ZIMBABWE CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS
(ZCTU)

REMARKS BY THE ZIMBABWE CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS
AT THE ZIMBABWE NATIONAL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT
CONFERENCE THEMED ‘BUILDING A FUTURE WITH DECENT WORK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE’

RAINBOW TOWERS, HARARE – 29 MARCH 2012
The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions is greatly honoured to be part of this noble gathering where stakeholders have gathered today to discuss issues to do with youth employment. We are glad that there is involvement of the tripartite constituents and other partners, including youth organizations at this forum. We hope such an arrangement will cascade to all the processes of decision-making, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes to do with youth employment.

Indeed, youth employment issues should be on the top of the agenda when we talk of our national priorities. As we deliberate and share ideas today, it is paramount that from the onset that we be mindful of the fact that employment in general, is the cornerstone of the survival of our economy and the key to the improvement of livelihoods of millions of youth. Given the current state of our economy, the biggest challenge for our youth has been to enter and remain in the labour market. Our institutions of higher learning are producing thousands of graduates in various fields every year but the job market has been unable to absorb most of these young people.

In our view as ZCTU the education and training system in Zimbabwe is largely supply-driven as the curriculum is geared towards academic qualifications. But is this what the market as of now demands? The answer is no. There is need to redefine our curricula so as to meet the specific needs of the non-formal and formal sectors of the economy. We need a curriculum that has special emphasis on business education and the acquisition of practical skills. In essence what we are saying is that we need to create an environment that allows our youth to be enterprising and to employ themselves.

This then calls for the participation of all stakeholders in the reviewing or formulation of relevant and enabling legislation to ensure that we nurture the informal economy. Africa has experienced widespread growth of the informal
economy and Zimbabwe has been no exception. The formal employment space continues to shrink as companies shut down and some embark on retrenchments. These people who are leaving the formal job market find themselves in the informal economy while at the same time we already have thousands of unemployed youth. As a result we need to move fast to put in place unambiguous policies that grow this sector and especially targeting the youth. Even as we move to grow the informal sector, we have to make sure that jobs created there are decent jobs that provide adequate remuneration, social protection and also in an environment that observes and promotes the rights of the working people. The rights enjoyed by those in the formal economy should be extended to those in the informal economy.

Our remarks would not complete without special mention to the tripartite constituencies’ cooperating and development partner the International Labour Organization. We note that ILO and the social partners are already on the ground working towards reducing youth unemployment through, for example, the Skills for Youth Employment and Rural Development and the YES JUMP Programs. These programmes are aimed at creating jobs for young men and women. It is in this vein that we would like to urge all arms of government or the various ministries to have a tripartite approach in their programming. This way we ensure ownership of whatever programme we develop as everyone will have been taken on board right through from consultations, policy formulation and implementation.

In conclusion, on our part as labour we are prepared to play our role by continuing supporting young workers, youth organizations and all initiatives meant to uplift our youth. It is in this vein that we ask government, as a social partner, to have more political will and commitment to make youth employment a national priority and also to create a conducive and enabling environment through an integrated policy approach that will place youth employment issues at the core of our policies. It is our hope that our deliberations here today will be honest and in the end fruitful.

I thank you.