



Remarks

by

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Salutations

- Minister of Development, Investments and International Cooperation (MDICI)
- Minister of Employment and Vocational Training
- Minister of Local Affairs

It is with great pleasure and honour that I address this august gathering on the occasion of the 18th Regional Seminar for Labour-Based Practitioners, here in the beautiful city of Tunis, under the theme *“Towards sustainable and inclusive local development: local resources based approaches and decent jobs”*.

My sincere thanks to the Government of the Republic of Tunisia for accepting to host this very important meeting. Clearly, this demonstrates your commitment to the development of Africa.

I am also indebted to the Government of Ethiopia who hosted the 17th regional seminar, which, as you will agree, raised the stakes to very high levels.

To the organizers of this meeting, I say thank you for the time invested and dedication to ensuring a very successful meeting.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

There can never be a better time for holding a meeting of such significance as this one, than now, when the International Labour Organization marks its Centenary, 1919-2019. Buoyed by the quest to promote social justice, the ILO Declaration of Philadelphia, articulates that vision, and states that:

- (a) labour is not a commodity;
- (b) freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustained progress;

c) poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere; and

(d) the war against want requires to be carried on with unrelenting vigour within each nation, and by continuous and concerted international effort in which the representatives of workers and employers, enjoying equal status with those of governments, join with them in free discussion and democratic decision with a view to the promotion of the common welfare.

The ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 108th session in Geneva in June 2019, firmly upholds the same virtues. This declaration requests member States to work based on tripartism and social dialogue to further develop a human-centred approach to the future of work by:

a) Strengthening the capacities of all people to benefit from the opportunities of a changing world of work;

b) Strengthening the institutions of work to ensure adequate protection of all workers, and reaffirming the continued relevance of the employment relationship as a means of providing certainty and legal protection to workers, while recognizing the extent of informality and the need to ensure effective action to achieve transition to formality; and

c) Promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work.

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Dear Participants

The promotion of employment-intensive investment strategies is in perfect tandem with the spirit of the ILO Declaration for the Future of Work. The promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth will require investments in technologies that favour job creation; financial mechanisms that support programs with high employment potential; and investing in projects that support the environment.

This meeting is also happening as the ILO in Africa celebrates 60 years after the first office was established in 1959 in Lagos, Nigeria. Over these years, I must say, the ILO has supported the achievement of social justice and decent work in Africa. The ILO has been pivotal in the promotion of employment, supporting the adoption of labour standards, promoting social protection floors, improving rights at work. The ILO will continue delivering in her mandate to the people of Africa.

Despite progress, the employment statistics show that we still need to do more. For example:

- a) Informal employment is high and persistent. It is now pegged at almost 86 percent; almost 95 percent for young women and men;
- b) Extreme working poverty has remained high. It is now at 32.5 percent;
- c) Labour productivity growth has remained very low. It is now at 1.1 percent; and
- d) There are still 34 million unemployed persons.

This situation is being compounded by generally high levels of inequality and extreme weather events due to climate change. On the other hand, we are faced with a changing world of work due to advances in technology (artificial intelligence, big data, and the Internet of things). These issues mean that our efforts towards addressing these multifaceted challenges should be systematic and strategic. Things cannot be **Business as usual!**

ILO's approach in addressing these challenges has always been to follow a two-pronged plan of action:

- 1) Addressing current challenges through creating a more inclusive and sustainable (climate-resilient) economic growth – in the spirit of not leaving anyone behind;
- 2) While at the same time gradually building up capabilities which improve education and skills sets, information and communications technology (ICT), industry/manufacturing base, Research and Development etc. This will enable countries to fully take advantage of the rapidly evolving digital transformation (artificial intelligence and the Fourth Industrial Revolution).

Pro-employment investments in job-rich sectors and the use of local-resource-based technologies are part of the ILO's overall support strategy in promoting inclusive economic growth. The local-resource approach is very important as it targets the people that need support the most, including the rural populations, who represent over 60 percent of Africans. Such investments support the SDGs' core value of not leaving any one behind.

Pro-employment investment also directly supports jobs for the youth, affording dignified incomes to them, and reducing the incidence of youth not in education, employment or training (NEETS).

Poor infrastructure and unemployment are “twin deficits” in Africa. The Employment Intensive Investment Programme has demonstrated over the years that the infrastructure deficit and the unemployment can be tackled together by using local resource-based methods. For this to be possible, EIIP projects need to scale up to have a lasting and more meaningful impact in addressing these two interrelated issues.

This is why I am particularly impressed with the achievements so far, as contained in the “Review of the XVII Regional Seminar of Employment Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) practitioners”, held in September 2017 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

I wish to highlight three important takeaways from the review:

First, *the enabling environment for the adoption and expansion of labour-based programs has expanded.* For instance, the review shows that a number of countries, which have completed development frameworks since 2017 have integrated labour-based methods in support of vulnerable groups. Examples include Togo, Senegal, Liberia, Ethiopia, Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa, and Mauritania.

Second, *the fight for better working condition is progressing quite well.* A number of labour-based guides and tools are being finalized in different countries, including Central African Republic and Cameroon, while countries such as Senegal have over a long period already systematized and stabilized labour-based methods. It is also pleasing to note that Employment Intensive Investment Programmes are leading in research and development relating to innovative rural infrastructure, climate-resilient construction techniques and use of locally available resources to create public assets.

Thirdly, participation of local entrepreneurs, youth and women in the delivery of public goods, services and works has increased, through improvement in *public procurement systems*. Important strides have been made to facilitate access to public procurement for national small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including those that target labour-based work. There are examples in Benin, Mali, and Tunisia, among other countries.

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

The ILO in Africa will be hosting the African Regional Meeting in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from 3-6 December, 2019. This important meeting that brings together ILO constituents will also adopt a Decent Work Agenda 2020-30 for Africa, rooted in structural transformation. I believe that local development hinged on labour-based methods is one way to ensure a structural transformation that supports job creation. This is even more

promising when such labour-based methods are focused on local resources that benefit the decentralization process.

I therefore would like to reiterate three key things that we must continue doing in support of the structural transformation we want:

First, the youth and women must be specially targeted as key actors in the planning, implementation and monitoring of all interventions and programs. Furthermore, the formalization of Africa's huge informal economy, including through the social and solidarity economy, must receive primary attention.

Second, we must invest in lifelong skills development which facilitates the optimum use of local resources and knowledge to enhance the development benefits to the local communities, through a decentralized process. This also helps to unlock the potentials of rural areas and transform them to centres of wealth creation and sources of decent work; particularly for young women and men. It is also important to keep abreast with technological changes and look for new solutions to address old/prevaling challenges.

Third, we must at all times, ensure that the key principles of the ILO Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work must underpin all development; thereby fostering an inclusive structural transformation.

Finally, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am always inspired by the words of one of Africa's role models, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate of 2004, Wangari Maathai, who said, and I quote:

“I’m very conscious of the fact that you can’t do it alone. It’s teamwork. When you do it alone you run the risk that when you are no longer there nobody else will do it.”

Thank you.