



13th African Regional Meeting

Introduction of the Director-General's Report

“Towards inclusive and sustainable growth in Africa

through Decent Work”

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**Chairperson, Honourable Minister of Labour and Social Affairs
of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia;**

- **Honourable Ministers;**
- **Secretary General of the 13th ARM, Director-General Guy
Ryder;**
- **Esteemed Tripartite Constituents;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**It is my pleasure and honour to introduce to you the report
prepared by the ILO Director-General for the 13th African
Regional Meeting.**

**In yesterday's opening address the Director-General touched
upon the principal elements of the first part of his report,
published under the heading "prospects and challenges to achieve
sustainable development in Africa". I will therefore focus my
presentation on the report's second part, which consists of the
final review of the Decent Work Agenda in Africa (2007-15).**

What is the origin of this Agenda? In June 1999, on the occasion of the 87th International Labour Conference, former ILO Director-General Juan Somavia presented the concept of Decent Work to the tripartite constituency. As any new idea, the notion of Decent Work was initially greeted with a good deal of scepticism, but quickly gained recognition and broad support throughout the world. Today, the term “Decent Work” has become an integral part of the global vocabulary, and is as such solidly anchored in global agreements, including the recently-adopted Sustainable Development Goals.

Already in 1999 it was evident to everyone that the global goal of Decent Work could be achieved only through concrete action at the national level. This led in October 2000 to the decision by the ILO to launch Decent Work Pilot Programmes in eight countries – two of which were African: Morocco and Ghana – as a testing ground for what was to become, six years later, the Decent Work

Country Programmes. Such programmes are now operational in ILO Member States in Africa.

So in 2006, we had a well-established *universal* concept of Decent Work, and we were moving towards the first generation of Decent Work *Country* Programmes – but we had nothing equivalent at the regional level. To fill this gap, the 2006 ILO Regional Meetings in Asia-Pacific and the Americas adopted regional Decent Work *Decades*, covering the period 2006 to 2015. The Africa region met one year later, here in Addis Ababa, for the 11th African Regional Meeting, and adopted the Decent Work *Agenda* in Africa 2007 to 2015. The target year of 2015 was maintained in all instances to align the programmes with the completion dates of the Millennium Development Goals and of ILO’s Strategic Policy Framework – but the African programme no longer covered a decade, hence the expression “agenda”.

The regional Decent Work Agenda had two principal objectives:

- **To adapt the global Decent Work concept to the realities prevailing in different parts of the world;**
- **To provide a conceptual framework for the formulation of Decent Work Country Programmes in those regions.**

Amongst the three regional frameworks, the Africa agenda was certainly the most ambitious, with not less than 17 targets that needed to be achieved not later than 2015 by the great majority, if not all, African nations within nine years.

So, where do we stand today?

The Director-General's report provides a detailed account of the achievements and shortcomings under each of the 17 targets, and gives numerous concrete country examples. In the interest of time, I will not go into a great amount of detail, but rather attempt to paint a broader picture of the evolution of the world of work in Africa since 2007.

Nine years ago, we had to struggle to make employment a distinct goal of national policies. Today, job creation is at the centre of national policies everywhere. Nine years ago, social protection was available only to a small minority of workers in the formal economy. Today, more and more African countries adopt policies that extend a minimum of social protection to all, including the most vulnerable.

Africa has made tremendous progress in advancing and extending social dialogue and tripartism, while the ratification of ILO's fundamental principles and rights is almost universal on the continent. This has translated into effective programmes to progressively eliminate child labour as well as forced labour. Most African countries have made progress in domesticating labour standards to improve workers' protection. A vibrant domestic private sector drives the continent's steady economic growth, creating jobs for millions of youths. The average GDP per capita in sub-Saharan Africa now stands at over 3,300 US\$, 28 of 54 Africa's nations are classified as middle or high income,

and in many of those we witness the emergence of an African middle class. In other words: many of the Decent Work Agenda targets are being achieved.

Yet, while acknowledging these positive trends, the Director-General's report reminds us that several targets lag behind: youth unemployment remains high on the continent, the informal economy continues expanding, inequality keeps growing, and the implementation of labour standards has not kept pace with their ratification. Social protection coverage, although improving, is still far from being universal; in several African countries, social dialogue suffers from the fragmentation and insufficient representativity of social partner organizations, and many African governments still lack the institutional capacity to implement commitments and enforce legislation.

Moreover, new challenges affect our continent: the Decent Work Agenda in Africa included a target relating to HIV/AIDS at the

work place – but could, of course, not predict the catastrophic Ebola outbreak last year. The Agenda included a target on “job creation for conflict prevention and reconstruction”, but did not address the wider spectrum of state fragility, which we will discuss in a side event tomorrow. Thirdly, the Agenda looked at migration only from a continental perspective, not anticipating the current mass emigration of young Africans to wealthier continents. And, finally, the Decent Work Agenda in Africa was formulated at a time when terrorism was a distant threat to Africa. Now, terrorist attacks have become an almost daily occurrence. Boko Haram assaults communities in Nigeria and neighbouring countries, Al-Shabab destabilizes the Horn of Africa, Al Qaida threatens North Africa and the Sahel, and all three movements are loosely united through their connections with the so-called Islamic State.

Despite these challenges and threats we have much reason to look towards the future with hope and optimism. It is not just the record economic growth, the youthfulness of our peoples and the

wealth of natural resources that we possess; Africa has embarked upon a structural transformation which promises to develop the continent into an economic giant of the future. Ethiopia, our host country, is determined to become “a carbon-neutral, middle-income manufacturing hub by 2025”. Other countries will undoubtedly follow her lead.

For many decades African governments have deplored the fact that the continent exports unprocessed raw material and primary agricultural commodities while importing finished goods from elsewhere. Today more and more industries are relocating to Africa, taking advantage of a plentiful youthful workforce, the availability of natural resources, the proximity of major consumer markets and continuous improvements in infrastructure and communications. The Africa of tomorrow will export garments rather than cotton, cables rather than copper, vehicles instead of iron ore, coffee instead of coffee beans. The continent’s structural transformation will create massive job

opportunities and greatly expand the country's fiscal space to finance social programmes.

For this to happen the Director-General's report has identified a number of critical factors which facilitated the implementation of the DWAA, such as:

- **National ownership of, and commitment to, the development process;**
- **The domestic funding of the development process in addition to ODA and FDI;**
- **The establishment of multi-stakeholder alliances and comprehensive partnerships in support of Decent Work;**
- **A focus on large-scale, long-term interventions rather than ad-hoc projects;**
- **The acceleration of regional integration across the continent.**

Several of these points remind us that the ILO cannot achieve the objectives of the Decent Work Agenda *alone*. We need first and

foremost to build on our solid partnership with the African Union; I humbly propose that the conclusions of the 13th Regional Meeting be closely aligned with the AU Declaration and Plan of Action on Employment, Poverty Eradication and Inclusive Development.

Secondly, we must take advantage of the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action (adopted this July) and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which both have recognized Decent Work as a key driver of development.

(Green jobs ?)

Thirdly, we must engage the entire United Nations Development System around the objective of Decent Work, because this is a goal to which each and every UN agency can contribute.

And finally, we must develop a new generation of African Decent Work Country Programmes, as a series of programmes which are entirely owned by our national constituents and are, therefore, to

a large extent, financed from domestic sources. This should also include the formulation of sub-regional Decent Work Programmes which the African region has pioneered.

Let me conclude by citing Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, when she addressed the International Labour Conference in 2006: “Decent work is one of the democratic demands of people everywhere. The Decent Work Agenda is an agenda for development that provides a sustainable route out of poverty”.

Honourable Chair,

With these few words, I commend to you and the tripartite constituency of the ILO, the Director-General’s Report to the 13th African Regional Meeting for your kind consideration.

Thank you for your attention.

