



Extraordinary Summit of the African Union On Employment and Poverty Reduction

Africa takes its destiny into its own hands

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, Sept. 9, 2004 – Africa, meeting at the highest level for the first time on job creation as a key means of fighting poverty, has decided to take its destiny into its own hands by adopting a concrete Plan of Action and a set of precise follow-up mechanisms.

The extraordinary Summit of the African Union (AU) on employment and poverty reduction ended Thursday in Ouagadougou with the adoption of a solemn declaration placing employment at the centre of development strategies and the endorsement of an 11-point Action Plan to achieve this goal. The introduction of follow-up mechanisms on the national, regional and continental levels including precise time-tables for implementation will make it possible to monitor the process at all levels and to report back.

The African Commission chaired by Alpha Oumar Konaré, Mali's former president, was charged with drawing up an annual report on the follow-up activities, and will report on a biennial basis on the progress of the implementation of the action plan, and will compile detailed assessments every five years.

Africa already benefits from the support of its principal partner in the preparation of this summit, the Geneva-based International Labour Office which is the executive body of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). ILO Director General Juan Somavia attended the summit here with African Heads of state and government. He also took part in a session of the ministerial Executive Council of the UA and in a Social Forum which brought together representatives of African governments, workers and employers.

It will now be up to the Africans to persuade their development partners and the international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank that they mean business and deserve support.

The new IMF Managing Director, Rodrigo de Rato of Spain, who was among the guests at the summit, placed the emphasis on job-generating growth as a component of poverty-reduction strategies. He noted that the IMF would be flexible in its approach, notably as regards trade liberalisation by African countries.

African leaders, on the other hand, above all called for a more socially oriented and more equitable globalisation process, sharing the views of the ILO which advocates good governance at the global as well as the national levels.

Fifteen UN specialised agencies have worked with the ILO to prepare a background document defining the key priority issues facing Africa and proposing concrete initiatives on the basis of their own experiences and competencies. They discussed the follow-up mechanisms which should contribute to the implementation of the commitments made by the summit.

Juan Somavia, who addressed Wednesday's opening session after the summit's host, Burkina Faso president Blaise Compaoré and AU Commission president Alpha Oumar Konaré, reaffirmed "Africa's right to expect global fairness" and said "good national governance will not succeed unless we have good global governance."

He called for a more resolute effort by the international community to achieve policy coherence on growth, investment and employment creation in order to help Africa fight poverty and unemployment.

He also said Africa needs "a listening service – partners who truly respect national ownership of development policy."

Referring to the report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation published last February, he stressed Africans' right to expect global fairness, adding that the decisions made in Ouagadougou reflected a simple truth: "Africa is working. The women, men and youth and, unfortunately, even children of this continent are working hard every day. There is no poverty of effort in Africa. There is a poverty of opportunity."

Pleading for a "global approach", Juan Somavia said the summit had focused new light on a fundamental point: "poverty reduction will not succeed without jobs."

Pledging ILO's support for Africa's efforts, he said: "We are a tripartite voice for social justice and social dialogue – a voice that respects and demands respect for Africa's priorities."

The Social Partners Forum, which preceded the summit, in a message to its participants pin-pointed six priorities: Decent jobs must become a global objective; the promotion of decent jobs must be placed at the centre of economic and social policies within the framework of poverty reduction programmes; the fundamental rights of workers must be respected in the context of a globalised economy; the role of women must be respected; and the democratic process must be consolidated and the social dialogue must be institutionalised at all levels.