

- **Honourable Ministers responsible for Labour,**
- **Your excellencies Ambassadors,**
- **Distinguished Social Partners,**
- **Delegates,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

It is a great honour and privilege for me to have this opportunity to share ideas with the Africa Group made up of the tripartite structure, namely; Governments, Employer organisations and Labour Unions. The three meet in this forum of influence and authority on effective and efficient labour administration to discuss matters of mutual interest, benefit and concerns as equals.

Allow me to thank the African envoys based in Geneva for relentlessly representing our Continental interests with skill and dedication in all International Organisations based in this city, in particular the ILO. If it were not for your deep commitment, unity and common vision I dare say that Africa would not have made the strides which we have witnessed to date in

the areas that you cover. I therefore wish to urge you to continue in that spirit, high level of commitment and selflessness.

Let me also extend my deep gratitude to the Africa Group of the ILC for the unity and maturity they have demonstrated when dealing with pertinent issues at hand. I have been reliably informed that you are the most organised Group within the ILO. This is all the more impressive because you form the majority anyway. It is through this unity of purpose that we will be able to achieve our socio-economic development objectives. I hope that you will report appropriately to your respective principals in the capitals.

My contact with you occurs when the world is besieged by a myriad of global challenges which also impact adversely on the African Continent. This is so despite Africa's endowment with human and natural resources. It is common knowledge that such global socio-economic and political issues pose more questions than answers on the living conditions of the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, namely

women, children, youth, people with disabilities, the elderly, the unemployed, including those in the informal sector, in Africa.

Director of Proceedings,

Allow me to highlight some of the challenges facing Africa. First, there is a high level of unemployment and/or underemployment in Africa. This affects mainly the youth.

We have realised that the number of youth who enter the labour market far outpaces the number of jobs available. We are all aware of what happens when the youth are not working. They are inherently very anxious and energetic but also imaginative. They can easily turn into delinquents and cause social disturbances. For, as we all know the devil finds work for idle hands. We therefore have to adopt policies which will directly target young jobseekers and also review our education system so that it is primarily labour market driven. Moreover, its products must not only be job-seekers but, more importantly, job-creators. In this process,

Employers and Business and the Private Sector must not be mere spectators but must advise Governments on which skills they require. After all, they are the main consumers of the products generated by the education system!

Second, the pandemic of HIV and AIDS is decimating our peoples at an alarming rate, particularly the African population under 49 years. This is further exacerbated by the rising food costs, which adds more burden to the already affected or infected masses of our populations.

Our priority as Governments in partnership with the private sector and civil society is to mobilise resources so as to ensure access to ARV treatment to those infected. However, in order for us, as a partnership, to be able to mobilise the necessary resources, we should be in a position to know how many people are infected. It is only through testing that we can know the magnitude of the problem and mitigate the impact effectively. Hence the “Know Your Status” campaign in Lesotho, as an example.

I therefore urge you all as leaders in your respective Constituencies - Government, Employers, and Workers to go for voluntary testing, so that you can all know your status. I am confident that those whom you lead will follow your good example.

Third, escalating cost of basic foodstuffs poses a new and most serious challenge. I am sure you have been following the discussions that we had in Rome last week. We are all familiar with some of the problems faced by our countries as a result of the current food crisis. As African Governments and partners we have to come up with strategies that will ensure food security. Reliance on foreign food aid alone is not a viable option in the medium to long term. We must take drastic or radical measures to restore the virtue, profitability, and respectability of farming, so that our youth may consider farming as a viable and worthwhile option.

Fourth, there is lack of social protection for the majority of our populations. It is imperative that we invest in

social security as African Governments, hopefully supported by the private sector, instead of predominantly putting the bulk of our expenditure into dispensable areas. Social protection to the most needy and the vulnerable is the key to effective poverty reduction. I have been informed that the Federal Republic of Germany has come to our rescue in assisting us to realise the universal coverage of social security. It is my sincere hope that we will use this gesture of goodwill, for which we are most grateful, for the improvement of the lives of our peoples.

Fifth, today the menace of child labour is a result of many factors including HIV and AIDS, rising food prices, and other social ills which affect children. It is therefore vital that as African Leaders we ensure that children go to school and NOT to work or worse still to war.

We all know very well that child labour denies children the opportunity to be children and enjoy their childhood first and foremost. It also prevents or disrupts children's education, and denies them an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills. This renders them

uncompetitive and inaccessible as a resource in the future. In most cases it perpetuates a vicious circle in which poverty begets more poverty from generation to generation. We therefore have to come up with policies and programmes that will ensure that child labour in all its forms is completely eradicated as it does not belong to the modern society.

Before I conclude let me highlight the fact that tripartism plays a vital role in ensuring that the policies and programmes for the socio-economic development of Africa are implemented and are sustainable. Therefore as the tripartite it is vital that we work together for the common goal, of alleviating the poverty facing our populations. It is through genuine dialogue and truly constructive engagement that we will be able to achieve rapid-paced and high quality socio-economic development.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, let me wish you all a gainful stay in Geneva and fruitful deliberations which I hope and trust will bring positive and timely change to Africa. We are now the only continent left behind in the development process.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Khotso! Pula!! Nala!!!

(Peace! Rain!., Prosperity!!!)