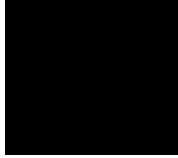


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OPENING STATEMENT BY

**H.E. DR. MUSTAPHA S. KALOKO
COMMISSIONER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

**AT THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE LABOUR AND
SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION**

**23 – 25 APRIL 2014
WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA**

PROTOCOL

I am wholeheartedly grateful to be here with you at this historic Special Session of African Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs. I sincerely welcome you and greatly hope that the objectives that brought us here will strengthen us to engage in a constructive and well-structured deliberation.

The Namibian Government, our host, has provided the congenial atmosphere and the logistical support to ensure that we pursue those objectives without let up or hindrance. For such generosity and invaluable service rendered to the continent in the spirit of Pan-Africanism, I seize this moment to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to our host and the people of Namibia.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ten years ago, we met in Ouagadougou the Burkinabe Capital. The outcome of that Extraordinary Summit was an ambitious Declaration backed by a Plan of Action. Our goal then was to address the problem of poverty and its ramifications mindful that it had held the continent and its people hostage for more than four decades of independence and caused instability and conflict while pushing the continent in to an abyss of misery.

In the ensuing years of Ouagadougou, countries have increased their capacity in policy planning and monitoring and evaluation as means of tracking the effects of those policies. The four biennial (2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012) and two comprehensive follow up reports (2009 and 2014) are clear indicators of this fact. We have also noticed a semblance of the functioning with enhance capacity of the labour market institutions.

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Despite those achievements, we are seriously challenged by the effects of underemployment (between 35% - 75%) in the informal economy, which are further made severe by rising unemployment rates in our countries.

Ten years after, we are returning to Ouagadougou with this important pause in Windhoek to assess the gains and the effects of our actions. We also hope that this Special Session will embolden us to turn poverty on its head and ensure that our people are free from its shackles and its fretting effects.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

For some of us who have been following Africa's progress and privy to the discussions and consultations on the present and future prospects of the continent, we know that many mistakes were and are still being made with grave and unbearable consequences coming in their wake. However, optimism and the prospects of a better and brighter future stare at us as some of our economies have witnessed sustained economic growth in spite of financial crisis and austerity elsewhere. Notwithstanding such growth, concrete benefits are yet to trickle down or turned into employment opportunities with social protection serving as means of eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities and achieving inclusive growth and sustainable economic development. This is why we need more courage and determination to capitalize on the favorable atmosphere of optimally utilizing the opportunities and wisely maximizing the gains for the benefit of our people rather than settle for inaction or allow ourselves to be saddled with the encumbrances thrown at us by a complex and dynamic global environment.

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Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Poverty continues to be one of the gravest burdens of the continent; its persistence and ubiquitous presence amidst huge natural, mineral and human resources are a paradox in itself. That it has not been adequately addressed for more than fifty years of independence, is a shame and a stigma the continent has lived with for all these years while at the same time attracting appellations such as “hopeless” “dark” “miserable” “failed” and ‘conflict prone’ to name just a few.

However, the fact that we here and heading towards an Extra-Ordinary Summit in Ouagadougou on poverty , suggests that we are determined to reexamine ourselves, our methodology and our strategy to eradicate poverty in order to ensure a better standard of living for our people.

The African Union, quite conscious of the relevance of the Youth bulge and how it could play out to the continent’s disadvantage if a conducive environment is not created to reap the demographic dividend, has strongly indicated to the world in its Common African Position on the Post 2015 Development Agenda that the continent would redirect its focus on the wellbeing and economic regeneration of Africa’s people.

Pillar one of the six pillars stresses the relevance of structural economic transformation and inclusive growth that “can play in creating resilient economies, decent employment opportunities minimizing income and wealth disparities, and eradicating poverty”

In another bid to wipe out poverty, ensure growth and curb against shocks for African economies, the recent Conference of African Ministers of Finance in Abuja, Nigeria underscored the relevance of

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industrialization as a precondition for the continent to achieve inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

On agriculture and food security, which mainly speaks to rural and informal economy, the Africa Union, in an effort to raise the profile and draw attention to the sector, has pronounced this year as a year of Agriculture and food security.

These are few examples of the change of mindset; a new mindset that is consciously riveted on a people centered approach and how to lift the citizens of Africa from perennial poverty and its woes.

In that direction, I would like to see significant progress made on the following fronts:

- Implement the Youth and Women Employment Pact, and ensure the reduction of by 2% per year of youth and women unemployment rate;
- Position Labour market institution as strategic assets of national and regional investment policies and strategies;
- Address the challenge of underemployment prevalent in the informal economy and rural sector, and ensure that at least 10% per year of social protection coverage for the informal economy and rural workers;
- Ensure progress on integrated regional labour market to improve labour migration within the continent, and enhance the productivity management capacity at all levels to be at par with other regions of the world;
- Increase budget allocation to employment policies, and the African Union Commission to work with the AfDB financial mechanism for the implementation of the Ouaga+10 policy instruments and;

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- Call upon ILO to lead the engagement of the international partners in implementing the Ouga+10 policy instruments and the four-year implementing programmes over the decade

Hon Ministers, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to emphasize here that this Special Session is a special historic moment that calls upon you to take forward the various efforts of the continental body, set the tone and agenda for the Extraordinary Summit with the hope of producing qualitative documents capable of inspiring our Heads of States (when they meet in Ouagadougou in September) to adopt decisions for poverty eradication and the economic transformation of this great continent.

During this Session, let us also focus our attention on those who are gravely touched by the omissions or commissions of policy and decision makers; those who bear the brunt when economies fail; when flood, draughts and famine devastate; when conflict breaks; when states are tilted toward near collapse; and austerity becomes the only language or prescription to salvage the situation. Let us be mindful of the young men and women who rely on us for a better future; the elderly, the disabled the rural poor and the slum dweller who are bereft of their strength , but yet to be protected and comforted in the dusk and withering years of their lives by universal health coverage and social protection policies.

I thank you for your attention.

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