

Speech by

**Mr. Gilbert F. Hounbo, Deputy Director-General, International Labour
Office**

At the

African Regional Consultations on Sustainable Development Goals

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 4-5 November 2013

Chair, Dear Ministers, members of the diplomatic corps, representatives of the RECs, colleagues from the UN family, Civil Society Groups, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for inviting the ILO to the African Regional Consultations on Sustainable Development Goals. On the onset, let me express to you the best wishes of my Director-General, Mr. Guy Ryder. Let me take this great opportunity to quickly share with you some ideas, to feed into your already rich draft discussions and outcome document.

Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Africa's economic growth has been impressive, with six of the world's ten fastest-growing economies being in Africa, and recording at least 7 per cent growth rate in 2012. Growth performance has not been altogether inclusive, as many millions of Africans are caught in the poverty trap, accompanied by rising inequality in some countries. Why? Because our growth has not translated into commensurate job creation and poverty rates remain high in most of our countries.

More than 70 per cent of Africans earn their living from vulnerable employment on small farms or in the urban informal economy.

Globally the number of unemployed worldwide is projected to rise by 5.1 million more than 202 million in 2013 and by another 3 million in 2014. Young people remain particularly stricken by the jobs crisis, with youth unemployment being a major challenge that cuts across many developing countries. Our young people are impatient. This calls for urgency to create full and productive employment and decent work for our young people.

We all recognize the poverty-reducing role of jobs, and recall the commitment of our Heads of State and Government at the AU Extraordinary Summit on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa, held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in September 2004 to “place employment creation as an explicit and central objective of our economic and social policies at national, regional and continental levels, for sustainable poverty alleviation and with a view to improving the living conditions of our people”.

In 2000 at the Millennium Summit, decent work was missing on the MDG list that the international community adopted. Five years later, it was added on. As we formulate the SGDs, let us not make the same mistake but make full and productive employment and decent work a central goal of our post-2015 development framework.

So, the promotion of decent jobs, accompanied by adequate social protection is a vehicle toward eradicating extreme and pervasive poverty, ensuring food security, reducing inequalities and social exclusion. The promotion of full and productive employment and decent work for all is central to achieving sustainable development with its three pillars – economic, social and environmental.

In the words of the African Development Bank, and here I quote from their 2013 African Economic Outlook, “To be job-intensive, growth must be accompanied by structural transformation: that is, the reallocation of economic resources from activities with low productivity– such as family farming, or petty informal trading – to more productive ones – such as manufacturing. This contains two elements: the rise of new, more productive activities and the movement of resources and labour from traditional activities to these newer ones, raising overall productivity and with it wages and the quality of jobs.”

In the current weak and turbulent international economic environment, job creation is the most pressing global development priority.

Dear Ministers,

I would therefore like to appeal to you to take forward the many African decisions already taken to ensure that full and productive employment and decent work is adopted as an explicit goal of the global development agenda beyond 2015. As you are already aware, this is not new information, as various dialogues, initiatives, and institutions have already made calls for a stand-alone global goal of full and productive employment and decent work.

The results of your own consultations, which documents we have before us, have identified decent employment creation as central to the post-2015 agenda. These include the "Outcome Document of the Regional Consultations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda", and the "Outcome Document of the Africa Regional Implementation Meeting for the Post-Rio+20 follow-up processes". Likewise the outcomes of the five sub regional consultations, presented to the experts had a jobs-focus.

Recently, at the UN General Assembly's Open Working Group on SDGs held in New York in June 2013, several governments from all regions mentioned the issue of an employment and decent work goal.

Closer home, the Report entitled "A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development" by the UN High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, co-chaired by Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, recommends a focus on transforming economies for jobs and inclusive growth as one of the main pillars of the future agenda. The report also recommends a target on social protection.

We do hope our African Heads of State and Government take the same message to the rest of the world – to ensure that an explicit goal of full and productive employment and decent work for all, supported through the implementation of social protection floors, is adopted as one of the global development agenda beyond 2015.

As we make progress, we commend your decision for the need for an early convergence of the post-2015 development agenda and the SDG processes. We believe that a single post-2015 UN development framework should have a single and balanced set of goals, limited in number, universal to all nations but responsive to the specificities of each country, with the greatest emphasis on employment as the surest way of eradicating poverty and integrating sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions.

Dear Ministers,

That being said, MDGs remain unfinished business in Africa. We welcome the progress made by African countries towards the achievement of the MDGs.

However, this progress has been uneven. I would therefore continue to appeal to

Member States to continue the push for MDG acceleration in their respective countries.

On our part as ILO, we have made great strides in supporting countries, for instance in social protection, employment intensive investment programmes, rural development and food security, public works programmes, etc. – which efforts make our work central to the attainment of these MDGs.

Just a few days ago, we had a vigorous debate in the ILO Governing Body, which showed a very high degree of consensus amongst governments, unions and employers from around the world that decent work must play a key role in a new transformative agenda for change. Our African delegates were particularly outspoken about the central importance of growing decent jobs that lift people out of poverty and give our young populations the prospect of building a life of dignity for all, to quote the title of the UN Secretary General's latest report.

The ILO is connecting ordinary people's aspirations through decent work. This is the role we will continue to play now, and beyond 2015.

I thank you.
