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Statement of the Commissioner for Social Affairs

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On the occasion of The International Labour Day

1 May 2020

Every year, the world of work celebrates the International Labour Day on May 1. From its first celebration, it has always been a moment of promotion of the rights of workers.

This year, the COVID-19 has taken from the world of work the joy of celebration of social achievements for the betterment of workers and their families. All over the globe, jobs are lost in incredible numbers in millions, putting livelihoods at risk.

Beyond and more than the health crisis, this is a human crisis affecting all segments of our societies, bringing more vulnerability and insecurity in already precarious world of work.

Africa is not spare by the pandemic, with almost all countries hit by the COVID-19. Preceding the advent of COVID-19, was shrinking African economies that were already struggling and not able to generate job opportunities.

The African Union Report of the Socio Economic Impacts of the pandemic underlines the huge shocks on the economies and the high cost paid by the world of work with companies' closures and jobs losses, supply chain disruption in critical sectors such as transportation, food and health.

The health professionals are at the frontline of the battle against the disease. They consent in a dedicated manner immense sacrifices to stop the spread of the disease by providing the needed care to infected persons, often without appropriate protection for themselves, putting their life in the balance.

As a result, a considerable number of health professionals are among the persons who lost their life in this battle. The African Union and its Commission extend their

heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. We are with them in this sorrow. We pray for the quick relief of those who are under care in hospitals and other centers.

We had for long lived with shortfalls in the African labour market. They have been brutally unveiled by the COVID-19 crisis which created a labour market crisis in the world. In Africa, it is now crucial to address the informal economy issues, to build resilient and inclusive labour market systems, leaving no one behind. We should also be attentive to the rights of migrant workers who are contributing to the wealth and resilience of our communities, as well as to their rich cultural diversity.

We need to come together, governments, employees and workers' organizations, and win the fight against the disease, protect and safeguard jobs, ensure business continuity. We should work out effective exit strategies for the world of work, preserving the potential of building stronger economies after the crisis. African responses to the virus need to provide options to prioritize informal economy which holds most of the jobs and livelihoods.

In cooperation with the NEPAD and the ILO, and in consultation with Business Africa, OATUU and ITUC-AFRICA, the Commission issued the AU Guidelines on CoVID-19 at Workplace. The AU Peace and Security Council also adopted decisions on the migrants, refugees and IDPs whose vulnerability is accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic and who need greater protection.

With the ILO support, the Commission organized on 29 April, a videoconference of the AU Ministers of Labour to exchange on measures taken to mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of the crisis and craft ways for the post COVID-19 era.

The social partners' organizations and other labour organizations participated. We are confident that together we will limit the negative impacts in the world of work in Africa and emerge stronger. I thank the ministers and social partners for their constructive proposals aiming for human centered development.

The focus is on building resilient and inclusive social security systems; using the labour market services to bring the informal economy into the formal economy; creating unemployment insurance mechanisms; putting the social dialogue institutions in the center of the construction of the post COVID-19 recovery to take into consideration the realities of the world of work.

I wish a peaceful celebration of the international day to all.