

***SPEECH by Omar Faruk Osman, General Secretary, Federation of Somali Trade Unions (FESTU)***

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Somalia's social and economic development has been hampered by insecurity resulting from a long period of armed conflict that followed the collapse of the State institutions for decades and vulnerability induced by climatic disasters, now worsened by the recent outbreak the dreadful Covid-19 pandemic that has negatively impacted lives and livelihoods.

But it cannot be denied that one of the main root causes of the Somali conflict was lingering poverty, discrimination, violation of human rights and social injustice.

Today still, about 4.7 million people in Somalia are in need of livelihood support. Basic services are weak, chronically underfunded and inequitably distributed. Our country is experiencing a youth bulge with over 70 per cent of its population under the age of 30 years and is facing a chronic problem of unemployment and underemployment.

About 90 per cent of the labour force is found in the informal economy and is characterized by widespread decent work deficits, which has contributed significantly to the race to the bottom, an increased fragility, a high frequency of human rights violations, in particular those of the rights of women and young workers as well as those trapped in child labour. These challenges take place in the context of a country with a considerable natural resource base, most of which has been under-exploited.

What certainly aggravated the crisis, was the total disregard of working people and the outright rejection of any form of social dialogue, resulting in hostile labour and industrial relations and frequent conflicts and disputes in workplaces across the country.

That notwithstanding, over the past two years, the tide has dramatically changed for the better as social dialogue and tripartism have been embraced by tripartite constituents – thanks to the diplomatic work of the ILO. Conducive working relationship based on consensus, confidence and trust building between the government and trade unions has not only enhanced social peace in the country but has also opened the door for the establishment of the first formal tripartite structure, Somali National Tripartite Consultative Committee to deal with labour issues including policies of relevance to the post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction, reintegration, prevention, mitigation and preparedness.

Guided by the key principles that workers are peacebuilders and essential partners of progress, the Federation of Somali Trade Unions (FESTU) has consistently played a frontline role in the development of progressive policies including the Labour Code, National Employment Policy, Social Protection Policy and National Development Plan,

which are anchored on the Decent Work Agenda, the ILO Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work and the UN SDG No. 8.

Martin Luther King said: 'True peace is not merely the absence of tensions. It is the presence of justice.' In our experience, the absence of social dialogue and the lack of decent work opportunities to address particularly the employment appetite of young workers provide a breeding ground for conflict and social crisis. The very purpose of conflict resolution is to achieve a solution acceptable to the parties through social dialogue and based on justice, fairness and equity. Although human functioning requires individual thinking, initiative and creativity, group participation is imperative for the attainment of durable peace and social cohesion in the resolution of any conflict situation.

We continue to insist on the fact that young people are an asset rather than a liability for the socio-economic development of our country if their talents and energies are properly harnessed. Therefore, the current predicament of young people, characterized by alarming rates of unemployment and underemployment, poses serious security risks and, if not addressed, will continue to undermine the development efforts of Somalia and increase its vulnerability to further civil strife and conflict.

In this context, FESTU will continue its participation in national processes, including the elaboration of various development policies and programs, the implementation of which will help to sway young people away from a warfare mentality by directing their mind, energy and time towards decent work opportunities aimed at achieving inclusive growth and sustainable development.

There is an adage that says that an **"idle mind is the devil's workshop"**. FESTU believes in this adage and will therefore continue to advocate the support of the international community to provide requisite assistance that will foster reconciliation, enable citizens to speak truth to power, strengthen human rights, and increase the employability and inclusion of Somali youth into gainful employment and income generating activities.

Peace building must be everyone's business and must involve the participation of all. It is not a zero-sum game. If achieved, it will pay dividends for all Somalis by living in an environment of peace and stability, which is a necessary pre-condition for ensuring rule of law, democracy, good governance, inclusiveness, social cohesion and prosperity for all.