



Address by Ms. Cynthia Samuel – Olonjuwon

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**9th Africa Congress of the International Labour and Employment
Relations Association (ILERA)**

27 September 2021

Salutations

- Minister of Employment and Labour of the Republic of South Africa, Honourable Thulas Nxesi;
- President of ILERA, Prof Harry Katz;
- ILERA Past-President, Prof Evance Kalula;
- LERASA President, Mr Frikkie de Bruin;
- Executive Director of Business Africa, Ms Jacqueline Mugo;
- Executive Secretary of the Southern African Trade Union Coordinating Council (SATUCC), Ms Mavis Koogotsitse;
- Chairperson of Scientific Committee, Prof Marius Olivier;
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great honour to join you at this 9th Africa Congress of the International Labour and Employment Relations Association. The last time we met was in May 2018 during the 8th Africa ILERA Congress, which was held in the Republic of Mauritius where we had the opportunity to physically interact and exchange views. I would have loved to be with you in South Africa. Unfortunately, we are interacting virtually today, in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic, which has negatively affected our labour markets and reversed some of the socio-economic gains that had been made.

The ILO World Employment and Social Outlook (WESO) Trends 2021 shows that the pandemic struck Africa at the time when most countries were positively recovering from the effects of the economic crisis following the fall in commodity prices in 2014. This had imposed challenges such as limited private and public finance, increased levels of debt and fragile fiscal situations in most African economies. In addition to the loss of 4 million net jobs and additional 13 million forgone jobs, the socio-economic shock of the pandemic has triggered more decent work deficits and vulnerability to those who are in the informal economy.

Unfortunately, the measures adopted to counter the spread of the virus, perpetuated exclusion of the youth, migrant workers and people with disabilities from opportunities in the labour market. Additionally, the pandemic has put further stress on the inadequate social protection systems that exist in the continent whose coverage is currently estimated at 17.4 % of the working population, as compared to the global average of 46.9 %.

The pandemic did not affect all workers in the same manner in that the impact on women was more severe. Traditional segregation and stereotypes which made women be over-represented in sectors such as

food, retail, accommodation and hospitality further exacerbated the plight of women since these were the sectors which were hard hit by lockdown measures. Since schools and care facilities had to close, it was women again who bore the brunt of care work and home schooling. More than 70% of the health, care and social work professionals are women, which put more women in the frontline during the fight against the pandemic. The gender dimensions of the pandemic were therefore quite immense, and this has served as a reminder and a clarion call that going forward, the recovery route should in earnest address these gender stereotypes.

With the situation at hand, the *Global call to action for a human centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient* which was adopted during the virtual International Labour Conference in June, 2021, could not have come at a better time. Anchored in the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, the Global Call to Action underscores the importance of a human – centred and globally coordinated recovery from the crisis based on solidarity. It emphasises a recovery process that is inclusive of social partners and carried out through social dialogue, respect of fundamental principles and rights at work to avoid the long-term scarring of economies and societies.

But what does the Call to Action Really Mean to Africa?

For us the Call to Action is in line with, and builds on, the Abidjan Declaration of 2019, which was adopted by ILO constituents at the 14th Africa Regional Meeting, in Abidjan. The Abidjan Declaration spells out Africa's priority areas of intervention, which are further elaborated in its implementation plan. To this end, I am pleased to inform you that the Mid-term Review of the Implementation Plan of the Abidjan Declaration is underway. We see this as an excellent opportunity to learn from what

works well and what needs improvement and allow necessary adjustments for the next two years.

At this juncture, I am pleased to share with you some of the ILO's regional level interventions to support African tripartite constituents to implement the Abidjan Declaration and foster a human centred recovery from the pandemic that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. These also constitute areas for collaboration with ILERA in Africa.

First, address the longstanding challenge of inadequate social protection

Africa's social protection coverage gap¹ is associated with a significant underinvestment in social protection as well as the persistence of the informal economy. Social protection expenditure in Africa amounts to less than 5 per cent of GDP compared to a global average of 12.9 per cent. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation. Most of those excluded work in the informal economy and many are locked in a vicious cycle of vulnerability, poverty and social exclusion. To provide universal access to comprehensive, adequate and sustainable social protection, the ILO Regional Office **has developed a regional strategy** to support constituents' initiatives towards universal social protection at the national level. The aim is to more than double Africa's social protection coverage to 40% by 2025! In this regard, the partnerships with the African Union, World Bank, UNDP, UN Country Teams and other key actors have been significantly enhanced.

¹ World Social Protection Report, 2020-2022

Second, addressing informality

The informal economy is the reality of the world of work for a large majority of people in the world; especially in Africa where informal employment is about **83%** of total employment compared to the global average of **61%**². Again, the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the situation, and laid bare the vulnerabilities of the millions who earn a livelihood in the informal economy.

This reaffirms the Abidjan Declaration's focus on the transition from the informal to the formal economy as a priority area in national policies. The Five-Year ILO/AU Programme on Decent Work for the Transformation of the Informal Economy, endorsed by African Ministers of Labour and Employment and the ILO Africa Informal Economy Strategy anchor the collaborative work to promote decent work and increase the pace of the transition to formality. The regional strategy is a core element of the ILO integrated strategy for the implementation of the Recommendation no.204 on "transition from the informal to the formal economy" and the realization of SDG 8.

Due to the COVID pandemic, the extension of social protection coverage is the priority in the immediate term. However, a longer view of transforming the informal economy is necessary if we are to ensure inclusive economies.

Third, halting child labour and forced labour in Africa

2021 is also the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour. Sadly, child labour in Africa has risen dramatically since 2016³. In fact, 40 million girls and 52 million boys were involved in child labour in Africa at the beginning of 2020, accounting for more than 20 percent of children in Africa (21.6%). This (92million boys and girls) represents an increase of 20 million children in the last four years alone. The ILO is supporting the elimination of child labour with innovative projects such as the Accelerating action for the elimination of child labour in supply chains in Africa (ACCEL).

² See ILO World Employment Social Outlook (WESO), Trends ,2021

³ See Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward, ILO/UNICEF, 2021

This is also within the broader context of the ILO's support for the implementation of the *African Union's Ten Year Action Plan to Eradicate Child Labour, Forced Labour, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery (2020-2030)*. We are very pleased that Africa, specifically South Africa will host the V Global Conference on Child Labour (V GCCL) in 2022.

Forth, harnessing the digital economy to support skills development and employment creation

Indeed, one lesson learnt from the pandemic is the importance of digital technology in crises response. This is therefore an opportune moment to accelerate Africa's digital transformation and create decent and resilient jobs in the digital economy. It is also in this context that we have launched the ILO/ITU/ AU the joint continental programme on "Boosting decent jobs and enhancing skills for youth in Africa's digital economy". The programme supports ILO constituents across the continent to ensure that Africa's youth are able to realize the opportunities in the digital economy, but also that the digital economy benefits from the creativity, innovation and talents of young people. This programme is being piloted with seed funds from the ILO and other partners in Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa.

Fifth, enhancing the decent work outcomes of the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA)

It is widely recognized that trade integration can play an important role in driving growth and employment. It is also widely accepted however, that the gains from trade do not accrue automatically nor equally, and policies matter both for gains to materialize and for the redistribution of the gains. A new generation of employment policies that are closely coordinated with economic policies, including trade and social protection policies are can provide a framework to better realize productive and inclusive job gains in

the African Continental Free Trade Area. Subsequently, to ensure evidence-based interventions, the ILO Regional Office for Africa has commissioned a study **on Employment Creation and Decent Work Impacts of the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement**. **The major aim of this study is to determine the extent to which labour provisions are provided for in the AfCFTA and how they can be incorporated in further agreement negotiations.** The ILO is also undertaking work on the potential role of the AfCFTA in promoting SDG 8 and the effects of trade liberalisation on labour market outcomes.

Sixth, promote ratification and application of International labour standards, especially for gender equality

In addition to the very important work to promote the ratification and effective application of international labour standards, those relating to gender equality are in the fore front. This is the context for the regional campaign to promote the ratification of Convention No. 190 and its Recommendation No. 206 on Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. We are pleased that Africa is in the forefront of the countries that have ratified this important framework to prevent and address violence and Harassment, based on an inclusive, integrated and gender responsive approach.

...promote decent work in Africa's green and blue economies

The **Abidjan Declaration also places** the promotion of growth towards a **green economy**, harnessing decent work from the **blue economy** and a **just transition for all** as key priorities. This is vital since it is estimated **59% of the jobs in Africa** rely on ecosystem services. In addition to the pioneering work to promote decent work in the blue economy of Africa's Island States, it is quite encouraging that with ILO support, **several**

African countries have already included or plan to include just transition and decent work creation in their enhanced **Nationally Determined Contributions on climate change**, including Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal and Zimbabwe. In addition, the ILO worked closely with governments and social partners to support the development of **Green Jobs National Strategies** in countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Senegal.

... promote fairer migration

The ILO has continued to the AUC/IOM/ILO/ECA Joint Programme on Labour Migration Governance for Development and Integration known as the (JLMP), which is supporting improved labour migration governance to achieve safe, orderly and regular migration in Africa. We are pleased with the significant results achieved by the JLPM. These include the establishment of The AU Labour Migration Advisory Committee (AU-LMAC), a tripartite forum for result oriented dialogue aims at providing advice, the regular production of the Report on Labour Migration Statistics for evidence based interventions. To two issues have been produced and the third one is underway. The AU Model Bilateral Labour Agreement, developed with the support of ILO and partners under the JLMP, gives guidance to Member States on how to improve the impact of BLAs to expand opportunities to African Migrants workers within and beyond the region; including with GCC Countries.

... support decent work in the orange economy

You may be aware that the 33rd Assembly of the African Union declared the year 2021 as the AU Year of the Arts, Culture and Heritage. The Assembly stressed the importance of Culture, Arts and Heritage in the achievement of the objectives of African Union Agenda 2063 as well as

those of its Flagship Projects. We are excited that the ILO is collaborating with the AUC to develop a programme/project to identify and address the decent work deficits in Africa's arts and cultural enterprises (ie the orange economy).

Finally, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I have no doubt that there is room for enhanced ILERA – ILO collaboration to address the challenges facing employment relations, labour law and social protection as a means of reducing poverty, inequality and unemployment in Africa- especially in the wake of the global pandemic.

We are aware that this 9th Africa ILERA Congress has outlined a number of high quality papers with excellent policy implications. I want to encourage you to ensure there is an effective dissemination plan of all the papers discussed here. Access to policy papers by policy makers is the only way that evidence can become meaningful to policy processes.

I want to leave you with the words of The ILO Director General, Guy Rider, who said and I quote:

“Placing decent work and social justice at the core of policymaking is simply a recognition of the obvious: none of us can build a better future for ourselves unless we include others”.

I wish you very fruitful deliberations.