



Fourth (special) sitting

Monday, 4 June 2007, 11.35 a.m.

President: Mr. Sulka

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR. JOHN KUFUOR, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA

The PRESIDENT

I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Somavia, Secretary-General of the Conference, to welcome our distinguished guest, President Kufuor of the Republic of Ghana.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL

Your Excellency we are very proud to welcome you to this 96th Session of the International Labour Conference of Governments, Employers and Workers – this great assembly of world tripartism. It is a profound honour that you have honoured us with your presence as your country celebrates its golden jubilee year. In welcoming you, we welcome the leader of a nation whose independence, 50 years ago, helped set the stage for the liberation of the entire African continent. We welcome an exceptional lawyer, business leader, long-time public servant, Member of Parliament, diplomat, and former Deputy Foreign Minister. But we welcome, above all, the Chairman of the African Union, who was elected unanimously to that position and has carried on the pan-African vision of your countryman, Kwame Nkrumah.

(Applause)

And dear friends, we welcome a President who has stood against intolerance and staunchly defended human rights.

Mr. President, you know the price of freedom – having been jailed twice for fighting for your ideas and ideals.

(Applause)

You bring a unique vision and panorama of experience to our assembly. As a local leader, having helped to manage Ghana's second largest city and then served as secretary of local government; as a national leader, highlighting the priorities of social stability through youth employment, private sector development and good governance; as a regional leader helping to broker and secure peace in some of the most difficult and bloody conflicts in neighbouring countries; as a continental leader, strengthening the institutions of governance and reinforcing the new partnership for Africa's development by putting Ghana forward as the first country to be part of the NEPAD peer review process – you lead by example; and as a global leader representing Africa throughout the world as Chairman of the African Union, an African Union that is sure of

itself, who knows the role it has to play in the Africa that is emerging today.

Your Excellency from the local to the global, you bring to us a reservoir of experience and vision that is both deep and wide. Let me say on a personal note and as a friend of Africa, that I saw your personal leadership on display at the landmark African Union Summit on Employment and Poverty Reduction in Ouagadougou, and at the regional employment and poverty summit in Cotonou, where we had the opportunity to discuss all these matters before the Ouagadougou process and before the leadership that Africa gave to the world made the Decent Work Agenda into a global agenda. It started in Africa, it started in Cotonou, it started in Ouagadougou and it started under the leadership of the African Union. Your voice was instrumental in the success of both summits. It strongly made the case for decent work and a decent life for the people of Ghana, of the continent and of the world. A Ghanaian proverb reminds us: "Not gold, not cloth: it is the human being that counts."

Mr. President, you are showing your commitment to the values of the ILO through your policies and through your presence here. As you are here with us, let me say that I think that I interpret everybody in this room to say that we will also be with you in the pursuit of decent work, a fair globalization, social justice for the people of Ghana and all of Africa. Thank you so much for honouring us here.

Mr. KUFUOR (President of the Republic of Ghana)

I wish to express my appreciation to the Director-General for the invitation to share some thoughts with you at the 96th Session of the International Labour Conference. I feel really honoured by this invitation.

As the President of the Republic of Ghana and the current Chairman of the African Union, I see the invitation as an honour to Ghana and indeed Africa.

Before I proceed, let me congratulate you, Mr. President, and your Officers for your election to the Presidency and Vice-Presidencies of the Conference.

The 96th Session of the International Labour Conference is taking place at a critical moment for Africa, a time when the whole of Africa is making efforts to transform itself within the context of globalization. Globalization has presented all the nations of the world with new and varied challenges which require new responses – responses which must have the human being as the focus and not as an incidental addition. Indeed the world has been caught in the

globalization net and must adjust to that reality for the benefit of all mankind.

The phenomenon of globalization which, in hindsight, was always insinuated in the dynamics of the scientific and technological age in the world, has been gathering momentum over the past two decades, especially with the collapse of the Cold War. The advent of the era of electronics and its derivatives of computers and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is virtually shrinking the globe to the size of a village. It is revolutionizing the mode of production and radically reclassifying communities and nations. Its mastery and innovative uses are unleashing untold wealth for its masters, no matter who and where they are geographically. Those who have not caught on are, however, threatened with abysmal relegation and irrelevance. Ominously, by far the majority of the world's population, including most African nations, is in the category of this endangered group. This rapidly widening gap is the main challenge the globalization process poses to humanity, and it is both material and moral.

Fortunately, the United Nations Organization and its agencies, including the International Labour Organization, the G8 and the various continental and regional groupings around the world, are awakening to this danger and are committing themselves individually and collectively to searching for appropriate interventions to enable mankind to contain and overcome this threat as much as possible.

As a forum, the ILO has remained responsive to the political, socio-economic and technological developments and processes which have a direct bearing on quality of life in this rapidly changing world. It is reassuring that the tripartite stakeholders of the Organization – namely, governments, enterprises and organized labour – recognize these challenges and are beginning to work in concert to tackle them. It is true, after all, that the interests of these stakeholders are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they are inextricably linked and must therefore be organized and managed to reinforce each other to their collective and individual benefit.

Thanks to the progressive interventions and advocacy of the ILO among other agencies of the United Nations, issues of human rights, including rights of women and children, the right to employment, decent work, fair wages and pensions, social protection and inclusion are appreciated not only as moral imperatives but also as pragmatic ways of advancing the cause of workers, enhancing productivity and economic growth and, for the poor nations of the world, facilitating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and poverty reduction by 2015.

Globalization would truly lead to shared global prosperity if, and I repeat, if all nations were at the same stage of development and could exploit its benefits equally. Unfortunately, many nations, including most in Africa, lack the resources, infrastructure and capacity to exploit it now. Nevertheless, Africa is no longer a dark continent. The African renaissance is real. Africa is back, and opened for partnership with the international community with the purpose of catching up and launching itself into the mainstream of the globalization process. This calls for extra support in terms of debt forgiveness, timely implementation of promises of enhanced aid and technical support, especially as pledged by the G8 and the other donor communities

generally, and the conclusion of the World Trade Organization talks, which must recognize a period of transition during which necessary concessions would be provided to the developing world to mature those countries into competitiveness in the global market.

As Chairman of the African Union, I cannot have a better platform to bring to the attention of the world the developments within the continent which seek to address the challenges of the moment. The launch of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2001 and the creation of the African Union in 2002 signify to the world Africa's resolve to engage positively on a win-win basis with the rest of the world.

NEPAD is a comprehensive, integrated sustainable development initiative for the economic and social revival of Africa. It aims at planning and contributing to: the effective implementation of regional and continental infrastructure projects to open up the continent to facilitate the exploitation of its massive endowment of natural resources; the integration of its priorities into national development plans in order to enhance the ability of the individual African countries to meet the Millennium Development Goals; and the reinforcement of engagements on a just and fair basis with the international community.

NEPAD considers the issues of good governance, peace, security and human rights as critical to any prospects for development in Africa. It also gives priority to the settlement of internal conflicts in component nations and the creation of a political democratic order.

This is why it devised the African Peer Review Mechanism to encourage leaders and nations to voluntarily submit to review among themselves to ensure inclusion and participation of their entire societies in transparent and accountable governance.

Some happy indications of Africa's awakening are: (a) the election of Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as Africa's first female Head of State; in Liberia, a nation that had been reduced to a political abyss for the previous 15 years; (b) the brilliant example of Rwanda, a nation previously marked by unimaginable genocide just a decade and a half ago, becoming the world's number one country for the percentage of elected women parliamentarians in a stable democracy; (c) the epochal leadership of President Nelson Mandela of South Africa who put an end to one of the most shameful acts of inhumanity, apartheid, and opened up the prospects for Africa to take control of its destiny and achieve complete independence, both politically and economically; (d) the recent first and successful democratic elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo after more than 40 years of conflict and chaos in a country that is arguably one of the most endowed naturally anywhere on earth.

The examples of the African Renaissance are too numerous to recount. Suffice it to say that democracy is taking root with a number of countries witnessing peaceful handovers of power from one elected leader to another, as opposed to the power of the gun. The long list of countries which have reached this level of political maturity include Benin, Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

But Africa still suffers some serious drawbacks, outstanding among which are the seemingly intrac-

table conflicts in the Darfur region of Sudan and Somalia. The African Union, within the constraints of its limited resources, has taken the initiative of trying to get the governments and parties to the conflicts to resolve them peacefully on humanitarian and constitutional lines. In spite of the support these initiatives have attracted from the international community, especially the United Nations Security Council in Darfur, there is still no light at the end of the tunnel. I will urge bodies such as your organization to all exert whatever influences they can marshal to help resolve these problems against humanity.

With regard to economic performance, African economies continue to sustain the growth momentum of recent years, recording an overall real GDP growth of 5.7 per cent in 2006. They are forecast to grow by an average of 5.8 per cent in 2007, as per the latest edition of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa *Economic Report on Africa* (ERA 2007). In spite of these growth rates however, the continent continues to be plagued by dire poverty, unemployment, diseases, illiteracy and lack of value addition to its raw material supplies. The unregenerated economies of most of the African nations are caught in heavy debts, inadequate aid from the donor communities, unfair trading patterns with the advanced world and poor inflows of investments. The vicious cycle generated by the combined effect of these drawbacks is the cause of the general poverty and stagnation of the continent.

The hopelessness caused by this cycle in turn causes the wild migration of many a youth in Africa, which is now so topical in world news. Not a day passes without world television channels beaming sorry pictures of dazed African youth landing on the shores of Europe and elsewhere. Some of these youngsters will have risked their lives to cross the Mediterranean sea at great expense and in not seaworthy boats and crafts of all sorts, and also the Sahara desert by unimaginable hazardous means. Many lose their lives in the process, but even those who make it most times find themselves in a worse situation than they were back at home. More often than not they are arrested, detained in inhuman conditions and deported penniless. The truth of the sad situation is that most of these youngsters are not criminals, but only criminalized by the vicious conspiracy of political and economic forces and also the natural instincts for survival. They should therefore be sympathized with rather than be prosecuted or persecuted.

As part of the globalization process, the international community must lead in the search for far-reaching and sustainable solutions in the management of migration. After all, migration has been a major vehicle from time immemorial for the spread of civilizations, cultural intercourse and even economic and social enlightenment among all peoples of the world.

The other major African challenge is the communicable pandemic diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. Whilst appreciating the massive humanitarian contributions and support to Africa in the fight against these diseases, Africa will continually renew the appeal for cooperation and more support because these diseases do not know any bounds, given the increasing mobility amongst peoples around the world. It is only right that we stand together to overcome these plagues against humanity.

Zooming home on Ghana, I am pleased to report that we are at the forefront of promoting the Decent Work Agenda. The Government has since 2005, the beginning of its second term, adopted a Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRSII), which focuses on “accelerated growth as a means of wealth creation, poverty reduction and equitable social development”. In pursuance of this objective, it is giving priority attention to three thematic areas. First, human resources development; second, private sector development; and third, good governance.

You will recall that the Heads of State and Government participating in the African Union Extraordinary Summit on Employment and Poverty Alleviation, held in Ouagadougou in September 2004, overwhelmingly endorsed the Decent Work Agenda.

The Summit adopted a Declaration, Plan of Action and Follow-up Mechanism, which committed member States to place employment at the centre of economic and social policies. Ghana has just passed a law establishing a Fair Wages and Salaries Commission in consultation with the tripartite stakeholders, all of whom are represented at this Conference, at the highest level. Earlier, these social partners had collaborated and exhibited the spirit of tripartism and social dialogue to set up the Decent Work Country Programme and sponsored the new Labour Law of 2003. This law set up the Labour Commission to settle industrial disputes to make for the requisite peace to underpin an investment-friendly atmosphere, enhanced productivity and poverty reduction.

Recognizing that promoting the Decent Work Agenda must begin with the proper development and education of all the nation’s children, our Government is committed to the implementation of free universal compulsory basic education of all children from ages 4 to 15 and also a school feeding programme for all basic schools, and free bussing wherever possible. It has also launched a national youth employment programme, for the unemployed youth in the various sectors like community education, teaching assistants, health extension workers, waste and sanitation corps, community protection, internship and industrial attachments, agribusiness, trade and ICT.

While funding is wholly from the Government, these modules are being rolled out with support and technical advice from the social partners of organized labour and employers.

But Ghana will not allow herself to be affected by complacency because she still has a long way to go to attaining the middle income status objective she has set for herself by the year 2015 and even higher targets beyond. She is using this year 2007, which is her 50th anniversary as an independent, sovereign nation, to take stock of how far she has come, to reset her sights and also galvanize all her citizens to pursue her vision of development within the African and global context, single-mindedly and with all the advantages she can command. In this context, she sees the ILO as an invaluable partner and appeals for continued cooperation and support from it.

I am pleased to report that the Ninth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union will take place in Accra, the capital of Ghana, from 1 to 3 July this year, and we shall be happy to welcome any of you who can make their way to the Summit.

May I end my address by invoking the powerful words of President Nelson Mandela at his inaugura-

tion as South Africa's first democratically elected President in Pretoria on 10 May 1994. He said: "We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of the millions of our people. We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity – a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world."

I dare say that President Mandela could as well have been speaking for all of humanity. Let us make his words a reality, and let the Decent Work Agenda be the vehicle towards that goal.

The PRESIDENT

Many thanks, President Kufuor, for sharing with the participants at the International Labour Conference your vision of Africa's place in a globalizing world.

Your Excellency, Ghana has been among the most successful African nations in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. The country's achievement in reducing poverty levels from 52 per cent in 1992 to 28.5 per cent in 2005 is impressive. In

many other areas too, in education, literacy, and transport infrastructure, huge strides have been made. Your Government is working with the ILO to make decent work a reality in Ghana and has made youth employment, gender equality, the elimination of child labour and social protection – all issues central to the ILO – as its priorities.

In the year of its 50th anniversary of independence, under your guidance, the Republic of Ghana is assuming a major role on the African continent and indeed, as you say, leads the African nations into the global village.

Your Excellency, Switzerland is the fifth country you have visited over the past week. We have followed your progress in Brussels, meeting with President Barroso of the European Commission; in Addis Ababa, as Chairperson of the African Union; in Cairo, on a state visit; and in Abuja, for the inauguration of His Excellency the President of Nigeria.

We thank you for taking the time from this heavy schedule to come to talk to us; thank you for including the ILO in your personal "Global Village".

(The Conference adjourned at 12.10 p.m.)

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