



PAN-AFRICAN PARLIAMENT
SECOND ORDINARY SESSION

Address

By

Mr. Charles Dan, ILO Regional Director for Africa

Midrand, South Africa, 14 April 2010

Monsieur le Président,

Honorables Membres du Parlement Panafricain,

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Au nom de notre Directeur général, M. Juan Somavia, permettez-moi de vous dire combien nous ressentons votre invitation comme un privilège et un plaisir. Félicitations, Monsieur le Président Moussa Idriss Ndele, pour votre leadership politique. Merci à tous de nous accueillir dans cette enceinte du dialogue africain.

L'Agenda du travail décent : une aspiration universelle, une revendication politique africaine

A travers vous, ce que nous voyons dans cette assemblée, c'est la volonté politique de l'Afrique de travailler ensemble pour un développement partagé.

Cette ambition vous honore et vous engage. Vous êtes porteurs des attentes de nos peuples. Ils ne demandent pas la charité. Ils réclament des opportunités - un accès à l'emploi ou à l'entrepreneuriat - pour offrir un avenir d'espoir à leurs enfants, leurs familles, leurs communautés.

Le grand défi politique auquel nous sommes confrontés est la crise mondiale de l'emploi et le déficit africain de travail décent. Ceci devrait être un domaine prioritaire de coopération entre les parlements africains et l'OIT.

Je suis heureux de rappeler ici la participation du Président du Parlement Panafricain à notre Colloque sur le Travail Décent pour « La mise en œuvre du Pacte Mondial pour l'Emploi en Afrique », tenu les 1^{er} et 2 décembre 2009 à Ouagadougou.

Dans son allocution, en présence de leurs Excellences, M. Blaise Compaoré, Président du Faso, Me Abdoulaye Wade, Président du Sénégal et M. Faure Gnassingbé, Président du Togo, le Président Ndele a rappelé que : « Les Parlements et leurs membres ont des responsabilités clés en matière de travail, d'emploi et de justice sociale. Leur participation est essentielle pour que se concrétise le principe du travail décent au service d'une mondialisation juste ».

En effet, l'Agenda du travail décent de l'OIT repose sur quatre objectifs stratégiques et interdépendants qui sont au cœur de votre mandat pour la paix et le développement, à savoir :

- la création d'emplois ;
- le respect des droits des travailleurs ;
- l'extension de la protection sociale ;
- et la promotion du dialogue social.

L'on me demande souvent si le concept de travail décent n'est pas un luxe pour l'Afrique ; si l'essentiel pour les Africains n'est pas seulement d'avoir un travail.

Non.

Le travail décent n'est pas un luxe. C'est une aspiration universelle, car « le travail n'est pas une marchandise ». Pour nous, c'est aussi une revendication politique. L'Afrique a suffisamment souffert de la traite des esclaves, de la colonisation et du travail forcé pour revendiquer aujourd'hui, pour ses filles et ses fils, le respect de la dignité au travail.

Un travail oui, mais un travail qui vous permette un revenu décent en fonction des réalités de votre pays - un travail oui, mais un travail qui vous autorise à dialoguer et à négocier pour faire valoir vos droits - un travail oui, mais un travail qui vous permette de cotiser pour votre protection sociale - qui vous permette à la fin de votre vie professionnelle d'avoir une retraite et de voir venir les choses sans l'angoisse des lendemains imprévus.

C'est cela l'Agenda du travail décent tel que défini par l'OIT. C'est aujourd'hui un instrument international de justice sociale pour une mondialisation équitable.

Cette avancée doit beaucoup à l'Afrique grâce au Sommet Extraordinaire des Chefs d'Etat et de Gouvernement de l'Union Africaine sur l'Emploi et la Lutte contre la Pauvreté, tenu à Ouagadougou en septembre 2004, qui a reconnu l'Agenda du travail décent de l'OIT comme un agenda de développement.

Mais nous voyons bien aujourd'hui que partout dans le monde, les retombées de la crise financière et économique globale représentent un défi pour l'aspiration à un travail décent pour tous.

Sommes-nous en mesure de relever ce défi en Afrique ?

Oui.

Pour cela nous devons faire avec réalisme les analyses politiques pertinentes et engager avec courage les changements économiques nécessaires.

Escaping from the jobless growth trap

Mr. President,

Honourable Members of the Pan-African Parliament,

Decent work is at the heart of people's lives. No political election without employment promises - No possible re-election without employment delivery. This is today the political message of our peoples.

To respond concretely to their call for more jobs, the priority is to escape the trap of Africa's jobless growth.

Indeed, Africa achieved relatively high growth rates in the last ten years, culminating in a continent-wide average rate of 6.4 per cent in 2007.

But despite these high economic growth rates, Africa is still home to the largest number of working poor in the world.

And ILO's statistics show that the overall official unemployment rates in Africa have remained around 8% for many years. This is less than the average unemployment rate in the Euro zone, which reached 10% last month. Does this mean that Africa is better off than Europe in terms of employment? No, people simply do not appear in labour market statistics - whose validity is questionable anyway - and they are forced by circumstances to work in the informal economy.

This is also valid for Africa's youth. The youth unemployment rate increased from 14.0 per cent to 14.4 per cent in 2009. Youth make up to 45 per cent of the total unemployed of the continent.

But, I submit to you that the official unemployment rate is politically meaningless in the current African context. Much more telling is the rate of *vulnerable employment*. Vulnerable employment means that a worker, despite toiling for long hours under hard conditions, still does not earn enough to meet his most basic needs and those of his family.

About 258 million women and men in Africa were in vulnerable employment in 2009 representing 70.3 per cent of the total employment; and about 201 million women and men were poor workers (54.8 per cent of total employment), i.e. living with their families on less than US\$ 1.25 a day.

And women in vulnerable employment were 82 per cent in 2009 against 63 per cent for men. As a group they are still mostly concentrated in low-paid and low-skilled jobs in the service sector, in the informal economy and in agriculture.

The employment situation has been aggravated by the severe impact of the global economic and financial crisis. The overall economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa slowed down sharply from 5.4 per cent in 2008 to 1.2 per cent in 2009.

According to many analysts, economic activity in Africa is expected to recover in 2010, with GDP projected to grow at an average of 4.1 per cent.

But there will be no recovery without jobs creation.

A major part of the inability of African economies to generate productive and decent jobs can be attributed to the inadequate economic growth and lack of growth in labour-absorbing sectors. The policy issue at stake here is the sectoral composition of output growth.

If employment is to grow fast enough to absorb the increasing labour force in African economies, we will need to diversify the structure of our economies.

And jobs creation cannot be perceived anymore by policy-makers as a by-product of growth, but rather as a primary objective of national development policies.

Making employment a central objective of national policies

In the ILO, we strive for open economies and open societies.

But we have to acknowledge that the drivers of Africa's development are out of our hands: commodities exports revenues - outside driven; foreign direct investment - outside driven; tourism - outside driven; official development assistance (ODA) - outside driven; remittances from migrant workers - outside driven.

For instance, the reality is that when we are exporting our commodities as raw materials, we are exporting our potential for jobs creation.

This was the ILO's message at the AU / ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development held in Lilongwe last month: we must add value to our products, be they agricultural commodities or minerals. For too long, Africa has exported her wealth in its crudest, rawest form only to use the proceeds to buy more sophisticated goods.

In essence, we must work to ensure that our different economic sectors are integrated and mutually-sustaining and supporting.

Empowering people

Today, Africa needs a development paradigm shift with policies grounded in Africa's realities and own interests. It means more localization of African economies. It means more intra-African trade. It means more regional integration because "globalization begins at home".

Of course, there is no single answer or magic recipe. But we should never forget that there is no development without investment in human resources. That is the key role of leadership to put in place governance structures that ensure people's empowerment.

Whenever you empower peoples, you empower Africa, so I would like here to propose five possible policy directions:

First, we should create opportunities - for both women and men, with a specific reference to tackle gender inequality and address any legal discrimination against women. This requires strategic policy decisions to invest in education and workers' skills development, skills upgrading and reskilling, productivity and sustainable enterprises. And this means recognizing the contribution of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-enterprises to job creation, and promoting measures, including access to affordable credit, that would ensure a favourable environment for their development.

Second, we should establish a "social protection floor" - by ensuring access to basic social services to the poor and vulnerable. According to the Chief Executive Board (CEB) of the United Nations, such a basic social protection floor could consist of two main elements: on one hand, - services - which means geographical and financial access to essential public services (such as water and sanitation, health and education); and on the other hand, - transfers - that means a basic set of essential social transfers, in cash and in kind, paid to the poor and vulnerable to provide a minimum income security. And here, I would like to extend on time our invitation to the Regional Summit on Social Security – Building a Social Protection Floor for Africa – to be held from 5-7 October 2010 in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Third, we should guarantee workers' rights - I am proud to salute the role played by Parliaments as the vast majority of African countries have already ratified ILO's eight core conventions on fundamental principles and rights at work. But we need to do more in enforcing their effective application at the national, local and enterprise level; and we should promote other international labour standards that support the economic and jobs recovery and reduce gender inequality

Fourth, we should encourage organization - Poor people can gain voice and influence by joining forces with others. It means encouraging social economy (cooperatives, micro-credit institutions, mutual benefit associations, local development and community-based initiatives) as a "connecting bridge" between formal and informal economies that have been dichotomized for too long.

And fifth, we must engage in social dialogue - as a strong basis for building the commitment of social partners - employers and workers - to joint action with governments, including in the design of national policies.

Mr President,

Honourable Members of the Pan-African Parliament,

Opportunities - Protection - Rights - Organization and Dialogue, we all share these values and we are proud to be associated with your great Pan-African ambition. We look forward to continuing this cooperation at all levels in particular with the Committee on Health, Labour and Social Affairs and other Working Groups as Decent Work cuts across the work of all your Permanent Committees. We have an office in Pretoria and our Regional Office for Africa, based in Addis Ababa, is just a call away. We strongly believe that your role is key to empowering our people. And empowering people is unleashing Africa's enormous potential for development – to move ahead – to win the fight against poverty - and to achieve our goal: Decent Work for all.

Thank you so much for your kind invitation and attention.