



“Rwanda Employment Forum”

Statement by:

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- Honourable Anastase Murekezi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Rwanda;
- Honourable Judith Uwizeye, Minister of Public Service and Labour;
- Honourable Ministers here present;
- Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps;
- Mr Lamin Manneh, United Nations Resident Coordinator and Esteemed Colleagues from the United Nations Family;
- Distinguished Guests;
- Dear ILO Colleagues;
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you, Honourable Prime Minister, for inviting the ILO to contribute to the important events that your Government, through the Ministry of Public Service and social partners, has organized during these last few days, with a focus on addressing the employment challenge in Rwanda. I commend and congratulate your Government for taking these essential steps towards implementing the Decent Work Agenda in Rwanda.

Thank you for offering me this opportunity to share my own thoughts on how Rwanda and Africa in general can address the employment challenge.

First, let me turn to the global employment challenge

As UN member States are deliberating on the post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, the world has seen a fragile economic recovery in recent years, and continues to face major employment and poverty challenges, especially in Africa. Increasing income inequality is not only hampering economic growth, but also social cohesion and political stability.

Still, paid or unpaid work remains the most common avenue through which people secure their livelihood. However, work is not just about earning an income. It is a source of one's identity and dignity, and a way to connect with one's community and society at large. Having better and more equal access to productive employment and decent work opportunities, for both women and men, is crucial for forming a cohesive society.

The ILO's World of Work Report 2014, which was entitled "Developing with Jobs", states that despite past positive trends, employment and social challenges remain acute in most emerging and developing countries. Globally, some 839 million workers in developing countries, and over 230 million in Africa are among the "working poor", earning less than US\$ 2 a day. This corresponds to 30 percent of the working population globally, though it is down from nearly 63 percent in 1994. In Africa the rate is over 40 percent, reduced by some 17 per cent since 2000. While these clearly represent tremendous achievements in the broader development agenda, more efforts are needed in terms of boosting the employability and productivity of the poor, and promoting economic growth which is more job rich.

It is estimated that we would need 200 million new jobs to keep pace with the growing working age population in emerging and developing countries in the next 5 years. **Honourable Minister**, you have, in Rwanda set a target of creating 200,000 off-farm jobs annually. We stand ready to support you in these efforts.

Unemployment remains high, particularly amongst the youth. Youth unemployment stands at about 30 per cent in North Africa and the Middle East, where young women's unemployment is even higher at 45 percent. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the youth unemployment rate is estimated at 12 percent, and the underemployment rate, though hard to calculate, significantly higher.

Women constitute 40 per cent of the global workforce, and in past years, we have seen substantial progress in advancing gender equality in the world of work in many countries. However, across the globe, women tend to be concentrated in more precarious, low paid, and often informal jobs – outside social protection systems – compared to men. Globally, gender wage gaps remain substantial – in 2014, women would earn between 5 and 35 percent less than men, even when carrying out the same job. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the rate of vulnerable employment is 14 percentage points higher for women than for men. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the Government of Rwanda and social partners for the new laws on maternity protection that grant mothers a 12-week maternity leave with full pay.

Growing wage gaps across countries also motivate millions of workers to seek employment outside their countries of origin. Globally, over 230 million people, including Rwandans, lived in a foreign country in 2013 – a rise of some 57 million since 2000. It is estimated that between 8 and 10 million Africans currently live and work in a country other than their country of birth.

Women form about half of migrant workers and are commonly engaged in low paid jobs – millions work as domestic workers. Here, my thoughts and sympathies go to the families of the thousands of African migrants who have perished in recent months trying to cross the Mediterranean or in other difficult circumstances across the region.

The need for a new policy paradigm to promote inclusive job-rich growth has been underscored in numerous policy debates, including in the African Union’s Agenda 2063, which calls for the transformation, growth and industrialisation of our economies. The Declaration and Plan of Action on Employment, Poverty Eradication and Inclusive Development, which was adopted by African Heads of State and Government during the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa in January this year was a milestone – politically and strategically – as it reconfirms the commitment of African leaders to place employment at the centre of their economic and social policies.

Secondly, what are the international trends in the policy discourse on employment issues?

Esteemed Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Employment challenges, particularly affecting youth and women in the development context, are perennial. The Millennium Development Goals sought to address these challenges through MDG Goal 1 – Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger through labour market indicators relating to working poverty, labour productivity, and vulnerable employment, as well as under Goal 3 – Promote gender equality and empower women through indicators relating to women’s share in non-agriculture wage employment.

Since the 2008 global financial and economic crisis, creation of more and better jobs has remained on the top of policy agendas, not only in developing economies, but also in developed economies. Countries have committed to adopt multifaceted policy measures to promote employment and decent work for all, particularly, including for youth and women both at the UN and G20 levels.

In the current proposals for the new Sustainable Development Goals, the employment challenge is addressed, particularly through Goal 5 on “Gender equality and empowerment of all women

and girls”, and Goal 8 on “Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”. It is crucial that African countries, including Rwanda, advocate for and start putting in place strategies to deliver on this Goal.

The ILO Director General’s Report to this year’s International Labour Conference, “Decent work for sustainable development”, maintains the need to uphold sustainable development as the overriding policy paradigm within which the Decent Work Agenda can make its key contribution. For Rwanda, the green economy, green growth and, subsequently, the promotion of green jobs that have both economic, environmental and social outcomes must be a core consideration for the 200,000 off-farm jobs that will be created annually.

Needless to say, in order to achieve these goals, strong and effective national institutions are essential.

This brings me to my third point, national employment policies, national institutional frameworks and the role of the ILO

The ILO has been supporting a significant number of developing countries in formulating national employment policies and strategies – often together with UNDP and other UN agencies. 37 countries in Africa have been supported in this respect in the last few years, including Rwanda. Employment policies bring together policy measures that address both demand and supply side, as well as regulatory frameworks which govern the labour market.

Throughout the policy formulation process, a series of policy dialogues are held, involving governments, social partners and also relevant stakeholders from civil society. Such institution building through social dialogue is essential for establishing a solid ground for national ownership over the employment policy, and also overall policy coherence.

Needless to say, once the policy is formulated and adopted, the relevant measures need to be fully integrated into national development plans, so that appropriate resources can be allocated for the implementation of the adopted policy.

In order to effectively complete the employment policy processes, political will is key. In 36 countries across Africa, this will is manifested through a Decent Work Country Programme. The

ILO will be pleased to continue working with our constituents in Rwanda to see how the Decent Work Country Programme for Rwanda can be finalized for adoption.

Rwanda has already formulated and adopted a National Employment Programme, which is being implemented. Last week, you organized a High-Level Workshop on Employment Policies. This very Employment Forum forms part of the Employment Policy Course organized this week. We at the ILO are very happy to provide technical support to such capacity-building activities for the strengthening of national institutions and look forward to the final adoption of the Rwanda National Employment Policy.

In conclusion, what is the way forward?

Today, regrettably, the world has not yet seen the eradication of poverty. Working poverty persists in many developing countries, particularly in Africa, and the reduction of vulnerable employment has stagnated after the 2008 global economic crisis. We need to continue fighting poverty, informality, as well as vulnerability of employment, and strong and capable institutions are essential to both identifying and fully delivering appropriate policy measures.

The ILO and the UN System, together with the international donor community are committed to providing technical assistance to facilitate such policy processes, in particular to strengthen institutions, and also to provide technical guidance to policy research and options to promote full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work for all, including for youth and women.

Thank you for your kind attention.