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**Statement by H.E Amira Elfadil, Commissioner for Social Affairs,
African Union Commission**

ILO African Regional Virtual Meeting

2nd July 2020

COVID-19 Crisis in Africa: Building Back Better

Excellences, dear Ministers,

Dear Social partners,

Dear Sister Cynthia, the Regional ILO Director for Africa,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege for me to get an opportunity to convey the African Union Commission message during this important meeting. I wish to seize this moment to congratulate ILO for this this successful meeting amid the exceptional period we found ourselves having to navigate every day.

Excellences, never in the 21st century has the world seen a catastrophe of such humongous proportion that COVID-19 has imposed on human race. Since its advent, COVID-19 has permeated all spheres of life and the losses, particularly in the labour markets is indescribable.

On the 29th April 2020, the African Ministers of Labour and Social Development, held a videoconference and shared ideas on response to COVID-19. The Ministers stated unequivocally, that without cushioning mechanisms through fiscal stimulus, there will be significant job losses in Africa's large informal economy as well as in specific sectors like tourism and travel, hotel and hospitality. The Ministers, further committed themselves to work together more urgently than ever before to minimize the health, economic and employment impacts of this crisis, and prepare for an even brighter future of work.

We appreciated the leadership of the Ministers of Labour and Employment and at this juncture, I wish to pay tribute to Mohamed Ben Omar, former Minister of Labour and Employment of Niger who died from the novel coronavirus. We have been informed that before the Minister passed on he made a statement that "It is discipline alone that will be the weapon to destroy this virus." May his soul rest in peace.

Dear Ministers, dear Social partners, ladies and gentlemen,

As the pandemic is evolving fast on the continent with increasing numbers of cases, this meeting avails an opportunity to assess the changes in the labour market and frame measures that are relevant to the current situation.

The African Union, through the Africa CDC, continue to reinforcing health systems in member states and medical research. As the virus spreads, the pressure on the health system increases to its limits.

But we also are concerned about the harsh socio economic impacts of the disease on workers, employers and the workplace. With an estimated 25 million job loss in Africa, there is need for policy measures to stimulate the economy and employment; support enterprises, jobs and income; and protecting workers in the workplace. Workers in the informal economy and rural sector, migrant workers, youth and women are among the most vulnerable groups bearing heavy burden of the pandemic.

The African Union recognizes huge and adverse socio-economic impact on economies which simultaneously and acutely affects the prospects of the AfCFTA goals, as it was set to open its doors in 2020. This undermines the efforts contained in the Abidjan Declaration- Advancing Social Justice - Shaping the future of work in Africa, adopted during the ILO, 14th Africa Regional Meeting held in December 2019. In addition, there will be significant job losses in Africa's large informal economy as well as in specific sectors like tourism and travel, hotel and hospitality. Furthermore, both exports and imports will decline, affecting the potential of trade to support the growth process.

Youth and women being among the most vulnerable groups in the labour markets, a focus will be needed to accelerate the transition from the informal economy to the formal economy, leveraging the social security extension as a main policy. The AUC-ILO Joint programme on Decent Work for the Transformation of the informal Economy (2020-2024) will guide our journey.

Excellences, dear social partners

Productivity improvement is a key policy to pursue vigorously as a means to enhance the resilience of our economy and society. It must be accompanied by participative management systems with fair redistribution of the wealth. In other words a functional integrated labour market information system is imperative to successfully navigate the post covid 19 recovery time.

Agriculture is another economic sector which can absorb a significant number of young people and women. Well defined rural employment policies will go a long way building resilience in the food supply chain which was

disrupted by the pandemic. Example of successful model can be found in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

Excellencies, dear social partners,

Looking ahead, and expecting a situation where we will learn to live with the virus, we need to engage swiftly into the recovery phase, with the aim of ***Building Back Better***.

I therefore wish you success on your deliberation and look forward to the conclusions of the meeting.

Thank you for the kind attention