



6th ITUC-Africa New Year School

Opening Remarks by the General Secretary- Kwasi Adu-Amankwah

22-26 February 2016, Lome, Togo

Dear Comrades

It is my distinct honour to give opening remarks at this 6th edition of the ITUC-Africa Leadership School (known as the New Year School). This edition is taking place under the theme ***'Industrial Development and Employment in Africa: challenges and opportunities for Trade Unions in the face of Climate Change'***. The theme has two major components (a) *Industrial and Agricultural development in Africa: proposed Trade Union Strategies & Actions* (b) *Climate change and green jobs in Africa*.

Comrades, the ITUC-Africa 3rd Congress took resolutions on the following issues: *Human and Trade Union rights, Peace and Security, Organising, Climate change and structural transformation for Africa's development amongst others*. The theme of the NYS therefore responds directly to the mandate given by the congress.

Indeed, economic transformation is critical for Africa's development. Without the transformation of African economies from being export-dependent on raw materials, the development challenges of this continent shall remain. The current economic models for industrialization have failed to provide the necessary transformation and development that Africa requires. But as we all know by now, no country has achieved industrial transformation only on the basis of exploitation and exportation of natural resources. There are countries in this world that are highly industrialised while they have no single mineral. Why is it that many African countries, with all the resource endowments continue to hold the status of the poorest continent as countries and collectively as a continent?

Decade after decade, many development programs and actions have failed to reduce poverty on this continent. Africa thus is a continent of extreme contrast-a rich content with poor people. The kind of leadership that many African citizens have endured for decades has not been able to generate economic growth that narrows the gap between the rich and poor. Nor have they seen basic infrastructure that can enhance their quality of life.

Various reports maintain that between the years 1975 and 2000, Africa was the only continent where poverty has intensified. As the British prime minister declared in 2001 African poverty is "a scar on the conscience of the world". But I think African poverty should be a scar on the conscience of its leadership too. I

use the term leadership here in the broad sense to include trade union, religious, broad civil society leadership and anybody in position of power who could possibly bring about change. While some in leadership have more responsibility by virtue of being in strategic positions of power, we all have some level of responsibility to change the fortunes of this continent.

Africa is thus the only continent where the longer a country is independent from colonialism, the more intensified poverty and income inequalities becomes. In most African countries, disparities pose the problem of redistribution of wealth, but many of our countries are simply too poor to redistribute anything. The average income level is sometimes so low that even the formally employed live under poverty.

While Africa has recorded some positive economic growth since 1995, this growth has been mostly in the services sector. A sector most reliant on imported technology and goods. Technology is a critical area for development and Africa remains a consumer of technology rather than a producer. Thus, the kind of economic growth Africa has recorded in the last 10 years is not desirable because it means very little for job creation and the basic survival of our people.

The manufacturing sector in Africa remains in infant stages while the agricultural sector continues to be the most neglected part of the economy. These are

primarily the only sectors, which can deliver sustainable livelihoods and jobs for the majority. The state of our economies-the deepening poverty and inequality amidst plenty should concern any right thinking trade union leader. And we should wonder why with all these wealth we remain the most economically marginalized continent.

Now the effects of climate change confront us. Most African countries have failed to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis and as such Africa is at a cross road of development. As ITUC-Africa, we have made some progress in the area of climate change notably with the launch of our joint research report on climate change and trade union actions at the 2015 New Year School. Furthermore as part of the pre-congress activity, the draft strategy paper was presented and adopted.

More recently, we participated actively in the Paris Climate negotiations in December. The new Paris Climate Agreement adopted at COP 21 does not only provide a comprehensive response required by trade unions, but it has laid a firm foundation and an opportunity for trade unions to effectively engage at national, regional and international levels. As stated by Sharan Burrow of ITUC, *“Arising from the COP, unions will demand of their governments and employers the dialogue that will see a national plan for decarbonisation, clean energy and jobs -*

a plan that includes commitments to ensure a just transition for all". Thus, trade unions have to become critical actors in the fight for climate justice.

It is no secret that the African trade union movement has to adequately take on the fight against climate change, and the opportunities it has to offer very seriously. My hope therefore for this New Year School succeeds in cultivating a greater awareness of the major potential for trade unions that lies in the climate crisis. As trade unions we need to harness our efforts and leverage on the climate opportunities that are being created and also to make progress in implementing interventions at the national, sub-regional and regional levels.

Dear comrades, let me conclude while calling on all of us to realize that the time has come for ITUC-Africa to make an imprint in the area of provision of development alternatives. While we at the secretariat shall be leading this process, we call upon all of you to support the new and renewed ITUC-Africa development agenda that is anchored on 7 broad areas:

- a. The promotion of human and trade union rights
- b. Peace and security
- c. Organising and workers empowerment: with particular focus on women, youth, migrant workers and generally the informal economy workers
- d. Trade union unity
- e. Social protection

- f. Climate change and
- g. Structural transformation for Africa's development

We therefore without a doubt need systematic programs of education, information sharing, advocacy and research and information dissemination on the how trade unions can influence economic transformation and socio-economic development processes on the African continent. Most importantly, the time has come for African trade union perspectives to cut across all policy arenas. Our positions should ring a bell and make a lasting impression nationally at the sub-regional and regional levels. It should therefore be no surprise that 6th edition of the New Year School will take time to extensively unpack the following: industrial development reliant on minerals and agriculture and the cross cutting challenge of climate change and the possible options climate change presents in the form of green jobs in Africa.

Dear Comrades, I look forward to the outcomes of this year's New Year School especially the advocacy and engagement agendas that will be developed in the two thematic workshops.

While we shall be hearing various presentations from the various experts, lets also frankly share our experiences on the basis of our shared values, and then jointly pursue our strategic interests in the areas of industrial transformation and

climate change. In this way, we will be able to strengthen our role as the labour movement in Africa.

Dear comrades, I have been given another 4-year mandate. For that I am very grateful. I must emphasize that the first two terms of my time, as General Secretary was dedicated to building a foundation for this organization. I thank the previous members of the General Council (under the leadership of its chair and my President, Comrade Mody Guiro) for their decisive leadership. And take this opportunity to welcome all the new members of the GC to this 6th edition of the NYS and wish you all renewed strength and more wisdom to lead this organization to greater height.

I would like to thank you all of you for honouring our invitation. You have come from many corners of the continent and even globe. Much appreciation to our partners-the ILO-ACTRAV in particular Comrade Mohammed Mwandzingo who shall be joining us later in the week as well as Comrade Moustapha Kamal Gueye from the ILO Green Jobs Department. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES-regional and West African office, in particular comrade Bastian Schults and Mr. Fritz Schultz head of the West African office) who have always supported our NYS especially supporting the participation of the youth. Our much-respected collaborating partners, the Third World Network Africa represented by Comrade Tetteh Homerku, the ALRN-represented by its steering committee members and

the newly formed Africa Trade Union Development Network (ATUDN) members being coordinated by our own Africa Labour Research and Education Institute. Last but not the least I thank my ITUC-Africa Secretariat team. And let me wish all of us fruitful deliberations!