The participants at the regional meeting on the promotion of the Global Compact met in Nairobi in Kenya from May 14 to 15 2003 on the joint initiative of the International Labour Office (ILO), the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), the Pan-African Employers’ Confederation (PEC) and the Federation of Kenyan Employers (FKE).

The rich and high level debates and exchanges allowed the participants to highlight the following issues enabling them to structure their future promotion activities of the Global Compact analysing the following major themes:

1. General Presentation of the Global Compact
2. The IOE Strategy for promoting the Global Compact
3. Global Compact and Productivity
4. Why do Employers’ Organizations in Africa Support the Global Compact Initiative?
5. National Case Studies (Cameroon, Kenya)

1 General Presentation of the Global Compact

The call of Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations, to business for the promotion of a Global Compact based on the respect of nine principles covering human rights, the fundamental principles and rights at work and environmental issues has been positively received by the African employers’ organizations and their members. They are aware of the need and their direct responsibility to engage in the Global Compact in a coordinated way perceiving it as an opportunity and not as a constraint. It enables them to take the initiative in the process of globalisation and to formulate strategic answers to the emergent problems while contributing to the realization of the objectives of sustainable growth and integrated development suggested by the UN.

The African employers’ organizations affirm that the legitimacy of the Global Compact is based on the positive impulse it gives for a better world for all and that it is in the interest of employers to influence productive activity. They know that the business world must be profitable and contribute to creating an environment favourable to its prosperity and development and to reinforce its social role.
Conscious of their social responsibility and its strong links with economic efficiency, the participants approve the voluntary process suggested by the Global Compact. It allows them to integrate its principles and values in a differentiated and flexible way, taking into account the cultural realities and the socio-economic level of development of the continent and its private sector. Therefore, the private sector can more easily and progressively integrate the principles, choosing those that provide them a comparative advantage and which correspond to their immediate interests and their capacities.

2 The IOE Strategy for promoting the Global Compact

Corresponding to the strategy of promotion of the Global Compact by the International Organisation for Employers, the national employers’ organizations reaffirmed the importance of the initiative and its positive contribution to the current and future productivity of their companies. They recognized the need to actively promote the principles and values of the Global Compact so as to avoid other organizations or groups seeking to interpret and apply the principles in a way that is unsuitable to the needs and the interests of African enterprises.

The Global Compact is a progressive, flexible and a voluntary learning process that can provide a basis for social dialogue. The employers’ organizations recognize the interest of and the need to unite partners as appropriate in a network in order to reinforce their visibility in the process of globalisation. These ties can materialize by direct contacts between companies and by the networks of knowledge, contacts and best practices, created by national employers’ organisations and the PEC, the IOE and the UN. These strategic alliances are a great help in improving enterprise performance, employment creation and economic development.

Therefore, employers’ organizations support the active promotion of the principles and values of the Global Compact by developing and sharing good practice. Indeed, it is only by imitation, selection and dissemination of good practice that the principles of the Global Compact will spread.

3 Global Compact and Productivity

Concerned by the need to have means of promoting a positive perception of the Global Compact for their members, the employers’ organizations appreciate the positive impact on productivity inherent in the promotion of the principles of the Global Compact. They took note of the fact that proving the link between the respect for the human rights, the fundamental principles and rights at work and the environmental issues and productivity remains difficult to establish. Based on the experience of African enterprises and Asian SMEs, employers’ organizations nevertheless perceive that motivation, integration, co-operation and equity in human resource management strongly contributes to the increase in productivity. Concretely that implies prevention of accidents at work and occupational diseases, fighting against HIV/AIDS at the workplace, combating worst forms of child labour and improving working conditions.

Considering the concepts of fidelity and honesty underpinning African group values, the approach of the principles and values of the Global Compact represents a positive way to take into account the cultural and social realities of the continent.
4 Why do Employers’ Organizations in Africa Support the Global Compact Initiative?

The employers’ organizations are conscious of the universal character of the principles and values of the Global Compact, which set African companies at the same level as those of the rest of the world. This initiative represents an opportunity for them to structure and increase the visibility of the activities they already have long been integrating into their strategies, in particular in the field of human rights and health and safety. Supporting the principles of the Global Compact also allows employers’ organizations to counter criticism of business by certain non-governmental organizations.

African enterprises continue to recognize the need to have a positive and integrated approach to the impact of globalisation including engagement with social partners. Only respect for the individual and the environment will enable improvement in individual aptitude, will to work, health and working conditions. These in turn enhance productivity. In this way, it is possible for employers to reduce poverty, to improve their public image, to maintain and develop their market shares, to improve their relations with the governments and to preserve and develop their natural resources.

5 National case studies

Cameroon: GICAM, in association with the national social partners and with the assistance of ILO and the UNDP, launched a Global Compact promotion campaign aimed at the enterprises of Cameroon. This process is leading to the implementation of a National Global Compact Counsel. The decree, actually in the process of adoption, includes the following:

- Establishing a voluntary initiative for enterprises thereby creating a framework for sustainable durable growth and corporate responsibility;
- The establishment of a network of enterprises participating in the Global Compact;
- An audit of the actual situation of the principles of the Global Compact in the country;
- Clarification, in collaboration with enterprises, of the actions to be undertaken in conformity with the Global Compact; and
- The setting-up of necessary structures involving all social partners supported by financing by the private sector, the State and the UN system.

The activities planned aim at supporting enterprises firstly in areas with strong social added value, such as the renegotiation of collective agreements, combating HIV/AIDS at the workplace, combating worst forms of child labour, efficiency of social dialogue, promotion of decent work and secondly in areas of economic development and integration.

These efforts have led to the establishment of codes of ethics with regards to combating HIV/AIDS, training courses on the Global Compact and seminars on health and safety at work. Furthermore, selected companies engaged in concrete actions in
conformity with the Global Compact thereby helping populations by adopting quality and environmental protection policies.

Kenya: The FKE and its member enterprises are facing a complex and moving environment involving national and international standards in the areas of work, environment, trade requirements, increasingly demanding consumer associations, ethical auditors and the trade block requirements. At the same time, they both must handle difficult relations regarding social and environmental issues with civil society and try to fight corruption.

Therefore, the FKE concentrates its energies, in addition to its basic industrial relations activities, on the response to these challenges by highlighting best practices and on needs-based interventions. In this regard the Global Compact offers a framework to promote corporate social responsibility, the elimination of worst forms of child labour, the promotion of productivity improvement initiatives, management training in support of the ILO's fundamental principles and rights at work, combating HIV/AIDS at the workplace and environmentally friendly production.

The FKE has thus a great awareness of corporate social responsibility and commits an important amount of time to this field. However, while considering that the Global Compact represents an integrated framework for the principles of corporate social responsibility, the FKE perceives the limits between corporate social responsibility and the issue of legal compliance with regard to labour law and health and safety at the workplace.

In order to continue its efforts in the promotion of the Global Compact the FKE is looking at the initiative to set up a National Global Compact Forum including the social partners. This is intended to promote and support initiatives related to the Global Compact. FKE continues to collaborate actively with the industrial sectors in the creation of sectoral codes of conduct.

The participants were encouraged to use their own networks within Africa and elsewhere to assist in addressing issues faced by the operation of Multinationals. Other tools such as the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration) provide an opportunity to discuss issues directly with Multinational enterprises.

6 Global Compact: a Promotional Framework for Technical Cooperation

The intention is to use the Global Compact as a promotional framework for technical cooperation aimed at mobilizing the necessary resources to meet the present and potential needs of the employers’ organisations in promoting of the principles and values of the Global Compact.

For the promotion of the Global Compact, employers’ organizations must work with institutional decision makers to promote appropriate legislation and within the framework of social dialogue, compliance with the principles of the Global Compact.
Furthermore, they must work with enterprises to inform, sensitize and support them on topics such as combating HIV/AIDS at the workplace, prevention and management of accidents at the workplace and occupational diseases, combating worst forms of child labour, freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining and the extension of social protection. Moreover, enterprises should be encouraged to consider taking other social initiatives such as the creation of voluntary enterprise networks, financing funds for training activities and the creation of product labels and codes of conduct. In this regard, enterprises will be encouraged to formulate their activities within the framework of calculable, quantifiable and measurable actions plans.

Lastly, employers’ organizations should use the Global Compact to engage with civil society so as to improve their public image and that of their members, adopting social policies inspired by the values of the Global Compact and using it as a marketing and communication tool with the relevant civil society actors and consumers.

These actions can be used as a technical framework for cooperation between the employers’ organizations and their partners, in particular the ILO, the IOE, the UNDP and the UNEP, to address the needs related to the promotion of the Global Compact.

*Finally, the participants thank and express their appreciation to the Kenyan authorities and all the organizers, the ILO, the IOE, the PEC and the FKE.*