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## **COTU (K) GOVERNING COUNCIL CONFERENCE**

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**Opening Address**

**by**

**Mr. Charles Dan**

**Assistant Director-General &  
Regional Director for Africa**

**18-21 May 2011**

**TOM MBOYA LABOUR COLLEGE, KISUMU, KENYA**

P.O. Box 2788/2532, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Honourable John Munyes, Minister of Labour of the Republic of Kenya,

Sir Leroy Trotman, Workers' Vice Chairperson of the ILO Governing Body,

Dear Chairman General of COTU, Rajab Mwendhi

Dear Francis Atwoli, Secretary General of the Central Organization of Trade Unions, and  
Member of the ILO Governing Body,

Dear Jaap Wiene, ITUC Deputy Secretary-General,

Dear Hassan Sunmonu, OATUU Secretary-General,

Dear Kwasi Adu Amankwah, ITUC-Africa Secretary-General,

Dear Trade Union Leaders and Members,

Dear Jacqueline Mugo, FKE Executive Director and Member of the ILO Governing Body –  
here represented,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I start by saluting Minister Munyes. Our sincere congratulations, Mr. Minister, for the  
proposed re-election of Kenya as a Government member of the ILO Governing Body. This is a  
testimony of your achievements. Well done Mr. Minister.

I would like to thank my friend Francis Atwoli for inviting me today. I feel deeply privileged to  
be here in Kisumu, Kenya, with you - with friends and elders of so many years - including Sir  
Leroy Trotman, Kwasi Adu Amankwah, Andrew Kailembo and George Muchai - with whom  
we have always shared ideas and initiatives to better the destiny of Africa's peoples.

And I have come to this Conference at Tom Mboya Labour College with respect and  
admiration:

- Respect for the rich history of COTU; and

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- Admiration for COTU's achievements under the leadership of our Brother Francis Atwoli.

Thank you so much, Brother Francis Atwoli for inviting us to your 12<sup>th</sup> Governing Council Delegates Conference on "Workers' full participation in Change Process and implementation of the New Constitution in Kenya".

I would like here to congratulate the people of Kenya for the successful referendum, and the workers of Kenya for the critical part they played in this great achievement.

A nation is a common will to live together. And the constitution is the common instrument to achieve this common will.

Today we are gathered in Kisumu to reflect on the workers' role in changing times around a unifying theme: a new constitution for a new Kenya - and a new Kenya for a new Africa. And as you strive as workers - real representatives of the real economy - to play your full role in change process and in building Kenya as one nation drawing on a new and solid Constitution, three core values come to my mind:

- Inclusion;
- Hope; and
- Trust.

First, promoting an inclusive growth:

Confronted unfairly by the global financial and economic crisis, Africa has proven its resilience. Growth in Africa is projected to expand by 5 per cent in 2011 and even more beyond.

However, no matter how robust, our continent's growth remains an abstraction for the majority of Africa's women and men. And this is due to a single reason: it is a jobless growth.

For growth to be sustainable, it must be inclusive:

- In this connection, any enabling policies should focus on:

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- Making full employment a macroeconomic priority; and
- Establishing social protection security including a social protection floor for the most vulnerable.

Second, building hope:

Since December last year, we have witnessed a wind of change blowing on North Africa and the Arab world at large. Starting in Africa, stemming from Tunisia, rebounding in Egypt, spreading in various parts of the Arab world, young people and workers from all walks of life, men and women have massively called for more freedoms and more employment opportunities.

And indeed, youth employment has become one the most pressing policy challenges of our times. Too many young Africans - men and women - face a daily economic challenge to work for income in an environment marked by widespread poverty and a lack of social protection.

What can be done to bring hope to the youth?

To bring hope we need to bring fairness.

Labour market needs a fair environment for sustainable enterprises at all levels, and I would say in particular for micro and small enterprises. Decent work for all require equal opportunities to access credit or purchase land and other key production factors, predictable taxation systems, and public investment boosting private investment.

But labour market also needs a fair environment for workers too and especially young Africans - women and men - who can enjoy equal opportunities to get good education and relevant training, and equal opportunities to compete for quality jobs.

It is in that line, that we welcome the new Constitution of Kenya as it recognizes that: “Every person has the right to fair labour practices”; and “every worker has the right to fair remuneration; and to reasonable working conditions”.

Indeed, hope in societies and fairness in the labour markets go hand in hand. And that brings me to my third point, building trust - social trust -:

There is no development without peoples' trust. In this connection, social dialogue can help bridging the trust gap in our societies. More than ever, we need to build a social trust through social dialogue to empower governments, employers and workers to democratic governance through freedom of association and collective bargaining.

This is why we welcome the new Constitution of Kenya as it recognizes that: "Every worker has the right to form, join or participate in the activities and programmes of trade unions". Unfortunately, these fundamental rights are not yet fully recognized and fully respected everywhere, including in our continent.

In this connection, let me put it loud and clear: we will never get tired to promote the universal ratification and effective application of fundamental principles and rights at work. We will never give up: each violation of workers' rights in any African country is a brainless obstruction to Africa's development.

There will be no sustainable development without respect of workers' rights. And there is no possible respect of workers' rights without solid public institutions as well as strong, representative and independent trade unions and employers' organizations leading to meaningful social dialogue.

When I look around this room, what I see is a proud Kenya and a proud Africa. Yes, I am convinced that our beloved COTU-Kenya, led by our beloved Brother Francis Atwoli, will take its full share of responsibilities in paving the way for a new Kenya in a new Africa.

Yes, Kenya needs a strong COTU. And Africa needs a strong Kenya.

Thank you so much for your attention.