



NIGERIA LABOUR CONGRESS

MOTTO: LABOUR CREATES WEALTH

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A FRATERNAL MESSAGE BY COMRADE AYUBA WABBA, mni, PRESIDENT OF THE NLC AND ITUC AT THE 6TH AFRICA SOCIAL PARTNERS SUMMIT

Protocol

I bring to the 6th Africa Social Partners Summit fraternal greetings from workers in Nigeria and the world over. It is impressive how this regional social partners' rendezvous has evolved from the first summit in Casablanca, Morocco to such a significant event. I salute the organizers of this summit especially our host – the Nigeria Employers Consultative Association (NECA) for putting up such a well-organized event.

Workers recognize the role of business in Africa and the world over as the creators of jobs. Yet, I must say that nothing captures the heartbeat of this Summit than figures from the Blueprint for Jobs in Africa adopted by social partners on December 15, 2015 in Casablanca. From the Blueprint, 63% of the African population is less than 25 years old. Every month at least one million young people on our continent enter the job market. The working population in Africa grows by 18 million jobs and most of these jobs, up to 80%, are in the informal sector.

Very challenging is the revelation that out of the 73 million jobs created in the past few years on the African continent, only about 16 million jobs were grabbed by young people. When you add this to the fact that Africa has a youth population of more than 200 million people, it will be easier to appreciate the enormity of the demographic time bomb sitting on our laps. Ordinarily, our huge youth population should be an advantage to us but if we fail to manage this strength, our asset could turn to a demographic disaster. This is why we believe that the timing of this summit is very apt as social partners must come together to find solutions to today's crisis of unemployment especially among the youth population in order to secure a sustained and sustainable future.

This is not the time for blame games. We cannot afford that luxury. We must delve into the heart of the issue and work together as partners with a common stake and facing a common foe to find answers. I find huge comfort in the prognosis offered in the Blueprint for Jobs in Africa – infrastructural expansion, attraction of ‘responsible’ investors (the operative word here is ‘responsible’) and upholding education, health, training and social dialogue as true standard of human development.

All over the world we need jobs. In Africa, we need plenty new jobs. Yet, jobs will not happen by happenstance. Job generation is a reward for economic growth. The economy can only grow with increase in purchasing power. The wages of workers underline the purchasing power in any clime. It is a major driver for productivity and growth.

Wages in Africa are the poorest around the world. For a continent that is endowed with enormous mineral and human resource, this is totally unacceptable. It is sad that while other regions have deservedly elevated the wage discourse to decent and living wages, many African governments and employers still see minimum wage as some sort of lottery for workers. Workers all over Africa demand for wage justice.

We appreciate our social partners in Nigeria for facilitating a new national minimum wage of N30,000 for Nigerian workers. We urge social partners all over the continent to take seriously the issue of wage justice. In a continent where the periodic review of national minimum wage has become the mother of all struggles, we must question our commitment to truly inspiring economic growth and creating the much-needed jobs.

In order to create sustainable jobs for Africa’s teeming youth, African governments must create the enabling environment for businesses to thrive. We call on our governments to fix and expand existing infrastructure especially roads, rails, and electricity which are critical for industrialization. We stress on affordable power. Government must provide the power to power the aspirations of millions of our youth. We must also avoid multiple taxation as it increases the cost of doing business in Africa.

While we support government initiatives on the ease of doing business, we must build the infrastructure for the future we desire. If we reduce the high incidence of official corruption, there will be enough funds to fund economic growth and bring about shared prosperity.

Whatever we do, we must ensure that the quantum leap in human population in Africa must not lag behind proactive visioning and action by government. We must plan and act like tomorrow is already here because Africa's tomorrow is already at the door heavily pregnant.

In today's globalized world, economic growth does not happen in isolation. The deliberate undermining of a region through unfair trade practices, restrictions, debt blackmail and imposition of 'impossible' trade conditions does not only hurt the target economies but also the predatory states. The current gale of forced migration warns all of us that crisis anywhere could mean chaos everywhere. A word suffices.

In conclusion, we all, especially Africans owe ourselves the duty of pulling ourselves by the bootstraps and attending to the work of creating sustainable jobs and meaningful living for our people. Job creation must now be taken down from PowerPoint presentations in beautiful summits like this and taken to the corridors of effective public policy making to achieve the streets of industrialization, healthy trade conditions, progressive and productive tax regimes, and an informal sector fully organized for genuine transition to the formal economy.

The Africa Continental Free Trade Area is a huge platform for economic growth and mass job creation. We must ensure it has decent work content. We must strictly enforce the rule of origin to avoid turning Africa into a dumping ground for finished goods from other climes. Clearly, the road ahead of us is not easy but nothing good comes easy.

Finally, it is important to keep reviewing progress made through effective social dialogue mechanisms, platforms and institutions. It is heart-warming that high up in the ten recommendations that form the fulcrum of the Casablanca Declaration is the call for formalized social dialogue through the cultivation of independent and representative social partners particularly strong trade unions; effective and sustainable institutions for dialogue; shared responsibility for agenda setting; and a commitment to implementing agreements.

I wish all of us a memorable Summit. I expect our international guests to experience the warmth of our people particularly Nigerian workers.

Thank you for giving me your time and ears.



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