



**Ministerial Meeting of the 9th Ordinary Session of the
Labour and Social Affairs Commission of the
African Union**

Opening Remarks

by

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Dear Chairperson of the AU Labour and Social Affairs Commission,

Dear AU Commissioner for Social Affairs,

Honourable Ministers,

Dear Ambassadors,

Dear Members of the ILO Governing Body,

Dear Tripartite Representatives of Africa,

Dear colleagues,

Dear friends,

Let me start by conveying the deep regrets and best wishes of the ILO Director-General, Mr. Guy Ryder, who had to attend the 9th ILO European Regional Meeting which is closing today in Oslo, at a period of great uncertainties in the Eurozone.

Thank you so much, Commissioner Kaloko, for the honour conferred to the ILO to address this important gathering. And thank you for your outstanding leadership.

Congratulations Honourable Chairperson for Namibia's achievements in driving our unique tripartite body over the last two years.

Like China at the beginning of the 80s, like India or Brazil since the 90s, Africa has started the 21st century by stopping the spiral of under-development in which it was trapped for too long.

Africa's economic growth reached 5 % on average since 2000.

And for 2013, an average growth rate of 6.2% is expected.

Vast natural resource discoveries, democratic deepening and improved macroeconomic governance have all contributed to bring about this African economic renaissance.

According to a recent book titled "The Fastest Billion - The Story behind Africa's Economic revolution" and published by Mr Charles Robertson with 10 co-authors including African economists, the most remarkable progress in Africa will occur in the next two generations. The authors expect Africa's GDP to increase from 2 trillion US Dollars today to 29 trillion US Dollars in today's money by 2050. By that date, Africa will produce more GDP than the US and Eurozone do today together.

Africa is moving.

But we can all see that “Economy Africa” is running much faster than “Social Africa”.

And we all know that sustained economic growth is virtually impossible without substantial human development.

Africa cannot win if its “Economic Team” is getting ready for the Olympic Games while its “Social Team” is not offered the same opportunities.

But to achieve that balance you need the appropriate institutions and policies.

Let me commend here the new AU Commissioner for Social Affairs, Dr Kaloko, for selecting as the theme of this session the pressing need to enhance the capacity of the labour market institutions to meet Africa’s challenges.

Today in this gathering, Honourable Ministers, distinguished leaders of employers’ and workers’, you represent this capacity to lead the socio-economic change, because you are the unique Africa Tripartite Team. Together, you are Africa’s best development chance.

And I would like to confirm that the ILO stands ready to accompany and support your efforts.

As many of you are aware, the ILO Director-General, Guy Ryder, has proposed eight Areas of Critical Importance for action in his ILO’s 2014-15 Programme and Budget proposals.

Let me highlight here these eight critical areas:

promoting more and better jobs for inclusive growth;

jobs and skills for youth;

creating and extending social protection floors;

productivity and working conditions in SMEs;

decent work in the rural economy;

formalization of the informal economy;

strengthening workplace compliance through labour inspection; and

protection of workers from unacceptable forms of work.

It is clear that these eight areas of critical importance reflect the needs and priorities of the Africa region, as highlighted in the 2004 Ouagadougou outcomes and the Decent Work Agenda in Africa 2007-15.

As a son of Africa, let me recommend you to fully support these proposals during the official adoption of the ILO's 2014-15 Programme and Budget, next June in Geneva, in line with the position taken by the African group of our Governing Body.

But today, I would like to focus on two urgent policy challenges for Africa: youth development and inclusive and sustainable development.

First, youth development:

In Africa, 10 to 12 million young people are entering the labour markets every year, only to find that the decent work doors are closed. The result is a fast growing number of educated unemployed young people, whose lives are delayed. Today, we have a massive "floating generation" while Africa's development needs a "booming generation".

The prime political challenge going forward, across Africa, is clearly youth employment.

We cannot expect Africa's youth to drive our African Union tomorrow if Africa cannot turn their productive aspirations into concrete decent jobs opportunities today.

Assigning political priority to youth employment will require an integrated policy agenda. The right mix of macroeconomic policies and active labour market policies can foster youth employment creation. This right policy mix should encourage private sector initiatives, strengthen skills, and promote economic diversification through sectoral and local development strategies.

And I would like to compliment the AU Commission for its initiative to develop a Youth and Women Employment Pact for Africa. And because nobody can do it alone, I would like to underline the importance of the First AU/ADB/ECA/ILO Joint Initiative on Youth Employment which will be launched later today.

And this leads me to my second point - the need for an inclusive and sustainable development.

Globally, about 45 to 50 million new jobs will be needed each year over the next ten years just to keep up with the growth of the world's working-age population and reduce the unemployment caused by the crisis.

Widening inequalities in income and opportunity within and across countries are fuelling the risk for a downward cycle of economic, political and social turmoil.

Setting the global route toward inclusive and sustainable development must be anchored in jobs and protection.

The Outcome Document of the Regional Consultations in Africa on the Post-2015 Development Agenda goes in the right direction as it includes the promotion of decent jobs and improved access to social protection.

But, there is a strong need to go much further and upgrade the objective of full and productive employment and decent work as a central goal of the Post-2015 development agenda.

It should come with agreed parameters to help national stakeholders define targets adapted to the circumstances and needs of their countries, within the overall framework of equality, sustainability and human rights.

In this context, labour productivity, labour migration, social dialogue, public employment services, labour market information systems, labour inspection, social security institutions, and workers' rights should get priority attention at the highest political level.

We have worked hard with all of you to include these labour and social priorities in your national agendas.

Today, we are proud to stress that 30 Decent Work Country Programmes have been finalized while so many others are being negotiated.

Still, much more needs to be done to address gender inequalities, lower HIV/AIDS prevalence, formalize the informality and improve the distribution of social services.

Next year, the final review of the Ouagadougou Follow-Up offers a key opportunity to connect Post-2015 and Ouagadougou + 10.

But it is also an opportunity for introspection. Are there any aspects of the Ouagadougou Plan of Action we need to revisit? Should we replicate Ouagadougou 2004 for another 10 years? Or should we be more forward-looking and start designing today, here in Addis Ababa, the "Ouagadougou 2025 Agenda".

Africa is moving and together we can move it faster. We will not wait 2050 to see the Golden Age of Africa.

If the 18th Century was French with the Age of Enlightenment, if the 19th Century was British with the Domination of the Seas, if the 20th Century was American with the US Superpower and also Asian with the emergence of China and the Asian Tigers, we all know that the 21st Century will be ours.

As we are celebrating the 50th Anniversary of our continental unity, what I feel mounting in Africa is an incredible amount of creativity and energy. And what I see growing is an All for one and One for All Africa ready to turn the 21st century into “The Africa Century” through productive and decent work for all.

Thank you so much for your attention.