

Africa regional consultation

In preparation of the V Global Conference on Child Labour (South Africa, 2022)

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Opening remarks

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Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

In May 2022, South Africa will host the V Global Conference on Child Labour. This will be the first time Africa is hosting this global milestone.

Allow me to take to express our deep appreciation to the Government and social partners of South Africa for offering to host this important global event.

With 92 million girls and boys in child labour and one in five children in child labour, Africa is the most affected region in the World. Global child labour goals will not be achieved without a breakthrough in Africa.

By hosting the 5th Global Conference on Child Labour, our Continent sends a strong message to the World: we are aware of the challenge, we are working

on it and, as a region, we are driving the change. This should make us - African stakeholders gathered here today - particularly proud.

In preparation of the Conference, the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization has requested the Office to organize regional consultations in five regions of the World before the end of 2021 - to bring regional perspectives to the Conference.

These consultations aim to identify common challenges, policy priorities and good practices in eliminating child labour. They also aim to give stakeholders at regional level the opportunity to identify the issues to be included in the agenda of the Conference and what type of outcome document they recommend.

It is my pleasure to welcome ILO Constituents as well as representatives from regional and sub regional institutions, civil society organizations and sister UN agencies. I'd like to particularly welcome the representatives of young people. You are key actors of change and your views matter. Furthermore, the future of Africa; our beloved continent is in your hands!

The Africa regional consultation is organized in partnership with the African Union Commission in the context of our longstanding collaboration to promote decent work in Africa. I take this opportunity to acknowledge your personal commitment to end child labour. The AUC has formulated, adopted and started implementing an ambitious ten-year Action Plan to end child labour, forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking, the first of its kind worldwide. We are proud to be your partner in this. We also acknowledge the very good collaboration in organizing high level advocacy events; including the launch of the International Year on the Elimination of Child Labour and to mark the 2021 World Day against Child Labour.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are only four years away from 2025 – the deadline by which the international community has committed itself to the total elimination of child labour.

In Africa, we are witnessing unprecedented awareness, commitment and political will to end child labour at continental, regional and national level. The great majority of African Member States have ratified the relevant ILO Conventions. Many have adopted laws and regulations, formulated national action plans and put in place coordination mechanisms to end child labour. Governments' efforts are supported by social partners, civil society organizations, the private sector and development partners. We observe numerous achievements and good practices, some of which will be shared during this meeting.

However, the prevalence and numbers of children in child labour in Africa are still high.

We have to question our certainties. Do we have a **full understanding of broader development challenges** underlying child labour in the region? Are **there gaps in our current policies** addressing child labour and the factors underlying it? Are **we prioritizing interventions** that will lead to actual reduction of child labour? Are we **scaling up** action?

These are some of the questions that you will try to respond to during these two days.

Allow me to share a couple of considerations.

Africa is a young continent with a **fast-growing population**. If we don't succeed in reducing the prevalence of child labour – currently 21.6% - we should expect 105 million child labourers in 2025 and many more in the following years. I therefore **call for an increased focus on prevention**.

It is therefore critical to **have a correct understanding of the drivers of child labour in Africa and to urgently act on them**. The evidence points out to the need to invest in the extension **of social protection** as a means to reduce poverty and vulnerability of households, ensure **free quality education** as an alternative to child labour and **promote decent jobs for young people** and adults, in particular in **rural areas**.

I am pleased with the **widespread and unanimous endorsement of Africa's strategy for accelerating social protection coverage to reach 40% by 2025**,

which was launched 2 days ago. It's a **key building block of the continental child labour eradication agenda**.

It is also important to acknowledge that child labour is linked to **violations of other fundamental rights at work** and that **organizing for collective strength**, voice and bargaining power is a key strategy for empowering those that are vulnerable to discrimination, child and forced labour.

Finally, I would also like to firmly reiterate that **Governments have the main responsibility to end child labour** through the implementation of adequately financed policy measures addressing root causes of child labour. This is the only way to **achieve impact at scale** and observe a sustainable reduction of the numbers and prevalence of child labour. I see concrete examples of how this may be done through innovative approaches - involving partnerships between the government and the private sector, social partners, civil society organizations and development partners.

Together we will also need to address the **issue of financing to address child labour in Africa**, in particular through domestic public financing, ODA, public private partnerships and innovative finance.

So now is the time to scale up what we have achieved. Governments need to act with the needed urgency, towards concrete progress on an annual basis.

The discussion on challenges, policy gaps and priorities for ending child labour in Africa will lead to the identification of issues that African Stakeholders would expect to be included in the agenda of the 5th Global conference and to the discussion on preferred outcome document.

As the ILO Regional Director for Africa, I commit the ILO to support these efforts in line with ILO Conventions, the 2019 Abidjan Declaration on the Future of Work in Africa and the African Union ten-year action plan on child labour.

We look forward to working closely with the Government and Social Partners of South Africa, in the process leading to the 5th Global Conference on the elimination of Child labour. Thank you once more for hosting this important event in our continent.

Siyabonga! Thank you