

**Africa Regional Preparatory Conference for
the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20)
Ministerial Policy Dialogue on Progress in the Implementation of
Sustainable Development Commitments and New and Emerging Challenges
Addis Ababa, 24 October 2011**

**Remarks of Hon. Immanuel Ngatjizeko, M.P.
Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of the Republic of Namibia
Chairperson of the Bureau of the African Union Labour and Social Affairs
Commission**

Mr Chairperson

It is an honour and pleasure for me to be given the opportunity to participate in this panel.

- Among the greatest challenges to sustainable development in Africa are increasing social vulnerabilities and worsening unemployment of youth and women, who in their vast majority have been left behind by jobless growth in African states.

- While we cannot claim that the problems are new, we must recognize that the impact of increasing unemployment and the absence of social protection for the poor remain the greatest obstacles to the achievement of sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

- Our challenge today is to devise inclusive and integrated strategies for sustainable development that will place well-being of Africa's greatest underutilized assets—its people—at centre-stage.

- Priority must be given to the most marginalised and vulnerable, among others, the youth, women, those living in rural areas, the working poor, those working in the informal economy, the elderly, and persons living with disabilities, the majority of whom live in persistent poverty.

- These are the persons who are most negatively affected by environmental degradation and climate change. They face food insecurity, lack of access to secure drinking water, lack of access to health care as well as to education and skills training. They are generally not protected by social safety nets. They are also the most negatively affected by desertification and by natural disasters, such

as floods, which destroy their homes and subsistence crops on a massive scale every year. Their vulnerability to environmental degradation and climate change is also exacerbated by the lack of adequate risk management capacities and systems in many countries.

- Our people-centred approach to sustainable development builds on the African Union's Ouagadougou Declaration and Plan of Action on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa and its Social Policy Framework for Africa. However, we must admit frankly that our well-considered policies for inclusive macroeconomic growth and social and labour market development have been slow to deliver their desired results of poverty alleviation through social protection and through decent and productive employment. We need to continue to perfect and implement these policies, while at the same time integrating the paradigm of the green economy and the opportunities for green jobs.

Mr. Chairperson,

- Our intention to develop green economies in Africa presents opportunities for sustainable economic development, while also posing certain challenges.
- Green economies can create employment and alleviate poverty through enabling greater industrialisation, facilitating value-addition in agriculture, agro-processing, forestry, fishing and mining, and expanding tourism. However, Africa will require a massive injection of capital in order to develop green economies. We must also build national institutional capacities to support the transition to green economies. In this regard, we call for the speedy operationalisation of the Green Climate Fund that was established at Cop 16 in Cancun. Most importantly, we must commit ourselves to ensure that African workers acquire the skills demanded by the growing green job market.
- Our vision of a green economy for Africa should be defined by strategies for inclusive growth that take into account the current realities and levels of development of our people, particularly the low-skilled women and youth who are concentrated in rural areas and in the informal economy. This requires not only an emphasis on "high tech" and capital intensive green growth, but an even greater emphasis on labour-intensive and grass roots-based green technologies, as well as targeted vocational training and shorter-term skills development. We must introduce appropriate social protection systems in order to ensure that the

marginalised and vulnerable groups in our countries can effectively contribute to green economic development and acquire the means to work themselves out of poverty.

- **Recommendations**

I would like to suggest that our Africa contribution to the Rio +20 compilation document should include the following principles:

- The objectives of poverty alleviation, maximum employment and social inclusion should be mainstreamed in all strategies for sustainable economic, social and environmental development;
- The goal of a green economy should be integrated into national employment and social protection policies;

I also would like to recommend the inclusion in the Rio +20 compilation document of the following measures:

- Developing policies and strategies to encourage and support maximum participation of the youth and women in the agriculture, agro-processing forestry and fishing sector in accordance with principles of inclusive and employment rich green growth;
- Introducing national social protection schemes that target vulnerable workers in the informal economy and the rural sector and members of their families;
- Supporting the manufacturing of machinery and equipment in African countries, at both the “high-tech” and grass-roots artisan levels, that are needed to develop green economies;
- Introducing clean and efficient energy technology at grass-roots level to promote sustainable environmental practices and to create jobs;

- Promoting community based tourism in support of a sustainable environment and employment creation;
- Supporting the development and marketing of traditional African medicinal plants;
- Empowering African youth, women and workers generally through the establishment or strengthening of education, vocational training and community-based skills development that match the needs of the labour market, including the green labour market;
- Promoting environmentally- sensitive entrepreneurship skills among the youth and women
- Enhancing the capacity of labour market institutions to identify opportunities for green employment, to give guidance to persons interested in green careers, to assist educational and training institutions to respond to the needs of the green labour market and to match green employers and jobseekers

Finally, I would like to recommend that

Africa should take ownership of the green economy process at continental level by creating a policy platform that integrates the strategies of all relevant sectors and stakeholders.