



## ILO NEWSLETTER

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

#### ***Decent work : How to implement political decisions***

**Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, Sept. 6, 2004 – The Executive Council of the African Union, meeting in Burkina Faso's capital, was on Monday working on a draft Declaration and Plan of Action to be submitted on Wednesday to Heads of State and government at the pan-African organisation's first extraordinary Summit on employment and poverty reduction.**

The African ministers attending the talks were also seeking to identify ways and means of translating into action the policies agreed at Ouagadougou, through a follow-up mechanism at the national, sub-regional and continental levels, which has still to be hammered out.

The declaration, to be released on Thursday night, will underscore African leaders' solemn commitment to putting into place national, regional and continental strategies for job creation and placing them at the centre of development strategies aimed at reducing poverty.

The Plan of Action, accompanied by a time-table that might coincide for instance with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) which call for the halving of world poverty by 2015, is expected to spell out the means of translating broad principles into action, targeting priority sectors favouring job creation, including agriculture and infrastructure projects, with special emphasis on the fight against the scourge of VIH/AIDS and similar diseases and on the role of women and youth in these development strategies.

The financing of the Plan of Action and the follow-up mechanism has also been discussed, as well as bilateral and international partnerships, in particular those with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and its executive body, the International Labour Office, which has supported the Summit preparations. ILO Director General Juan Somavia has been present in Ouagadougou all week for the preliminaries and the Summit itself.

The VIH/AIDS epidemic is considered by the ILO as one of the major challenges facing development in sub-Saharan Africa because of its impact on human capital and the economies of the countries concerned. This is therefore one of the main threats against the implementation of the "decent jobs" agenda which Africa now wants.

According to the latest estimates of UN and ILO experts, some 38 million adults and children were affected by VIH/AIDS as of the end of 2003. Sub-Saharan Africa was the most seriously hit region, with an estimated 25 million persons affected.

Three million people died from this scourge in Africa in 2003, and an estimated 8,000 Africans are infected every day, more than half of them women.

The impact of the disease on labour is considerable. The high mortality rate resulting from VIH/AIDS and absenteeism caused by the disease affect productivity and public services overall in several countries.

In this context, the ILO supports programmes to fight this disease at the workplace and the extension of social protection to ensure access to treatment.

The organisation considers that providing a job is not enough. Employment must also be "decent" – it must, in other words, provide for social protection. A STEP (Strategies and Techniques against social Exclusion and Poverty) is currently operational across West Africa, notably in such countries as Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Senegal.

The purpose is to support the creation and development of local networks which will be gradually expanded throughout the national territory. These networks are targeting in particular the populations of the urban and rural informal sectors.

In Burkina Faso, some 10,000 people have benefited from this programme which affords access to social protection and mutual benefit institutions in the health sector.

On Tuesday – on the eve of the Summit here – Juan Somavia and FAO Director General Jacques Diouf were due to visit a STEP project and a FAO project linked to food security about 30 kms (20 miles) outside Ouagadougou.

Before this outing, the ILO Director General is due to meet representatives of 15 international organisations which have contributed to a background document in order to identify major problems that need to be dealt with as a matter of priority and propose concrete initiatives, based on their respective experiences, within the framework of the African Union and the NEPAD, the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development.