

**Second Congress of ITUC-Africa
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**Address by Dan Cunniah
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Dear Colleagues and Friends,

It gives me great pleasure to address you on behalf of the ILO and I am pleased to convey to you the warm greetings of the Director-General, Mr Juan Somavia.

Thank you for the invitation to participate in your congress held at a crucial time for the African trade union movement and for all African workers and their families. It is indeed a great honour for me to address you, my friends, brothers and sisters, with whom I shared years of struggle as a trade unionist to improve the conditions of work and life of millions of workers on this continent.

I also attended your founding congress in Accra, Ghana, in November 2007. It was a historic congress where two African Regional organisations, the ICFTU-AFRO and the DOAWTU, joined together to form the ITUC-Africa. This second congress will certainly consolidate the achievements and progress you have made so far but more importantly to adopt a number of resolutions which will constitute your strategies and roadmap for the future. The congress theme document entitled "Reviewing the African Trade Union Movement Towards African Emancipation" is a bold and solid analysis of the global financial and economic crisis and its impact on African workers. It challenges the trade unions on organising, on unity and capacity-building in order to influence economic and social policies for the emancipation of the continent. I want to congratulate my friend Kwasi Adu-Amankwah and his team for producing such a high-quality, provocative and inspiring document for your discussion.

A recent report on the African Economic Outlook showed that Africa's economies have weathered the global crisis relatively well and have rebounded in 2010. Recent political events in North Africa and high food and fuel prices were likely to slow the continent's growth down to 3.7 per cent this year. During this year, sub-Saharan Africa will grow faster than North Africa. The new report predicts a rebound to 5.8 per cent in 2012.

"Africa is growing but there are risks. Urgent attention is needed to foster inclusive growth, to improve political accountability, and address the youth bulge," said Mthuli Ncube, Chief Economist and Vice-President of the African Development Bank (AfDB).

The report emphasised that governments' efforts need to include measures to create jobs, invest in basic social services and promote gender equality.

Growth alone is not enough for human development. Growth must be broad-based and bring down high levels of inequality.

Africa is becoming more integrated in the world economy and its partnerships are diversifying, revealing unprecedented economic opportunities. In 2009, China surpassed the US and became Africa's main trading partner, while the share conducted by Africa with emerging partners has grown from approximately 23 per cent to 39 per cent in the last ten years. Africa's top five emerging trade partners are now China (38 per cent), India (14 per cent), Korea (7.2 per cent), Brazil (7.1 per cent), and Turkey (6.5 per cent).

While traditional partners, as a whole, still account for the largest proportion of Africa's trade (62 per cent), investment (80 per cent) and Official Development Assistance (90 per cent), the report notes that emerging economies can provide additional know-how, technology and development experiences required to raise the standard of living for millions of people on the continent. Stagnant growth is exposing the huge structural shift in Europe's place in the world. Its share of world output has sunk steadily from a peak of about 40% to less than 20 per cent. In the next two decades, it will halve again as China, India and others rise. I am glad to see that the congress theme document analysed these trends in a sober manner.

Putting people first must go hand in hand with efforts to accelerate regional coordination and integration. Trade agreements that benefit the continent as a whole unleash the full potential of the private sector and develop regional investment opportunities are the way forward.

Africa needs more progress towards regional integration and bigger markets to improve the bargaining power of African countries and improve economic growth. While a greater diversity of partnerships can benefit Africa, over-specialisation on unprocessed raw materials, debt burden and good governance remain important challenges to address. The report recommends that African countries put in place development policies that promote different economic sectors and reduce reliance on commodities such as cash crops and minerals to address these challenges.

Dear Friends,

We are living through a hard moment for workers and their trade unions. The crisis of 2008 and the current one which is affecting countries in the Eurozone and the USA showed the limitations of the neo-liberal paradigm which has dominated over the past three decades resulting in social hardships for workers and their families. There is a strong sentiment of injustice as working people feel that they are made to pay for the consequences of a crisis which they have not caused... On the 15th of October, large numbers of people went on the streets in 591 cities in 82 countries to show their discontent and protested against austerity measures. The Occupy Wall Street movement gathered momentum and spread in several countries. All this is happening because the market fundamentalists have only one answer: reduce wages, deregulate labour markets, lower taxes, liberalize trade and financial markets, privatize public services and increase competition.

We are at a historic moment, a moment of rethinking of the past. We are at a turning point for embarking on a new development track based on social justice and a more balanced, fair and rights-based growth model with strong redistributive effects.

Historical turns however do not come by themselves. The shacking of the status-quo is one thing. Its transformation into a better future for our children is another thing. The latter would require a strong sense of responsibility, leadership and political commitment of governments. But it will also require efforts by trade unions if we are to meet people's expectation for a better future. The ILO has also a key role to play in this endeavour! We will follow with close attention the debate and the decisions that you will take for the renewal of the African trade union movement and the economic and social development of our continent.

My presence here is a testimony of the importance which we, in ILO-ACTRAV, attach to the struggle of trade unions to improve the conditions of work and living standards of workers in this region in this particular context.

Let me recall that during the nine decades of its existence, the mandate of the ILO have been based on the fundamental principle of ensuring that economic growth and social progress advance together. International Labour Standards and the Decent Work Agenda are based on the understanding that work is a source of personal dignity, family stability, peace in society, economic prosperity and social progress.

Dear Friends,

It may be the case that the right union strategy ahead is going back to the basics of organizing, particularly women workers and young people becoming more appealing to society, protecting the precarious and excluded workers, strengthening solidarity at continental and global levels.

Can trade union face the challenge without some internal reforms and stronger inter-union cooperation nationally, regionally and internationally? How to build up union strength and solidarity today? Can unions ignore with silence the protest of the young unemployed people on the streets of many countries? What strategy should the trade unions adopt to help get the continent out of the quagmire of poverty and underdevelopment? Difficult questions which need answers.

Dear Friends,

The Decent work Agenda adopted in 1999 has been recognized as a main tool to achieve social justice by the UN and G 20. It is a key indicator of the Millennium Development Goal of poverty reduction and is central to the achievement of MDGs in 2015. The Decent Work Agenda has been recognized as a basic policy framework for the ILO Global Jobs Pact adopted in 2009.

Indeed, a new policy approach is needed: one that puts emphasis on demand-led growth, a better balance between wages and productivity with the recognition of the key role played by freedom of association and collective bargaining, the right set of macro-economic policies to place employment at the

centre of economic and social policies, robust measures to ensure fair, redistributive growth.

While there are other actors to be held accountable for the break out of the current crisis, including the failure of many governments to take their responsibilities, we, in the trade union movement also need to rethink our policies and strategies.

What are the greatest challenges faced by trade unions today?

Let me focus in the next few minutes on some of them:

First, the decline of trade union membership. Strengthening the base and membership representation is the most important one. Trade union policies for organizing and recruiting has to address better the interests of ever more heterogeneous workforce, of specific groups (e.g. youth, women, ethnic minorities) and various categories of workers employed in SMEs, MNEs, EPZs and the informal economy.

Second is the fragmentation of trade union movements at both national and at branch levels. Trade union proliferation, and at times even confrontation, must give way to improved coordination and pragmatic cooperation. Not only have some governments and employers exploited union in-fighting for their own objectives, but it has also had a most harmful effect on the public image of unions, thus on their potential membership.

Third, meaningful involvement in social dialogue requires strong expertise in economic and social policies. Developing such expertise, maintaining relevant technical staff, and investing in trade union research are instrumental. For trade unions to be credible and able to influence policies through social dialogue and collective bargaining, they have to also be proactive and put on the table their own policy proposals.

Finally, let me say a few words in French:

Ainsi donc pendant les trois jours que vont durer vos travaux, vous aurez à réfléchir et à proposer des solutions sur des problèmes encore plus brûlants pour l'Afrique que sont le chômage et le sous-emploi particulièrement des jeunes, les droits fondamentaux au travail de plus en plus bafoués, la démocratie et l'unité syndicales déstabilisées par une ingérence caractérisée des politiques et des gouvernements, la solidarité syndicale internationale, l'économie informelle, la protection sociale, l'environnement, le dialogue social, le VIH et le sida, la sécurité et la santé au travail, la précarité des emplois et j'en passe.

Car même si cela doit se faire avec ses alliés de la société civile le mouvement syndical, par son organisation basée sur une structure démocratique et une représentativité de masse, est la seule organisation capable de diriger le front de la lutte pour contrer les effets négatifs des politiques néolibérales de la mondialisation.

Je vous encourage donc à davantage serrer les coudes et vous renouvelle l'engagement d'ACTRAV à vos côtés dans le cadre de sa mission de conseil, d'assistance et d'appui au mouvement syndical pour qu'ensemble nous fassions revivre le mouvement syndical africain unifié, libre, fort, indépendant et démocratique.

Brothers and Sisters,

Let me assure you that the ILO will support your struggle to protect the rights and dignity of working people in this region. I would like to assure you that the ILO assistance for trade unions in the region will continue mainly through the development and implementation of Decent Work Country Programs. ACTRAV, together with its staff in Africa, and in close cooperation with the ILO Offices in the Region will work together to assist you in your efforts to improve the lives of working people and their families.

I wish you all a very fruitful and productive Congress and thank you for your attention and the opportunity to share some ideas with you.