progress made by voluntary initiatives, and linking outputs explicitly to NDC revision cycles and the Global Stocktake. This would help ensure that rights-compliant practice is recognised and encouraged within the Paris Agreement framework itself.

Furthermore, an important outcome of the Mechanism should be strengthening the **coordination and development of spaces for dialogue on a just transition grounded in human rights**, not merely coordinating with existing bodies, but generating new opportunities for exchange, learning and mutual accountability. The enhanced version of the JTWP should be empowered to continue convening thematic workshops, expert dialogues, and multi-stakeholder forums that bring together Parties, rightsholders, civil society, and relevant institutions around the specific challenges

¹² Decision 2/CP.19, paragraphs 2-4, [FCCC/CP/2013/10/Add.1](https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/decision_2_cp_19)

of rights-respecting transition pathways. This is a key action to develop high-level guidelines and reports, and to ensure enough representation of different regional contexts and just transition pathways.

The dialogues should build on lessons learned from the JTWP and ensure they deepen the understanding of what real solutions for a just transition mean in practice across different sectors — such as energy, agriculture, industry, and care economies — and for the diverse realities and transition pathways of different regions and country groupings. Drawing on the model of the WIM’s mandate to foster coherence and synergies across all relevant stakeholders and levels of governance¹³, these spaces should extend from the international to the national and local level, creating genuine space for the voices of the different constituencies, rightsholders, and frontline communities to inform the Mechanism’s work.

Alongside these internal dialogue processes, the Mechanism should **maintain structured liaisons with external institutions that hold essential expertise**, like the ILO on labour rights and decent work standards; UNCTAD on trade and investment regimes; UNDP/UNEP on SDG alignment; and the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, among others. Integrating these relationships into the Coordination Entity’s regular work plan would help ground the Mechanism’s outputs in the international human rights and labour frameworks that give just transition its substantive content.

Moreover, **delivering effective action and support to countries and communities is one of the most critical outcomes of the Mechanism**. Through its operational bodies (the Permanent Committee with the support of the Technical Body), the Mechanism would generate tangible results, including: country-specific recommendations on how to align ongoing initiatives with just transition principles; responses to concrete queries from governments and practitioners on emerging implementation challenges; and a consolidated, publicly accessible database of just transition policies and strategies by country, enabling peer learning and comparative analysis. For this, the Permanent Committee would be responsible for overseeing these outputs and ensuring they feed back into COP-level guidance, while the Technical Body would be responsible for delivering matchmaking between projects and funders, facilitating access to non-debt-inducing finance and technology transfer, to develop repositories of best practices, and ensuring that the most vulnerable countries and communities receive support that is responsible to their specific social, economic and labour realities.

Accountability is central to the Mechanism’s credibility and trust of the Parties, rightsholders and communities it is intended to serve. **Annual reporting to the COP** – consistent with the frameworks established for the WIM, the Technology Mechanism, and the Adaptation Committee – **would ensure that the Mechanism’s work remains visible and subject to review across the Convention’s technical and political streams**. Reports should cover the outcome of constituency engagement, progress on safeguard guidance development, the state of external institutional dialogues, and concrete recommendations to the CMA. Making these reports publicly available, accessible in all UN languages, and open to review by both Parties and non-Party stakeholders would reinforce the Mechanism’s legitimacy and its accountability not only to governments, but to the rightsholders whose interests it exists to advance.

¹³ Decision 2/CP.19, paragraph 5(b), [FCCC/CP/2013/10/Add.1](https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/decision_2_cp_19)