

AFRICAN UNION		UNION AFRICAINE
الاتحاد الأفريقي		UNIÃO AFRICANA
Addis Ababa ETHIOPIA PO Box 3243 Tel 251-11 551 77 00 Fax 5517844 www.africa-union.org		

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF ADV. BIENCE P. GAWANAS, AFRICAN UNION COMMISSIONER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS, AT THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON SOCIAL PROTECTION LIVINGSTONE, ZAMBIA – 21-23 MARCH, 2006**

***Investing in People to Promote Growth and Stability: Building the Links between Social Policy and Basic Social Protection to African Economic and Growth Policy***

Your Excellency, Mr. Levy Patrick Mwanawasa SC,  
President of the Republic of ZAMBIA

Honourable Ministers

Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corp

Distinguished Representatives of the International Organisations

Distinguished Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and privilege for me to be part of this important and significant Workshop. Allow me at the outset to convey to you the warm greetings and best wishes of H. E. Prof Alpha Omar Konare, Chairperson of the African Union Commission. In the same vein, I would like to convey to you the apologies of Advocate Bience P. Gawanas, AU Commissioner for Social Affairs who, due to circumstances beyond her control, is unable to be in your midst today. I will therefore read this statement on her behalf.

**Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The topic of this Workshop “Social Protection” is indeed of great importance to our continent as it impacts on the rights, welfare and well-being of our society and community. Social protection is also part of the overall agenda of social development. It is about providing safety nets and support to the most vulnerable group of our society, including the elderly, children, the youth, people with disabilities as well as the family, to enhance their living standards.

The African Union was established on the basic principles of human rights, the rule of law and good governance. The other provisions of the Constitutive Act of the African Union are the promotion of sustainable development at economic, social and cultural levels as well as cooperation in all fields of human activity to raise the living standards of African people. The development programmes of the African Union Commission are, therefore, geared towards rights based approach and human security. Moreover, the AU vision and mission is, among others, to mainstream sound and sustainable social development in which people are at the centre and are beneficiaries. In this score, the marginalized and disadvantaged group, especially in the rural area, will be given particular attention.

In most African countries social development continues to raise grave concern as the majority of the population is afflicted by lack of social welfare services, social marginalization, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, ill-health, poverty, unemployment, lack of education and training, lack of food and nutrition, low life expectancy, an increase in child and infant mortality and morbidity, and increase of women’s death in child birth. This situation is compounded by the impact of globalization on all social and economic policies which left the most vulnerable to be among the poorest of the poor. This situation has also undermined social justice and equality and created marginalization and exclusion of social groups, in particular the most vulnerable ones. These challenges need to be addressed by looking at the human dimension and the rights of people to have a decent and affordable life. An improvement in quality of life and livelihood depends on a social transformation which Governments should be ready to implement at the national level.

In its effort to address the issue of social development and the fight against poverty, the AU Commission had organized an Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in September 2004. The outcome was the adoption of a Declaration and Plan of Action to guide Member States develop policies on poverty reduction and job creation. Member States also committed themselves to improve the living condition of older persons, through better social protection services including improved pensions, health and other social security schemes.

Furthermore, in implementation of a decision taken by AU Heads of State and Government, the African Union is also finalizing a continental Social Policy Framework which is aimed at fostering

sustainable human and social development in Africa. Its main focus is to reduce poverty and close the inequality gap.

It will provide guidelines to assist Member States in formulating policies that would address poverty and consider the basic needs of the poor people, especially the most vulnerable groups. These policies should recognize and promote human rights; ensure access to social welfare services and benefits; enhance social justice and inclusion; create equal opportunities and equity for access to services; reduce poverty and enhance market access for the poor; empower the poor and provide them with job opportunities; promote the participation of the society in development policies; address the challenges of the rural areas; and provide an enabling environment and resources to accelerate development. The social policy concept is an integrated and holistic approach involving the state, the private sector, civil society and international development partners in creating conducive socio-economic conditions, addressing the inequalities in wealth and means of production distribution, ensuring greater equality for all, and correcting market short-comings. It will also entail the promotion of social protection and vulnerability of the marginalized and excluded groups including the orphans, vulnerable children and youth, people with disabilities, refugees and displaced people, families, the elderly, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

Among others, the AU Commission has also developed an *AU Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing*, a *Plan of Action on the Family in Africa*; a *Common Position and Plan of Action on an “Africa Fit for Children”*; *Framework and Plan of Action on “HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and other Related Infectious Diseases”*; and a *Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS*.

It has also developed a *Plan of Action* to implement the objectives of the ***African Decade of People with Disabilities***. It is indeed the task of Governments to translate these policies into concrete actions.

**Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Social development does not take place in isolation or outside the ambit of other development policies. Social development goes hand in hand with economic growth, poverty reduction, reducing unemployment and the disparity in the distribution of income and wealth. Socio-economic policies are inter-linked and cross-cutting and need to be addressed in a holistic and integrated manner. But although economic growth is necessary, it is not sufficient for reducing poverty in a situation of inequality where the benefits are reaped by a few, who are the most privileged.

In spite of the numerous global, continental, regional and national social development blue-prints and human rights instruments, we are still faced with challenges and uncontrollable situations where poverty dominates all groups of the society, in particular the most vulnerable ones. People continue to live in undignified circumstances; they are marginalized and excluded from enjoying any benefits of development. A new paradigm, based on new understanding and real needs, is therefore imperative to attain the development of the twenty-first century. Social protection needs to be institutionalized in the heart of Governments.

When this is done, social protection will indeed become the sign of Government's commitment to the poor and the welfare and rights of all citizens will be included in the priority programmes.

At this juncture, allow me to focus on social protection which is the main topic of this Workshop. First of all let us reflect on how investing in social protection could enhance the efforts deployed to reduce poverty and stimulate development. Action needed in this regard is to address income inequality; and social protection offers the means to do this. There is indeed the issue of the overwhelming poverty which is prevailing in many of our countries and the numerous challenges which prevent Governments to establish social protection policies. Social transfers can be a mean of tackling the income inequality problem and ensure that the benefits reach the poorest of the poor. Evidence has shown that even the poorest countries can afford modest social transfers with the assistance received from various sources.

The social transfers are usually in the form of cash provided to the vulnerable group, including children, the older people, people with disability; pensions; and household and child benefits. These benefits can contribute in assisting the most needy ones with food, to improve the education and health of the poor families, to empower the poor to become self-sufficient, and to develop the local markets. The challenges are that:

**These** transfers should be managed properly and target the poorest otherwise they can land in other hands through corruption;

**Efforts** should be made to get the political will of leaders;

**Social** transfers need to be included into the social policy framework as well as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs); and

**Governments'** Capacity has to be enhanced to manage the transfers

The impact of these social transfers on the citizens and community cannot be overlooked. Experience has shown that social protection in the form of direct transfers has transformed the lives of the poorest population including the old people and the young ones. Social protection has also supported families, promoted social cohesion and provided means for poor people to invest and be self-sufficient. In many cases these transfers have been put to good and effective social and economic use in particular by older women. Studies have shown that Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia, to cite but a few, are among the countries where cash transfers have brought considerable changes to the lives of the most vulnerable and poor citizens. From these studies as well as available data, **it is clear that cost is not the major factor for not establishing social protection and transfer programmes**. National social transfer programmes **are affordable if political will exists**, and also, if **additional funding received by international development partners is utilized to scale up the social transfer programmes**.

The question which often comes to mind is why some countries are still hesitating to develop social protection policies while the population, in particular, the older people, women and children, are getting poorer. Many of these retired and old people have added responsibilities by having to care for orphans and vulnerable children.

Even when education and health have become more accessible through the removal of user fees, the poor cannot still benefit properly from these investments without additional measures being put in place. In AIDS affected countries, people living with the virus cannot obtain adequate nutrition, they cannot afford the anti-retroviral treatments as well as the cost of treatment and transport to go to health centres. Social protection and transfers can impact positively on achieving the MDG goals, in particular, those related to education, health, combating HIV/AIDS, and integration of sustainable development if included in the poverty reduction strategy. Governments should therefore build up the link and establish national social transfer programmes. In this regard, Governments should consider potential areas of support from the International Community and other donors. Social protection is also a human right issue. The rights for the most disadvantaged group of the society to have access to the basic necessities of life and an income to enhance their livelihood. The social contract between the State and citizens should be enhanced through social protection programmes. Governments should put an end to social exclusion and marginalization which affect the most vulnerable group. Social policy programmes should be put in place to take on board all social services and social sectors. As such socio-economic policies are inter-linked, cross-cutting, multidimensional and, therefore, multi-sectoral, holistic and integrated approach is necessary. It is a well known fact that the Ministries of Social Welfare in our countries do not obtain the visibility and the required budget to implement their programmes. This trend needs to be reversed and all sectoral Ministries should work in a coordinated manner to achieve the best result.

The African Union Commission is fully committed to advance an agenda which promotes the centrality of the human being in development which includes equitable social development and social justice. The key role of the African Union therefore is to provide the political leadership and harmonize and coordinate Africa's efforts to improve the living conditions of Africans on the continent. In this regard, the AU Commission is ready to work in partnership with the International Community and all other stakeholders.

I am pleased that we will have the opportunity to discuss a number of related interesting topics during the three days. We will also witness the real experience and successful social protection programme during our field trip to Kalomo. This will be an eye opener for many of us.

I would like to seize this opportunity to express my gratitude to the President and the Government of Zambia, and to HelpAge International for inviting the African Union Commission to co-host this very important Workshop. The AU Commission will indeed use the outcome of this Workshop to

sensitize the African Heads of State and Government on the need to establish social protection programmes at the national level to benefit the vulnerable and poor people. Finally, I would like to sincerely thank HelpAge International, Africa Region for sponsoring the participation of the AU delegation to this meeting.

I thank you for your attention.