



Extraordinary Summit of the African Union On Employment and Poverty Reduction

UN Agencies reaffirm support for Africa

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, Sept. 8, 2004 – Fifteen UN specialised agencies reaffirmed their commitment to Africa on the eve of the opening in Ouagadougou today of the African Union's first extraordinary Summit on employment and poverty reduction in the continent. Representatives of the 15 agencies met here on Tuesday with Juan Somavia, Director General of the International Labour Office.

These agencies have worked together with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), of which the International Labour Office is the executive body, to draw up an issues document defining key priority problems and proposing concrete initiatives, based on their respective experiences and competencies, within the framework of the decisions of the UA and NEPAD, the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development.

Participants in the consultative meeting, attended by observers from the IMF and UNICEF among others, discussed follow-up mechanisms that might contribute to the implementation of the commitments made by the Summit.

They raised the question of how to move one step further, suggesting notably the possibility of a strengthening of their agencies' coherence of action on the ground, which has already materialised in Burkina Faso, as well as realizing studies of the job-creating capacities of each sector, including agriculture and informal sector.

They also underscored the need for the states concerned to assume ownership of these programmes, underscoring the fact that the UN system is at the service of the member countries.

In their view, employment must henceforth be a focal point of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) being drawn up by the governments, and there is a need to follow up the studies carried out by the African Development Forum.

The Heads of State and government taking part in the Ouagadougou Summit are expected to endorse a solemn declaration, an eleven-point Plan of Action and follow-up mechanisms on the national, sub-regional and continental levels worked out by the Executive Council of the African Union.

UN sources say representatives of key international agencies attending the Summit with Mr Somavia include Rodrigo de Rato, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Jamie Wickens, Deputy Director in charge of operations of the World Food Programme (WFP), Callisto Madavo, Vice President of the World Bank, Michel Sibidié, Director of the Country and regional support department of UNAIDS, and Jacques Diouf, Director General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Representatives of the UN Population Fund and the UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) are also present.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan will be officially represented by Mr Amoako, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

Juan Somavia emphasised on Tuesday, in the course of a press briefing, that all the actors concerned, including the representatives of civil society, now agree that employment must play a primordial part in the struggle against poverty.

"ILO is in the service of Africa," he said, "It is at the disposal of the governments, the workers and the entrepreneurs to help them work together."

The ILO Director General said he considers that Africa has made good progress toward good governance at the national level, but added that "we still do not have global good governance." In his view, Africa is now reacting to effect a change of course and put employment where it belongs – at the centre of development policies.

Mr Somavia said follow-up action is of fundamental importance, starting with the national follow-up since there are specific situations in each country. "There is no single solution; while problems may be similar, solutions may differ," he pointed out.

One key issue, in his view, is to establish what margin of manoeuvre is enjoyed by the African countries as regards the globalisation process, which, he said, "is not fair."

A meeting on the social dimension of globalisation, an issue that has been thoroughly examined in an ILO report, is scheduled for September 20 in New York. It will be attended by several Heads of state and government from across the world who will on the same day also discuss how to finance the combat against poverty, hunger and pandemics.