



Tripartite Africa Group Meeting

Opening Address by

Mr. Charles Dan

Assistant Director-General

&

Regional Director for Africa

Geneva, 17 June 2011

Honourable Ministers,

Dear Ambassadors,

Dear Hassan, Dear Azad,

Dear Coordinator, Samir Koubaa,

Dear African delegates,

Allow me to thank and congratulate Mr. Samir Koubaa our outgoing Coordinator for a job well done. Thank you so much, Samir, for your commitment to the success of our great continent. Thank you so much for your confidence in our ILO work in Africa. Thank you for your partnership. And above all, thank you for your friendship.

Dear Friends,

We live in a very unique moment in history, a period of great economic challenges and social hopes.

Before the global financial crisis, we were told deregulation and privatization would unleash growth. Financial markets would regulate themselves effectively and would channel resources to the most

productive areas. And the rising tide of globalization would ensure prosperity for all.

This is what the “Washington consensus” was all about – a consensus imported into Africa, just like the financial crisis was also imported. This all came crashing down with the crisis.

But we have seen a resilient Africa exit the crisis, and ready to take its place in the global economy.

Today we know that we have to look ahead collectively and agree on our own way out of the crisis. As expressed so well by H.E. President Jakaya Kikwete on Wednesday at our African Tripartite Group Meeting, we have to define our own development policy agenda.

And for Africa’s tripartite constituents, this is all about implementing the Ouagadougou Consensus and the Yaoundé Declaration.

The task before us is to rebuild the foundations of peace, stability and development through productive employment and decent work for all.

Let us not forget that the uprisings started in Africa, in Tunisia, in Egypt.

Today young people are calling for greater freedom, including freedom of association and collective bargaining, and a fairer distribution of economic opportunities.

We all know young Africans - women and men - are the key to Africa taking off.

But the jobs crisis is hitting the young especially hard. And what should have been a brief period in unemployment is turning into a life sentence of joblessness.

Providing decent jobs for young women and men should become the common uniting rallying point of all countries.

The Ministries of Labour and Employment find themselves as the catalyst for this common goal, but the responsibility lies with all government ministries and agencies, as well as with social partners and society as a whole.

Indeed responding to youth aspirations will require far reaching changes in political, economic, and social institutions. This will not be a one day process - institutional change of this scale takes time and effort. The immediate challenge is to preserve social cohesion without undermining macroeconomic stability.

Growth alone is not enough. We need an efficient growth to ensure that such growth has a concrete impact on poverty reduction and job promotion.

This is at the heart of the Director-General's report, "A New Era for Social Justice". And I think that after this discussion in the plenary in Geneva, we need to extend the same discussion on the ground in Africa - at national, sub regional and continental levels.

Indeed, we need policies to reduce inequality, and to ensure a fairer distribution of opportunities and resources. We need policies to protect the most vulnerable through decent work.

This reconnects to the Ouagadougou Declaration, Plan of Action and Follow-up Mechanism on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa, adopted in September 2004.

It also links our efforts to the 2009 Ouagadougou Roadmap; and the “Yaoundé Tripartite Declaration on the Implementation of the Social Protection Floor”.

So we need social dialogue and partnership, as it allows both the growth gains and adjustment pains to be shared fairly.

This is the very purpose of the Decent Work Country Programmes.

To date 27 countries have finalised and are implementing DWCPs, which are now being endorsed at the Cabinet level after their tripartite adoption.

And 21 countries are drafting their first or second phase DWCPs.

Together with you, we have also embarked on a series of initiatives to accelerate the realization of the Decent Work Agenda in Africa.

We promote women economic empowerment and gender equality as key development goals. We continue to be guided by the 2009 Cairo Platform for Action to promote women entrepreneurship.

We promote the social protection floor for all women and men, in line with the Yaoundé Declaration. We have specially prepared a document highlighting major post-Yaoundé follow up initiatives that we have embarked in 37 countries, as well as with two sub regions.

We promote youth employment. Together with the UN Economic Commission for Africa, and the African Union Commission we are developing an initiative by the African Development Bank on “Accelerating the AfDB’s Response to the Youth Unemployment Crisis in Africa”.

We promote the social economy as the bridge between informality and the formal economy.

We promote employment for peace, stability and development, especially in fragile states, through our work with IGAD and the

African Union, with the Conference of Stakeholders and Development Partners on “Employment for Peace, Stability and Development in the Horn of Africa”, held from 11-12 April 2011 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

We promote employment for stability and socioeconomic progress as an ILO approach in North Africa.

All these policies will remain mere aspirations at national level if we do not have strong institutions, particularly strong labour administration and labour inspection - as has been ably articulated at this year’s session of the International Labour Conference.

More and more is being demanded of labour and employment ministries - in ensuring decent employment, peace, stability and development.

And yet the contradictions are clear. Ministries responsible for labour and employment remain under funded and under-staffed. This perennial challenge has to be addressed.



At the generous invitation of the Government of the Republic of South Africa, the 12<sup>th</sup> African Regional Meeting will be held in Johannesburg from 11 to 14 October 2011. We will assess progress made and debate how we can accelerate the implementation of the Decent Work Agenda in Africa by 2015.

And it is a realistic dream. It is possible if we change the current pattern of growth.

Indeed Africa is one of the world's fastest-growing regions.

According to the newspaper *The Economist*, much has been written about the rise of the BRICs and Asia's impressive economic performance. But over the ten years to 2010, six of the world's ten fastest-growing economies were in sub-Saharan. On IMF forecasts Africa will grab seven of the top ten places over the next five years.

Over the past decade the simple average of countries' growth rates was virtually identical in Africa and Asia. Over the next five years Africa is likely to take the lead. In other words, the average African economy will outpace its Asian counterpart.

Our common challenge will be to make Africa's growth pattern an efficient growth with decent work for the benefit of our populations.

Thank you so much for your attention.