

Second African Decent Work Symposium

“Building a social protection floor with the Global Jobs Pact”

(Yaounde, 6-8 October 2010)

Opening Address by Mr. Charles Dan

ILO Regional Director for Africa

- His Excellency the Prime Minister,
- Members of Government of the Republic of Cameroon,
- Ministers of Labour,
- The Chairperson of the AU Commission on Labour and Social Affairs,
- The Workers’ Vice-Chairperson of the ILO Governing Body,
- The President of the International Organization of Employers,
- The Representative of the African Union Commission,
- Dear ILO Tripartite Constituents in Africa,
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Dear Colleagues of the United Nations family and African regional institutions,
- The ILO Executive Directors for the Employment and Social Protection Sectors,
- The Director of the ILO Yaounde Decent Work Support Team,
- Distinguished guests,
- Dear friends,

On behalf of our Director General, Mr. Juan Somavia, I would like to ask you, Mr. Prime Minister, to extend the gratitude of the ILO to His Excellency Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon, for his very high patronage of this symposium that gathers us in Yaounde.

We thank Cameroon for the warm welcome and generous hospitality.

Through you, Mr. Prime Minister, we hail Cameroon’s 2035 vision and the commitment of Government to bring into line growth and employment.

Permit me to salute the commendable action of Minister Robert Nkili at the helm of the African Union Commission on Labour and Social Affairs. Mr. Minister, congratulations for your commitment to the organization of this event. I thank and congratulate your entire team.

Allow me to particularly acknowledge the presence of Sir Roy Trotman, Workers’ Vice-Chairperson of the ILO Governing Body. Your participation, Sir Trotman, clearly testifies once again your attachment to your roots. Thank you for your commitment to Africa’s development.

Let me express my friendship and admiration for the contribution of Professor Wiseman Nkuhlu at the service of the continent’s renaissance. Bravo Professor Nkuhlu for your action –

yesterday as Executive Secretary of NEPAD –today as President of the International Organization of Employers.

My respect also to the African Union Commission for its fight against exclusion, poverty and vulnerability for Africa and the fruitful cooperation ties that exist between us.

Countless thanks to Assane Diop and José-Manuel Salazar, Executive Directors of the Social Protection and Employment Sectors respectively, who committed themselves personally, together with colleagues at the Headquarters in Geneva and the Regional Office in Addis Ababa, as well as the teams on the ground, to propose you scenarios of a possible social Africa.

Such social Africa – a productive Africa – an equitable Africa – a protected Africa – is one in which we believe more than ever before at the ILO.

We believe in it because we trust you.

In this hall, what we see, in the light of the tripartism that you represent, is the power of a rising Africa – Africa resilient in the rural sector – Africa agile in informal economy – Africa in solidarity in social economy – Africa imaginative in service delivery- Africa in exports, gaining its place in a yet very unfair globalization – Africa of women at work and carrying the weight of the future of Africa’s development.

On this day, the heart of this progressing social Africa is beating in Yaounde.

Africa does not lack vision:

- On September 2004 - Ouagadougou – Declaration of Heads of State and Government to make decent work a development priority ;
- On April 2007 - Addis Ababa – Tripartite adoption of the Decent Work Agenda in Africa 2007-2015 ;
- On December 2009 - Ouagadougou – Tripartite decision to make Decent Work Country Programmes the main instrument for the implementation of the Global Jobs Pact, in response to the global financial and economic crisis.
- October 2010 - Yaounde – Tripartite Africa persistently believes in “building a social protection floor with the Global Jobs Pact”.

Africa does not lack assets.

Today, Africa represents:

- 1.6 trillion dollars of collective GDP;
- 860 billion dollars of consolidated consumer expenditure;
- 60% of total non-cultivated arable land in the world;

Tomorrow, Africa will represent:

- 2.6 trillion dollars of collective GDP,
- 1.4 trillion dollars of consolidated consumer expenditure in 2020 ; and
- 1.1 billion Africans would have come of labour force age in 2040 – a market – a force to reckon with.

Africa does not lack vision – Africa does not lack assets – Africa does not lack impulse.

It demonstrated this by containing the great global recession, better than forecasted.

Resorting to budgetary policies to respond to the impact of the global recession was one of the new developments in the region. Thirty-two African Countries experienced an economic downturn in 2009. Of this number, about twenty - virtually two-third – were able to adopt anticyclic budgetary positions without affecting, in the majority of cases, the sustainable character of public debt trajectories. This attests of the improved budgetary positions of a growing number of countries.

In 2010, the continent’s growth is expected to reach 4.5%, as against 2% in 2009. It is projected at over 5.5% to 6% in 2011.

However, we are all aware that the high growth rates in the continent in the decade previous to the global recession were not optimized in terms of poverty reduction and job creation.

Yet, by 2015, it is estimated that the active population growth rate will be higher in Sub-Saharan Africa than in any other region in the world.

According to ILO estimates, this will require the creation of some 61 million new jobs in the region to ensure, in particular, that the youth entering the labour market will have decent jobs.

In order to meet this huge challenge, Africa must shift towards a jobs-oriented macro-economic framework. It should equally develop its full productive potential in particular, in agriculture.

For our countries, there will be no economic development without improved productivity.

Similarly, there will be no improved productivity without better social protection of our populations.

Our message is simple: there is no economic security without social security for Africa.

It is in this context that we fully recognize the African Union Social Policy Framework adopted in 2008.

And this is to support this vision that we are parties to the initiative launched by the United Nations for a social protection floor, aimed at ensuring access to basic services and transfers to all those who need social protection to get out of poverty or not to plunge therein.

The Global Jobs Pact confirms this approach.

Is it daring to talk of social protection floor for Africa?

No – It is neither daring nor too early.

As stated in the report “Building a social protection floor with the Global Jobs Pact”, submitted by the ILO at this Symposium, social security should not be considered as a cost, but an investment in human development.

The share of resources available allocated to social security depends less on the wealth of a country than on political will – which determines the budget margin available.

While in Europe 20 to 30 per cent of GDP is invested in social security, in Africa, only 4 to 6% per cent of GDP is allocated to social security.

On condition that it is placed at the top of African policy priorities – as well as among those of the international community – it is possible to institute a gradual and far-reaching social protection floor.

It is possible and, above all, indispensable.

We can do a lot. In 2009, we were able to protect financial institutions that were at the origin of the systemic risk – those famous banks that were too big to sink.

In the future, we should equally be able to protect the smallest - the most vulnerable - our citizens. Time has come to address the social and human consequences of the crisis through employment and social protection.

To ensure that its priorities are recognized, tripartite Africa must mobilize through social dialogue.

Since December 2009, we have shown that such mobilization is possible to implement the Global Jobs Pact within the framework of Decent Work Country Programmes.

Today in Yaoundé, our pride is that you have not come to this Symposium to look at things as they are – but to examine them as they should be.

Yes, we believe that Social Africa is possible because we have put our trust in you.

Thank you for your attention.