



**Extraordinary Summit of the African Union  
On Employment and Poverty Reduction**

***Enormous Challenges – but Positive Outcomes, too...***

**Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, Sept. 5, 2004 – African ministers, meeting here in the Executive Council of the African Union (AU), were on Sunday actively preparing the agenda of this week's Summit on employment and poverty reduction. African workers were at the same time demonstrating peacefully in the streets of this capital, demanding decent jobs and pressing their leaders to ensure that their own words be followed by concrete deeds.**

Alpha Oumar Konaré, President of the African Commission, at the opening session of the Executive Council at the "Ouaga 2000" conference centre emphasised the importance of the follow-up mechanism that is to be established at the end of the Summit.

At the same time, he deplored the ravages caused by rabid liberalism. "The law of the market imposes its brutal and even inhuman force" and doesn't pay any attention to the social partners or legal and international norms, he said.

He said poverty is a challenge for all the world's region, adding that its scope and its further spread "threaten the economic and social stability of our states."

ILO Director General Juan Somavia, who attended the opening session, on his arrival in Ouagadougou on Friday pleaded for a more equitable globalisation process. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) and its executive body have submitted to this week's Summit a set of documents on "Success Stories" already achieved in Africa.

Several hundred demonstrators, who included members of the Social Partners' Forum as well as Burkina Faso trade unionists, meanwhile on Sunday morning staged a march to the local Labour Exchange (Bourse du Travail). They carried slogans demanding decent jobs and supporting the struggle against precariousness, poverty and privatisations. They also criticized the structural adjustment policies imposed by the IMF and the World Bank, arguing that they do not meet the requirements of the current situation marked by a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor.

Burkina Faso trade unions in a statement echoed these views and stressed the need for effective participation by the African populations in the drawing up and implementation of development policies and in the building of a "genuine" rule of law.

However, in spite of the enormous task ahead, the atmosphere is not one of pessimism, since concrete actions in the field show that anything can be done if there is will and the means are on hand.

The ILO has thus in a special dossier prepared in cooperation with several international organisations and NGOs presented 30 "positive experiences" across the continent, selected among about 100 projects submitted to it. This file entitled "Success Africa", which is "not exhaustive", seeks to show "how national governments, workers and employers' organisations and civil society can enhance the quantity and quality of employment in Africa by adopting innovative policy prescriptions with the support of the ILO, the UN system and the international donor community."

The projects cited include micro health insurance schemes in West Africa, textile sector development in North Africa and entrepreneurship training in East Africa. It describes collective efforts to create jobs through tourism in Southern Africa and the importance of protecting the rights of indigenous peoples in Central Africa.

Algeria, for instance, has succeeded in reducing youth and adult unemployment through active labour market policies, by means of pre-employment contracts, support for enterprise creation for the jobless, and the establishment of a system of micro-credits for those unemployed. Algeria's jobless rate now stands at 27 percent of the active population and youth unemployment is still higher.

In West Africa – Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal – an ILO project is encouraging trade unions to organise workers in the informal economy, so that methods of collective action can be used to improve their living and working conditions.

A similar experience is under way in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda to integrate the informal sector into these countries' productive economies. Education and training programmes in Kenya have helped combating the recourse to child domestic labour.

Mozambique has meanwhile generated employment and opened up the country through road reconstruction after the disruptions of the civil war, using manual labour rather than heavy machinery. Between 1992 and 2002, over 7.000 km of roads were opened. This facilitated a large resettlement of displaced people and provided work for more than 40.000 rural people.

In South Africa, tourism, combined with resource management, has helped sustaining local communities, which are associated with the development of their regions and their own land, restituted following the end of apartheid.