1. Context

There is increasing recognition among governments and developments partners in Africa that employment, and more specifically decent work, is the principal mechanism through which poverty can be reduced. It is also the means through which the benefits of economic growth can be distributed among those who have laboured in creating the growth and wealth of a nation. In this context employers and workers play a critical role.

In recognition of the importance of social dialogue to these key development issues, the President of Burkina Faso, H.E. Mr. Blaise Compaoré has proposed the holding of a Social Partners Forum. This Forum is seen as an integral part of the process of consultation and articulation of a Declaration, Plan of action and Follow-up mechanisms for addressing Africa’s employment and poverty issues. It has hence been debated and endorsed at the 2nd AU Labour and Social Affairs Commission meeting held in Cotonou, Benin, 19-23 April 2004.

To prepare for this landmark event, the senior officials of the African Social Partners have held a series of preparatory meetings: in Cotonou, Benin during the Labour and Social Affairs Commission meeting; in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from the 25\textsuperscript{th} to 26 May 2004; and in Geneva, Switzerland during 92\textsuperscript{nd} Session of the International Labour Conference. The following is the Memorandum for the Social Partners Forum endorsed on the workers’ side, by Mr Hassan Sunmonu, General Secretary of OATUU, Mr Andrew Kailembo, General Secretary of ICFTU-AFRO and Mr Adrien Akouete, General Secretary of DOAWTU, and on the Employers’ side, by Mr Birahima Nacoulma President of the PEC and Mr Azad Jeetun, General Secretary of PEC.

The Memorandum proposes the theme and organizing framework of this Forum to the social partners in order to produce a Joint Statement to the AU Extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa, to be held in Ouagadougou, September 8-9 2004. The Memorandum covers the following issues:

- Themes and sub-themes
- Format
2. Theme and sub-themes of the Social Partners Forum

2.1. Theme:

The eradication of poverty in Africa requires an integrated perspective on the relationship between employment and poverty and coherent policy solutions. Both Groups identified the need for the Social Partners Forum to address two key issues, namely:

- sustainable economic growth is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for poverty reduction;
- that Decent Work should be at the heart of all socio-economic policy as recommended by the Report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation;
- that freely chosen, productive and full employment should be the key policy framework for the eradication of poverty in Africa.

It is against this background that both Groups agreed that the theme of the Social Partners’ Forum should be the following: «Decent Work, a new development strategy for Africa»

2.2. Sub-themes:

Based on relevant elements of the Global Employment Agenda and the different preparatory consultations held, the following sub-themes of the forum were identified:

- Promoting agricultural development
- Development of industrial capacity, entrepreneurship, knowledge and skills
- Promoting the transformation of the informal economy to the formal economy
- Rights at work
- Towards a fair globalization: investment; competitiveness; fair trade; market access; debt; development assistance

These sub-themes will be the basis for discussions in the interactive workshops to be held on the first day of the forum. In dealing with the main theme and sub-themes, the Forum will feature:

- Gender as a cross-cutting issue;
- Conclusions and recommendations of the Report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization co-chaired by President Benjamin Mkapa of the United Republic of Tanzania and H.E. Mrs Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland;
- Showcases and exhibitions on successful stories on advancing the decent work agenda;
- Draft joint Statement of the Social Partners to the Summit.

3. Format

3.1. The two-day Forum would be organized to permit interactive discussion of the areas above based on supporting documents, an information fair, success stories showcases and exhibitions, etc. The Forum will take the following format:

- Official Opening Ceremony;
- Thematic Session on identified sub-themes;
- Technical Workshops based on the 5 sub-themes identified above;
- Group meetings of Social Partners;
- Plenary sessions and Conclusions;
- Closing Ceremony
- Exhibition/Side events of good and best practices on poverty alleviation through decent work