



**Statement by H.E Minata Samate Cessouma, Commissioner for
Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, African Union
Commission on the occasion of the International Labour Day**

May 1st, 2022

Every year, the world of work celebrates the International Labour Day on May 1st. Predated by conceptual intent to protect the cardinal human rights, from its first celebration, it has always been a moment of promotion of the rights of workers.

During the last three years, 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. Amongst the repercussion of Covid-19 ranking highest is the shading of jobs – a phenomenon that has been witnessed all over the globe, in incredible numbers of millions, putting lives and 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 economically and socially precarious world of work.

Africa is not spared 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 enough job opportunities in general and job creation for youth and women.

[The African Union Report of the Socio-Economic Impacts of the pandemic in 2021](#) 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 processing and health.

The African health professionals, like elsewhere in the world, have been and continue to be 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. Their commitment and professionalism throughout the pandemic are evident to all: extraordinary people, performing extraordinary work.

As a result, a considerable number of health professional workers are among the persons who lost their lives in this battle against the COVID-19. The African Union extends heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families most of them who have lost breadwinners who were contributing the immensely to African economies. At AU it is our considered commitment to continue to pray for the quick relief of all African citizens who are under care in hospitals and other centers due to COVID-19.

For long, we 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 more resilient and inclusive labour market systems, leaving not a single of workers 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 African cultural diversity and heritage.

First, we need to establish and strengthen the political and strategic leadership of the department of labour and of social partners. Today, after the adoption of the African Continental Free Trade Area and of the Protocol on Free Movement of People, we must look at Tripartism as a powerful instrument for Africa to be a fair player in the Global economy. Our collective responsibility is to build strong Tripartism which work for shared prosperity benefiting to labour, the capital, our nations and societies. This is the founding spirit and principle of the Ouagadougou+10 Declaration and Plan of Action on Employment, Poverty Eradication and Inclusive Development. For our part, the AUC is putting in place an innovative strategic partnership with the social partners' organization in support to the implementation of continental employment and labour policies.

I trust that for our common vision, we must always refer to 2023 critical targets of the AU Agenda 2063 which can be achieved only if the world of work takes up its share of responsibility.

The African continent 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 forward better 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.

As the world of work requested through a decision of the extraordinary session of the Specialized Technical Committee on Social Development, Labour and Employment in in Abidjan in December 2019, a meeting was organized in this very symbolic Month of May 2021, to establish a continental coordination and cooperation mechanism on social security. It is my call to all institutions of social Security of all AU Member States and Social Partners to participate in this important coordination mechanism which will pave the way to needed platform for enhancing the rights of all categories of workers, including migrant workers and workers in the informal economy and rural sector. This continental coordination and cooperation mechanism has been endorsed by the 4th session of the Specialized Technical Committee on Social Development, Labour and Employment held in April this year, 2022. The meeting also endorsed four other key following instruments:

- i. Draft Declaration on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers;
- ii. Guidelines on Establishing Integrated Labour Market Information Systems;
- iii. Guidelines on the Development of a Model Migrant Welfare Programme/System;
- iv. Guidelines on Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs).

In cooperation with the AUDA-NEPAD and the International Labour Organization (ILO), and in consultation with Business Africa, the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) and the African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa), the Commission developed and issued the [AU Guidelines on COVID-19 at Workplace](#). We are confident that together, we will limit the obliterating impacts in the world of work in Africa and emerge stronger. I thank the ministers and social partners for their constructive collaboration and proposals aiming for human centered development during the last three years that lasted this obstinate COVID-19 crisis.

Going forward, the focus is on building resilient and inclusive social security systems; using the labour market services to recognize the huge contribution of informal economy to the focus along with 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.

The fight against the pandemic continues. While COVID-19 imposes health, social and economic crisis, it can also be seen as an opportunity for African people to cultivate impetus and efficiencies on fiscal and economic governance thus creating more job opportunities and save lives and livelihoods. Building forward better should not be an option, but a resolve of AU Member States in order to craft necessary responses including for the post pandemic recovery.

AU seizes, once more, this moment to wish all AU workers and Member States and beyond, a peaceful commemoration of the International Workers' Day.