



Address by:

**Mr Aeneas C. Chuma
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to the:

**5th Regional Committee Meeting of the
ILO Staff Union for the African Region**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

12 May 2014

Dear Chairperson of the ILO Staff Union Committee,
Dear Titular Staff Union Committee Member for Africa,
Dear Chairperson of the Addis Ababa Staff Union Committee,
Dear Staff Union Representatives from across the African Region,
Dear colleagues,

Welcome to Ethiopia and Addis Ababa!

I am immensely pleased that you have chosen to host the 5th Regional Committee Meeting of the ILO Staff Union for the African Region in Addis Ababa, the home of not only the ILO's Regional Office for Africa, but also of the African Union – the clearest symbol of African solidarity.

I deeply regret that I could not be in Addis to greet you in person. I have been called upon to represent the Director-General in Helsinki, Finland, at a high-level seminar on peace-building and state-building in the African region. A topic of particular importance and relevance to the work of the ILO and the very values embedded in the ILO's mandate. As you know, the preamble to the ILO's Constitution states that “(...) universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice.” The ILO believes that social justice, democratic participation and respect for fundamental workers' rights are essential for peace building and the preservation of social cohesion. These are precisely the same values that bring you together in Addis Ababa today. I am confident, thus, that in spite of my absence, we are each championing a common message and a common belief: albeit in different parts of the world!

Collaboration with the Staff Union is very important to me. This informed my decision to hold a meeting with the Addis Ababa Staff Union Committee Executive on my first day in Office. The preliminary meeting was followed up - four weeks later - with a meeting between the SUC Executive and the ROAF Management team. In addition, the Titular SUC Member for Africa and the Chairperson of the Addis Ababa SUC were invited to, and participated in, the extraordinary retreat I had with all the Directors of ILO Offices in Africa in April 2014.

I have entered the ILO at a critical time, both for the organization itself, which is undergoing reform, and, more particularly, for the African region. I am convinced that Africa needs the ILO more than ever!

Economic growth in Africa has been impressive in recent years, with GDP growth averaging over 5 per cent in 2012 and 2013. However, economic growth has not been inclusive. Economic growth has also not been matched by growth in employment. Throughout the region, the same scenario emerges; there is limited job creation in those sectors that contribute most to GDP. This has resulted in growing inequalities – with the rich getting richer, and the poorest seemingly caught in a trap of poverty. In addition, world population data for 2013 suggest that Africa's population growth will be the world's fastest between now and 2050, increasing from 1.1 billion to 2.4 billion, including over a billion people of working age by 2050. 41 percent of the population in Africa is under the age of 15.

Based on these and other important developments in the continent, the African Union is finalising its 10 year policy documents to guide the achievement of decent work outcomes. These documents (Ouagadougou+10 Declaration and Plan of Action on Employment, Poverty Eradication and Inclusive Development, and their Follow-up Mechanism) will be adopted during the African Union Extraordinary Summit of Heads of States and Government on Employment Creation, Poverty Eradication and Inclusive Development (Ouagadougou+10) scheduled for September 2014 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. This Summit is organized within the context of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the AU Agenda 2063.

The priorities which have emerged include:

- Promoting employment opportunities, especially for Africa's youthful population and women;
- Extending social protection for those by-passed by the macro-economic growth of recent years through the Social Protection Floor; especially for those in the informal economy and rural workers;
- Improving labour migration governance for enhanced regional integration; and
- Effective labour market institutions which includes improved labour market information systems and social dialogue.

These are critical issues of our time. I want to add, however, that these are also issues that are central to ILO's very existence as an organization. They constitute the regional priorities for Africa during this biennium and the immediate future. It is also interesting that these are also aligned with the ACIs – ILO's global priority themes for the 2014-2015 biennium. Though labour migration is not an ACI, you are all aware that it is a priority, and the DG's report to the 103rd Session of the ILC will focus on this theme.

The ILO is committed to the success of Ouagadougou+10. The ILO is also committed to the change process that is required in order to realise the outcomes of this important meeting of African leaders. Because, the meeting is not only an event, it is indeed the launch and continuation of a region-wide process. The ILO will support the implementation of policy outcomes from Ouagadougou+10 at country level, through well-established Decent Work Country Programmes; at sub-regional level, through sub-regional Decent Work Programmes, like those developed for the SADC region; and at regional level, through our dialogue with the African Union on the development of an African Regional Decent Work Programme.

Strategic partnerships are important for the ILO to be able to support the achievement of these outcomes. In addition to the responsibility assigned to the ILO to co-ordinate UN support to the AU Ouagadougou + 10 process through the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), I place significant premium on the collaboration with the United National Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Africa Development Bank and other key regional institutions.

At the ILO, we believe it is the responsibility of tripartism to promote policies that will give people a fair chance at a decent job. In many countries across Africa, however, mechanisms and processes for social dialogue remain underdeveloped. The numbers of workers belonging to trade unions and who have their wages determined by collective agreements remains low – particularly when considering their numbers in proportion to total employment. The growth of temporary labour services, alongside long-standing informal employment relationships in many countries excludes disproportionately large number of workers from protection by labour law due to the difficulty in establishing whether or not an employment relationship exists and with whom. Here, I mention, in particular, the situation of domestic workers.

The promotion of sound labour relations is central to decent work!

All of the above places significant demands on the ILO, our services and our staff.

Already after my short time in the ILO, I am impressed by, and proud of the decent work results we are achieving in the African region. I have so far visited Namibia, Nigeria and Zimbabwe on official missions and the message from our constituents is one of profound satisfaction with, and gratitude to, the ILO for the quality of support provided.

The ongoing reform processes in the ILO should make us even better equipped to respond to the needs of our constituents. This was one of the issues discussed last month during the extraordinary retreat of ILO field office Directors in the African region from 14 to 16 April 2014. Matters that were raised during the retreat, around staff mobility, rights and entitlements, job security and recruitment practices are also matters that you will be debating this week. Staff members across the region count on you to be their “voice”! I respect and thank you for your commitment and dedication. I extend my appreciation to the Titular Staff Union Member for the African Region who, as indicated earlier, participated in the retreat of Directors and brought forward some of the concerns of colleagues in the region. He also highlighted the good climate of dialogue that has existed between the ILO administration and the staff union in the African region – a trend I aspire to continue.

I know you follow with great interest, as do I, the ongoing review of the ILO’s field structure. Dedicated task forces are currently considering the implementation of the initial decisions made by the Director-General and a completed process is expected by the time the Governing Body convenes in March 2015. I am confident that the outcome of the process will be a strengthened ILO in the African region.

I see social dialogue as a key governance mechanism, both in order to realize the Decent Work Agenda in Africa and to achieve good internal working relations. I look forward to continued fruitful dialogue and collaboration with the ILO Staff Union.

Thank you for your attention.