MESSAGE OF THE SOCIAL PARTNERS FORUM
TO THE THIRD EXTRAORDINARY SUMMIT OF HEADS OF STATE AND OF GOVERNMENT OF
THE AFRICAN UNION ON EMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION

His Excellency, Mr Blaise Compaoré, President of Faso
His Excellency Mr Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the African Union
His Excellency, Mr Alpha Oumar Konaré, President of the African Union Commission
Excellencies, Heads of State and of Government of the African Union
Excellencies, members of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished Heads of Delegations and Representatives of regional and International Institutions
Ladies and Gentlemen

On the auspicious occasion of the Third Extraordinary Summit on Employment and Poverty Alleviation, the Social Partners Forum would like to present its warm wishes to the Heads of State and Government.

The Social Partners wish to express their deep gratitude to the President of Faso, His Excellency, Blaise Compaoré for his historic initiative in proposing the organisation of this Forum as a prelude to the Extraordinary Summit.

The Social Partners would like to express all their gratitude to His Excellency Mr Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the African Union for the opportunity given to us to present a joint message on the occasion of this historic Summit.

We would also like to extend our thanks to His Excellency Mr Alpha Oumar Konaré and the Commission of the African Union for their strong involvement and unflinching support to ensure the success of this forum. In this respect, the Social Partners acknowledge the key role played by the AU Labour and Social Affairs Commission.

The Social Partners wish to express their appreciation to His Excellency Ambassador Juan Somavia, Director-General of the ILO for his singular contribution, commitment and support in the organisation and success of this Forum.

Our thanks are also due to the various regional and international institutions and development partners for their support and contribution to the deliberations of the Forum.

The main theme of the Social Partners Forum held on 3 and 4 September was “Decent Work: a driving force for Africa’s development”. 80 representatives of the Pan-African Employers’ Confederation (PEC), the Organisation of African trade Union Unity (OATUU), African regional Organisation (ICFTU-AFRO) and the Democratic Organisation of African Workers’ trade Union (DOAWTU) participated actively in the Forum. In addition, 20 relevant non-governmental organisations involved in matters relating to employment participated as observers.

The Social Partners welcomed the creation of the African Union and the establishment of the New Partnership for Africa’s development (NEPAD) that provides a framework and ushers in new perspectives for the development of the continent. In spite of the serious difficulties faced in the context of globalisation, many African countries have registered a relatively good economic performance in recent years. This positive performance may be attributed to many contributory factors. First, many countries have adopted conducive macro-economic policies
with the support of development partners. Second, African enterprises have demonstrated a
dynamism and have adopted improved management techniques in the wake of growing
international competition. Third, it is also the result of the significant contribution from
dedicated workers.

However, Africa still faces numerous challenges. Demographic pressures, crushing debt
burden, lack of economic integration, growth of the informal economy, absence of safety nets
for the unemployed and poor workers and child labour. All these are an aggravating factor to
poverty. The creation of employment which is the major instrument to come out of poverty
has been a missing link in development strategies in the past.

It is for this very reason that the social partners fully endorsed the commitment of the Heads
of State and of Government of the African Union to place employment at the heart of
strategies in the fight against poverty.

Conscious of the fact that our countries have serious resource constraints, we would like to
bring to the attention of the Summit the following six priorities.

First, we make an appeal for decent work as defined by the ILO to become a global objective
and hence an African objective as well especially since there is a deficit on this count on the
continent. The decent work agenda is based on the following four strategic objectives that
pave the way for concerted solutions which would enable Africa to lift itself out of poverty
through employment, namely:

(i) enhance opportunities to obtain decent employment and income for women and
   men;
(ii) promote core standards and fundamental principles and rights at work;
(iii) extend the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all, and
(iv) strengthen tripartism and social dialogue.

Second, we underline the importance of placing the promotion of decent work as a key and
explicit objective of economic and social policies in the context of national and regional
programmes for the fight against poverty—including PRSP and NEPAD. We depend on
Governments to create conducive conditions for the creation of enterprise and generation of
employment. There should be an integrated package of agricultural, industrial, financial,
fiscal, educational and social policies. These policies should be compatible to the needs of
open economies and and should be conducive to strong, balanced and sustained economic
growth, investment, creation and development of enterprises, increased intra-African trade
and consequently to the creation of decent and productive employment.

Thirdly, we should recall that there is no sustainable human development without the
promotion and respect of fundamental rights of workers. There should be respect for the
fundamental conventions of the ILO which should apply to all workers and these include their
freedom of association and their right to collective bargaining.

Fourthly, we would like to state that African women constitute a valuable asset for Africa.
They play a crucial role in the development of income-generating activities in our villages and
towns. They constitute a pillar for the stability of the family, the community and society. We,
therefore, highly appreciate the efforts of the African Union to eliminate all the constraints for
their potential development and contribution.
Fifth, we are convinced that for Africa to benefit from the opportunities of globalisation, it is important to consolidate democratic processes and values, promote good governance and corporate governance and fight against corruption. In this perspective, we subscribe fully to the recommendations of the World Commission on Social Dimension of Globalisation chaired jointly by His Excellency Mr Benjamin Mkapa, President of the United Republic of Tanzania and Her Excellency Ms Targa Halomen, President of the Republic of Finland entitled “A Fair Globalisation: Creating opportunities for All” that recalls “the response to globalization can be said to start at home”.

Sixth, the social partners consider as top priority the institutionalisation of social dialogue at the local, sectoral, national, sub-regional, regional as well as at the AU Labour and Social Affairs Commission. Strengthening social dialogue and consultations at all levels should aim at promoting

(i) the commitment of the State to create an environment propitious for the competitiveness of enterprises, the generation of productive activities, human resource development and for the promotion of social protection,

(ii) the commitment of enterprises to create wealth and decent and productive employment, and

(iii) the commitment of workers to have their due share in the global efforts to improve productivity, higher remuneration and a better quality of life.

The Social Partners Forum highly appreciates that the Heads of State and of Government define a new vision that will contribute to economic and social progress in the context of the African Union and in the framework of the NEPAD. The Forum has been an opportunity for social partners to affirm their will to work together. The Governments fix key objectives, however they need the contributions of major stakeholders to achieve these objectives. In this respect, social partners have their respective responsibilities and fields of action. We, therefore, wish to reassure the Heads of State and Government of the African Union that we will spare no efforts, within our fields of competence, to support their determined efforts aimed at the eradication of poverty through the creation of productive and decent employment for African women and men. We are conscious of the magnitude of the task and the efforts required. But we are convinced that by working together around a shared vision and shared understanding, success is within the reach of the continent. Dans cette perspective, nous en appelons à l’institutionnialisation du Forum des Partenaires Sociaux qui a le mérite de pouvoir réunir les employeurs et les travailleurs ainsi que leurs partenaires pour contribuer à la réflexion et l’action autour des grands défis qui interpellent le continent.