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**AMB. OLAWALE MAIYEGUN (PhD)
AU DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

**AT THE
OPENING OF THE EXPERTS MEETING OF THE 8TH
SESSION OF THE LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
COMMISSION, YAOUNDE, CAMEROON**

11 April 2011

Distinguished Experts, and Members of the
Bureau of the 7th Session of the Labour and Social Affairs Commission,
Distinguished Social Partner Representatives from AU Member States,
Representatives from Regional Economic Communities,
Representatives from International Organisations, including UN Agencies,
Invited Experts, and Civil Society Counterparts in Africa,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to take the floor at the opening of the Experts Meeting of the 8th Session of the Labour and Social Affairs Commission which takes place in the beautiful City of Yaoundé with the full hospitality granted to the participants by the People and Government of the Republic of Cameroon.

On behalf of H.E the Commissioner for Social Affairs, Adv.Bience Gawanas, and on the behalf of all participants here, I have the duty of extending our gratitude to Cameroon. As you may know, in view of rationalizing and improving the efficiency of the various statutory meetings of the Union, the Executive Council decided that the Ministerial Conferences will be held every two years. Hence, the 8th Session of the Labour and Social Affairs Commission was organized in 2011. This decision will provide for enough time that Member States, the RECs, the African Union Commission and other key stakeholders can effectively implement the recommendations adopted by the Sessions of the Labour and Social Affairs Commission.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 8th Session of the Labour and Social Affairs Commission comes at a time of a harsh employment challenge, resulting from the world-wide financial and economic crises. We also know that, although Africa maintained a mean growth rate of 5.5 % during the last decade, this did not translate properly into significant creation of quality jobs and reduction of poverty. Africa has still to accentuate her effort in simultaneously pursuing its economic development and expanding her social progress for better living conditions of her people and working conditions for

the working poor in the informal economy. In view of the above, the theme of the current Session of the Labour and Social Affairs Commission is “Promoting Employment for Social Cohesion and Inclusive Growth”. To this effect, delegates will discuss key issues relating to the achievements and constraints faced by Member States and the RECs in implementing the 2004 Ouagadougou Plan of Action on Employment Promotion and Poverty Alleviation, and the need for social protection schemes for the informal economy and rural workers. It may be recalled that the 3rd Conference of Ministers of Finance, Economy and Development Planning, which took place in Lilongwe, Malawi, in March 2010 discussed issues related to the theme “**Promoting high-level Sustainable Growth to Reduce Unemployment in Africa**”. Delegates will be briefed on the outcome of the Lilongwe Conference for implementation. You will also debate on the challenge of the labour market information system coordination and harmonization, the challenge of funding of employment policies on the continent, and activities of the African Group in the ILO Governing Body.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past months, we witnessed social and political instability starting to unfold on the continent, as a result of disruptions in social service delivery, in particular the high level of youth unemployment and underemployment. Subsequently, you will consider a Policy and Orientation Paper on “Promoting Youth Employment for Social Cohesion and Inclusive Growth”, which will be debated in the Ministerial Panel Discussion on Thursday, the 14th of April. The outcome of the ministerial panel discussion will feed into the 17th Assembly of the African Union in Malabo, in June 2011, under the theme “Accelerating Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development”. The contribution of the Labour and Social Affairs Commission to this Assembly is crucial, as youth employment is key to youth empowerment and to sustainable development. The challenge is even greater in post-conflict countries where the Commission undertook needs assessment missions in 2008 and 2009 to evaluate the labour and employment gaps. A briefing on these assessment exercises will allow Member States to be informed on the situation prevailing in the concerned post-conflict countries and, hopefully, commit themselves to providing any kind of assistance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Africa-EU Strategic Partnership is in its second Action Plan for the period 2011-2013. It was observed that Member States and Private sector of both parties, as well as the AU RECs did not properly engage in the implementation of the 1st Plan of Action (2008-2010), which limited the achievements of the 1st Action Plan. Consequently, the Labour and Social Affairs Commission, a tripartite organ, would be the appropriate body to be briefed as it involves the key stakeholders to be brought into the loop for a more comprehensive and dynamic implementation of the employment related strategic initiatives contained in the Action Plan.

The Commission would like to, in advance, appreciate the continuous and renewed engagement of Member States, the Private Sector, the RECS and international partners in translating into action the outcome of our meeting.

I thank you for your kind attention.