Welcome Statement by Mr George Okutho, Director
ILO Country Office for Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Djibouti, 4th February 2016 during the Launching Ceremony of the Project at
Arvind Lifestyle Apparel Manufacturing PLC, Bole-Lemi Industrial Zone

Your Excellency Ato Abdulfeta Abdulahi, Minister, MoLSA
Your Excellency Ato Tadele Yimer, President, EEF
Your Excellency Ato Kassahun Follo, President, CETU
Ms Anneka Knutsson, Head of Bilateral Cooperation, Sida
Mr Tobias Fischer, Country Manager, H&M
Mr Rajarshi Dutta, General Manager, Arvind Lifestyle Apparel Manufacturing PLC
Invited Guests and Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me to be among you this afternoon for the launching of this important project. Let me say from the outset that, the project is indeed timely and relevant for Ethiopia; as the country has also integrated the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into its GTP II, which puts people and planet at its centre. The SDGs calls for collaboration to tackle the formidable challenges confronting humanity, including those in the world of work.
Improving the working conditions, productivity and competitiveness of the cotton and textile industry has been a priority of the ILO and its tripartite partners since 2007.

The first Decent work country programme (2006-2009) for Ethiopia, agreed by the tripartite partners, was about promoting decent work in the cotton and textiles sector. Since then, there have been a lot of positive developments in Ethiopia in general and in the sector in particular.

We know that, Ethiopia is among the top 10 fastest growing economies in the world, having registered a double-digit average growth rate of 11% over the past decade. The garment and textile industry is growing very fast and attracting foreign direct investments. Moreover, GTP II focuses on pursuing aggressive measures towards rapid industrialization and structural transformation to achieve the realization of Ethiopia’s vision of becoming a middle income country, in the next ten (10) years.

Your Excellences
Ladies and Gentlemen

For us in the ILO, we note with appreciation that the strategic directions of the industrial sector are, among others, to establish light manufacturing industries which are labor intensive and benefit citizens of this country, are
globally competitive while being environment friendly, and will become the manufacturing hub for Africa.

The textile and garment sector is expected to create employment opportunities for around 350,000 workers and 1 billion dollars export earnings by the end of GTP II period.

While we are witnessing the emergence of the sector in Ethiopia, we also need to learn from the experience of other countries. For example, in Bangladesh the sector has seen a number of industrial accidents including the fire at Tazreen Fashions and the collapse of Rana Plaza which claimed the lives of over 1,200 workers. As our ILO Director General puts it, this tragedy must be a catalyst for change not only in Bangladesh but also for the rest of the World.

The ILO is working in many countries around the world. Our work demonstrates that steadily improving working conditions can go hand in hand with profitable, well run and productive businesses. The project we are launching today is part of that effort.

During the formulation process, the project identified the different challenges that confront the sector in relation to industrial relations and productivity enhancement from the perspectives of the businesses, workers and
government; and appropriate interventions were identified and have been agreed upon, as the basis for the interventions that we are launching today.

The project will create regular dialogue forums that will bring together governments and representative organizations of business and workers and suppliers like H&M to collectively tackle common and urgent problems in the sector.

The issue of lack of data will be addressed as the project has strong component on baseline data gathering and monitoring and evaluation.

I want to thank SIDA and H&M for their financial support to make this project a reality. I would also like to thank Arvind Lifestyle Apparel Manufacturing PLC.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all of you for coming today.

I thank you