



34th Session of the OATUU General Council
Youth Employment, Governance and Democracy in Africa:
The Role of the Trade Union

Opening Speech

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&

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His Excellency, Mr. Dak Duop Bichiok, Minister of Labour,
Government of National Unity

Professor Ibrahim Ahmed Ghadour, Chairperson of the Sudanese
Workers' Trade Union Federation, and President of the Organization of
African Trade Union Unity

Alhaji Hassan Sunmonu, Secretary General of the Organization of
African Trade Union Unity

Dear Sister Vice President of the Organization of African Trade Union
Unity

Distinguished Guests

Dear Friends

In today's world, youth are almost three times as likely to be unemployed compared to adults. Only one young person out of two is active in labour markets around the world. Young people account for almost a quarter of the world's total working poor. And in most regions, young women continue to be the hardest hit by unemployment and discrimination at work.

If youth unemployment numbers and rates are expected to decline worldwide in 2011, the Middle East and North Africa are the only parts of the world where youth unemployment rates were already the highest and are still expected to continue to increase.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, we estimate that an annual 2.2 million young people are to enter the labour market each and every year by 2015.

The magnitude of the youth employment challenge illustrates the importance of your meeting.

Today, as African workers you are gathered in Khartoum because you are listening to youth's aspirations.

Young women and men in Africa are not calling for charity. They are looking for participation, productive opportunities and social inclusion.

Africa has the potential to offer a brighter future to its young population.

We should never underestimate Africa's economic and social potential: our unexploited mineral wealth, 60% of the world's uncultivated

agricultural land, and above all human resources with the youngest age profile of any continent.

Yes, enormous development opportunities exist all over our continent, even as in some parts it so explosively continues its movement toward freedom and democracy.

And Africa has proved its economic resilience in resisting to the negative effects of the global financial crisis, with the sub-Saharan region, for example, forecast to grow by 5,5% in 2011 and even more beyond.

But what is the meaning of Africa's economic growth for the young people if such growth rates are not translated for them into concrete opportunities in the labour market?

We all know how much young women and men can bring energy to societies and creativity to economies.

Can we any longer ignore their innovative and creative potential and take away their hopes?

As African workers, today you are sending a clear political message: it is time to connect youth aspirations for productive and decent work and a better living to shared growth, productive opportunities and participative governance.

Let me put it loud and clear: Africa's youth is the solution to Africa's development challenge.

But to realize Africa's youth potential for Africa's development, we need to realize four policy transitions.

First, a transition from jobless growth to an employment driven-growth:

Making full employment and decent work a key macroeconomic objective in itself will be a major policy step forward.

African countries may have to consider embedding aspects of education and employment policies at the time of designing macroeconomic frameworks to ensure that these issues are timely addressed. In addition, more refined methodologies to assess the employment content of different investment options and growth patterns are needed.

But it remains, that the ease with which young people can find jobs is both dependent on how well they are prepared to enter the labour market and on how well the labour market itself is prepared to receive them.

And this is directly related to the second transition that we need- the transition from primary to higher levels of education and skills:

Reports on progress being made towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) indicate that youth literacy has increased in the region and that gender disparities in educational attainment are narrowing.

Yet, African countries must step up efforts to provide basic education to the millions of children left behind, while also finding efficient ways to provide secondary, vocational, and tertiary education. In a continent where only 5% of the relevant age group is enrolled in tertiary education, development will also depend on access to tertiary institutions, as well as their relevance to the needs of the labour market.

Strategies therefore need to be revisited to ensure that balance is achieved between universal primary education and higher levels of learning.

Third transition, connecting the world of learning and the world of work:

Most countries in Africa have a significant number of graduates in the social sciences, business and law, while engineering, manufacturing and construction as well as health record the lowest percentage of tertiary graduates.

The labour market in Africa should be closely monitored and adequate labour information should be generated for more effective planning and connections between the world of learning and the world of work. This labour market information is essential given the current scenario, where potentially 200 million young Africans could effectively participate in the labour market.

And we also need to take into account that African countries have large informal economies and rural working populations. In this context, limiting efforts to implementing active labour market policies only is not likely to have a large impact in the daily lives of peoples.

African countries should expand job and education alternatives in rural areas and informal economies. They also should encourage the social and solidarity economy including cooperatives as well as young and women productive associations. And they should create an environment that is conducive for entrepreneurship at all levels and self-employment.

And fourth transition, moving from top-down development policies to participative governance:

One of the main challenges of public policy today is to foster institutional arrangements through which governments, employers and workers can play a strategic and forward-looking role in anticipating future needs.

Taking into account that skills and employment policies should go hand in hand, social dialogue is therefore essential for integrating skills development policies with other policy areas - not only labour market and social protection policies, but also industrial, investment, trade policies as well as regional or local development policies.

The political turmoil in North Africa and the Middle East is an important reminder of why unemployment, and more importantly youth unemployment should be at the forefront of Africa's development agenda. Youth unemployment is not just a threat to authoritarian regimes but also to democracies. To tackle the youth employment challenges, we are convinced that social dialogue and tripartism are essential to promote common understanding and consensus.

Clearly, the primary responsibility for promoting youth employment lies with States.

But we all know that nobody can do it alone.

This is why I would like to salute your decision to place these decent work challenges in perspective with governance and democracy during this workshop because the tenets of governance and democracy encompass:

- the rule of law - including the respect of workers' rights;
- fundamental freedoms - including freedom of association and collective bargaining; and
- accountability and participative governance - including voice, representation and social dialogue.

And I know that, as trade unions, these are values that are close to your hearts and convictions.

Yes indeed, I salute your determination to contribute, as trade unions, to Africa's major policy challenge: translating Africa's solid growth into inclusive development through social dialogue.

This is our decent work development agenda – and this is a process which needs policy coherence, tripartite commitment and concerted action.

Your presence hence today in Khartoum shows Africa's readiness to determine its own destiny.

And once again, the Organization of African Trade Union Unity is taking the lead in shaping Africa's development agenda and responding to the needs of Africa's peoples. Well done, Comrade Hassan Sunmonu. Well done, Comrades.

Thank you so much for your attention and confidence.