



**SECOND SESSION OF THE SPECIALISED TECHNICAL
COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT,
LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (STC-SDLE-2)
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***Theme: “Social Development and Employment: Benefits of
the Demographic Dividend for Inclusive Development”***

**OPENING STATEMENT BY
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PROTOCOLS

On behalf of the Chairperson of the Commission and the Commissioner for Social Affairs, I am honoured to you welcome to the 2nd Session of the Specialised Technical Committee on Social Development, Labour and Employment with the theme: “***Social Development and Employment: Benefits of the Demographic Dividend for Inclusive Development***”. I would like to sincerely thank the Government of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria for hosting this key meeting and graciously welcoming us to their country, we recognize you for your continued commitment to promoting sustainable development and progress in Africa.

This second meeting of the STC istaking place within the framework of the 2017 AU theme of, “Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth” in Africa andthe overall objective of this meeting is to consider which investments would be required to address opportunities and challenges in reaping the benefits of the demographic dividend with the inclusion of all groups and maximising labour outcomes towards poverty eradication and inclusive development.

What are the challenges we need to overcome in order to harness DD? What are the investments that we need to make particularly in the young people to realize DD?These two critical questions are at the centre of our deliberations during this session of the STC. Permit me to highlight four of the challenges in the context of this STC that clearly point in the direction of the investments that must be made if we are to realize DD and the Africa we want.

First, is the mismatch between the demands of the labour market and the products of our education systems. For sometime, our young people have been graduating into unemployment because of the disconnect between the skills acquired and those required by the economy. We must invest in skill development, in particular science, technology and

engineering. Investment in science and technology will facilitate innovation and creativity which in turn will considerably contribute to entrepreneurship among young people.

Secondly, is decent job that is sustainable and environmentally friendly. We must invest in the creation of decent jobs directly and through policies that provide enabling environment. If we failed to create decent jobs, we shall pay heavy price in human and health costs, widen inequalities and perpetuate intergenerational poverty. Part of the focus of this meeting will be on the future of work in Africa, looking at the ways in which Africa's older and youth populations and persons with disabilities can yield a demographic dividend on the continent.

Thirdly, is the challenge of the unmet needs of vulnerable groups in our society such as adequate protection of and uplifting of children, persons with disabilities, young people, and older persons in order to be inclusive and to ensure that no one is left behind. In effect, we must invest in and expand social security and social protection for all in order to harness demographic dividend.

Fourthly and in the context of social protection is the challenge of malnutrition and undernutrition. The Commission together with our partners, WFP, and ECA among others have been generating evidence around the enormity of the malnutrition problem on the continent through the Cost of Hunger in Africa (COHA) study. The evidence revealed the irreversible damage of malnutrition in the first 100 days of life together with childhood stunting resulting in long term consequences on educational attainments and the labour market. It is true that nutrition starts with the food we produce and eat but evidence from COHA also revealed that food alone will not fully and effectively address malnutrition, as there are many health and psychosocial care factors that negatively affect peoples' nutrition status and unless they they are effectively contained will continue to hamper efforts to establish nutrition security in Africa and realization of DD.

Thus, we must consider investments in education, decent jobs, unmet needs of vulnerable groups, nutrition security and social protection. Otherwise we will not realize the first goal of Agenda 2063 that aims at, “A high standard of living, quality of life and well-being for all citizens”. This will be pursued through a set of interlinked priority areas, which are, to:

- 1. Provide affordable social security and protection for all (which includes investments in health and education)**
- 2. Increase incomes and provide decent jobs for working age adults**
- 3. End poverty and eliminate hunger and malnutrition.**

Distinguished Experts, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the next three days, we have a packed agenda. In the area of Social Development, we shall focus on the older persons, persons with disabilities and the child.

Does DD only affect the young populations? It is true that Africa has a fast growing young population. However, on the other end of the spectrum, one cannot neglect the fact that the population of older persons is also growing and by 2050, the global population of older persons is projected to more than double its size in 2015, reaching nearly 2.1 billion, and if Africa by then, we will have 220 million older persons. The current figure is 65 million for persons older than 60 years.

So even though the theme of the AU this year focusses on investment in the youth, in the Department of Social Affairs, we are also exploring the need to invest in older persons who are often productive far beyond the age of 60 years and are often thrust into the responsibility of being care givers for family members and grandchildren.

I wish to add that since the adoption in January 2016 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa, the Commission has focused on its entry into force, which will result in, among others, improved access to health care and enhanced social security provisions for older persons in AU Member States. This STC will consider fast-tracking of the entry into force of the Protocol, as well as which investments would yield desired outcomes with regard to long-term care of older persons, and access to health care, as encapsulated in the Protocol.

With regard to disability, I am pleased to inform that we will also be presenting to the Ministers the Draft Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This draft protocol has been on-going for the past few years and it has been a long time coming from the start 4 years ago to the validation workshop last year on 29 – 30 November 2016. The High Level Meeting of Experts was held yesterday bringing together Ministers, Members of Parliament and distinguished Experts, where they thoroughly considered and discussed the Draft Protocol. In addition the Government of the Republic of South Africa shall host a session for Ministers, Members of Parliament and Disabled People's Organisations on 26 April 2017, to develop a Road Map for the signing and ratification of the Protocol once it is adopted by the AU Assembly of Heads of State, hopefully in July this year.

The Commission views child marriage as a crucial and crosscutting issue and recognizes that it is a developmental, cultural, health, political and religious issue, among others. Within the framework of the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa, which was launched in May 2014, the Commission has been implementing a number of activities in joining the efforts at country and regional levels to bring an end to this harmful practice. This includes capacity building trainings for different stakeholders and the launch of the Campaign in 19 countries. I commend all the countries who have stepped up efforts against child marriage and that have recognized that investing in children and youth is an investment in the future of the nation, as children who are forced into child marriage are often

unable to continue their education, have limited access to quality health services, are exposed to numerous mental and physical risks, limited income generating activities and are inevitably denied the opportunity to productively contribute to society in terms of human and social capital.

Distinguished Experts, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Age structure changes have a profound impact on African labour markets and in return the effective governance of labour market institutions is essential for the ability of African countries to accelerate the demographic transition, allowing extra labour to be absorbed productively in the market. This meeting has the opportunity to consider the mechanisms and tools required to fast-track the implementation of the First Five Year Priority Programme on Employment, Poverty Eradication and Inclusive Development. This is embedded in the First Ten Year Implementation Plan of the Agenda 2063 and builds largely on the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, in particular Goal 8 on full and productive employment for all.

This blue print continental policy must be domesticated at national and RECs' level. In this respect, the meeting may agree on strategic common priority actions to be undertaken by all countries to face the most common longstanding challenges in our labour markets, such as the labour market information system, the transitioning from informal economy to formal economy to eradicate the working poverty which impacts a large share of youth and female workforce, the imperative to improve productivity performance, labour migration management, social security extension to excluded categories of workers, and of course, youth employment. Your reflections will also be supported by discussions on the Future of Work in Africa, women empowerment in labour markets, green jobs and skills matching.

In conclusion, **Distinguished Experts, Ladies and Gentlemen,** we must not sit down complacently and pat ourselves on the back for a job well done after this meeting, just because we came, we talked and we left. Instead when we return to our respective countries and places of work; the

clear recommendations that come out of this STC must be taken forward - whether it is promoting the rights and protection of children, persons of disabilities, older persons or workers. I urge all of us here to make this STC really count and to go beyond endless conversations of what we need to do and just do it.

I wish you a successful meeting and I plead for strong commitment to make Africa the continent we all want to be proud of.

Thank you.