

**CLOSING SPEECH BY MTHUNZI MDWABA, EMPLOYER
VICE CHAIRPERSON OF THE CONFERENCE AT THE 12TH
ILO AFRICAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE,
JOHANNESBURG, 14TH OCTOBER 2011**

**Mr Greg Vine, Chairperson of the ILO Governing Body
Ambassador Juan Somavia, Director General of the
ILO**

Mr Charles Dan, Regional Director of the ILO in Africa

Ms Mildred Oliphant, Chairperson of the Conference

**Mr Kasahun Follo, Worker Vice Chairperson of the
Conference**

Honourable Ministers

**Distinguished representatives of employers and
workers**

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and gentlemen,

As indicated in my opening speech, I am hugely honoured to have participated in the 12th ILO African Regional Meeting.

I take this opportunity to reiterate the gratitude we have for Juan and the work he and his team has been doing for Africa, other emerging countries and the world.

While the time will come to wish you well and party at your expense when it is time to truly say goodbye next year September, it is nevertheless appropriate and opportune to wish you well in planning your next endeavours and adventures.

The Employers Group is always grateful for the work your team does for Africa and to your colleague Charles. Muchas gratias and merci beaucoup, respectively.

As I was tossing and turning in my bed last night trying to decide what to say-indeed those who know me well are aware that I prefer to speak from the heart and not be constrained by what is on paper (but have been beaten into

submission by PR, Communications and Protocol people on this one, and accept defeat and therefore have learnt to write speeches, but always leave it for the very last minute)- it occurred to me that there were more questions than answers that we are leaving this conference with and in many instances we have been very repetitive in saying the same things over and over again at all the conferences I have attended.

Indeed, my worker comrade, the distinguished Bheki Ntshalintshali asked a very pertinent question at one of the thematic sessions I was chairing, when he said, "What is new?!" In absolute frustration he said this and continued to state what has occurred to me on a number of occasions, that we read all the ILO information which is meant to empower us with information so we can prepare adequately and provide answers, and regurgitate same and agree with all of it, and agree with the Director General Report without adding anything to it for the office to assist us with proposed solutions.

This has got to stop! We need to apply our minds to the burning issues that are destroying us, talk less and do more...together! I need to repeat this.

We must apply our minds, be true to ourselves, talk less and do more...together! This for me is part of the paradigm shift we were referring to and will return to this later.

One of yesterday's headlines on a local newspaper read, "**No Jobs, No Hope, No Future...6-8 million are without jobs**". We know that this is not sustainable, but we continue to talk about it without coming up with solutions.

It is our time, everyone agrees-we should be on the pound seat as Africans and other emerging countries, but we are still carrying a begging bowl and are still having policies that are imposed on us by others who have lost the way. We are still coming up with policies that are designed to please others who have never taken time to understand us, to ask

us what we really need and have always told us what we need, based on what they want.

Tripartism is natural to us as Africans. Our way of doing things has always been consultative and inclusive, not instructive. It has taken a financial crisis that refuses to end for the world (some are still in denial wanting to continue as if it is business as usual) to realise that the ILO model of doing things is the way of life.

Let us ask ourselves how the ILO got to the G20 and let us ask ourselves how it is that we are now coming up with the B20 and the L20?

Let us ask ourselves how it is that the world is no longer run by the G7? Let us ask ourselves how the world now is watching and listening to what the BRICS countries have to say?

This did not just happen and just evolve because someone or some people decided it was now time to share with other people and it was time to be inclusive in the decision making of world politics.

For Heaven's sake, let us take the steering wheel and make things happen for us and determine the programme for Africa and our share of the world! Otherwise we shall go down with those who refuse to accept that the world has changed.

So what do we need to do?

Paradigm shift we keep saying!

Well, I have touched on this already a little bit, but we need to elaborate.

We need to do the following: -

- We need to strengthen the private sector and give it a voice - without resources, we are wasting our time. The example of how Brazil funds business organisations is very critical for us to move forward as it is in all our interests. What people do not realise is that trade unions more often than not have more resources and support than business

organisations, including organisations which were not historically organised such as black business organisations in South Africa;

- We need to work with the youth in coming up with policies that will solve their problems. They have already told us that, “either we deal with these unemployment problems and poverty or they will deal with us”, and you all know they will...but as it was rightly pointed out by the distinguished John from the Zimbabwean employers. We need each other and wisdom and experience never have a substitute, but the trick is that we must all be in the room, doing things together. The youth is right when it says, “nothing for us, without us”;
- We need as Africans to work together by leveraging off each other with strategic and tactical positioning as well as infrastructural improvements-we need to stop petty jealousies that come with many years of oppression and not supporting the progress of others and working with them;
- We need to be true to ourselves as I said already by knowing our strengths and weaknesses and “opening up the private boys” clubs of procuring favours to friends who cannot and are not competent to deliver-this is not empowerment, but huge disempowerment of ourselves and our communities. Let us get the right people to do things urgently and deep down we all know when people are right;
- We need to have self-belief and confidence in ourselves, who we are and stop believing that someone out there has answers for us-let us drive this vehicle and stop being passengers;
- We need to be strengthened by diversity and fresh thought and not feel intimidated by same;
- We need huge change management and to this end need change agents to accept that jobs must be at the centre of everything we do. When we make

policies and write laws, we have to consider the jobs impact-deliberately, consciously and responsively. We need to develop a capability to assess the regulatory impact on jobs on everything we do. When we all embrace and apply human rights principles and place human dignity at the fore, all jobs we create will be decent jobs and we need to do this now in all our countries;

- We need to work hard on the industrialisation process and not be apologetic about it. Without value-add for us, no deals must be done with anyone! The small amounts of money we are given in corners are not sustainable and once we lose the bargaining power we have which is the projected growth of the next few years, then we shall have lost an opportunity to change things;
- We need to ensure that rural misery is converted to rural prosperity by, *inter alia*, adopting programmes such as the South African Minister responsible for Rural Development, the honourable Minister Nkwinti shared with us;
- We need to focus our energies on what I continuously refer to as the “coolification of vocational and technical jobs” with our kids and the youth so that we all embrace that this is the change we need to create jobs by the millions;
- We need to ensure that the educational content is the right one -aligned to industrial policy and areas of future industrial growth such as the green economy, “fit for purpose to create jobs” as the distinguished employer, Jackie from Kenya said, and instilling entrepreneurship at an early foundational stage in our schools;
- Governments must create a conducive and enabling environment for enterprise building and sustainable private sector growth, investment and access to finance. We need big companies to continue oiling

the economy, but we all know that jobs come from lots and lots of small enterprises for sustainability;

- We need armies of entrepreneurs, we need the youth to have the confidence in themselves to create jobs and not stand in job queues and the confidence in us to support them;
- We need to support and use the informal economy as an advantage rather than a challenge as it is a key feature of our economies;
- We need to ensure that our inspectorate systems work well by ensuring that training takes place for better cooperation with all parts of society;
- Multinational must be made to play a constructive role and comply with National laws and be part of our programmes as per the Multinational Declaration;
- We must support national determination and progressive implementation for any social protection schemes with the involvement of social partners, taking into account the financial capacity of the state concerned;
- We need to review social security schemes to reflect demographic changes and to make employment transition easier (including examples of social security reform, incentives for workforce participation and conditionality of benefits);
- Maintain the G20's unambiguous rejection of labour standards as a tool for protectionism, consistent with the ILO's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work;
- We need innovation and creativity urgently - we need to design for the future.

Distinguished delegates, I have tried to give some pointers by saying things that some of say in corridors instead of sharing so we can move forward and I am doing this in the desperate hope that we can stop the bleeding and the threats it comes with for all of us.

The time for populist rhetoric is way over, we need to get cracking, now!

Finally, I would like to thank my Minister of Labour, the honourable Ms Oliphant, for doing such a sterling job in chairing this conference, the department of labour, particularly Les, Mahlomola and Sipho and the rest of my Government for agreeing that we be the hosts and always being there for the continent, Christoph for being an excellent clerk and his team, Antoinette and Corinne, Fred of the IOE for always remembering his roots and being there for his continent of birth, Francis and his boss Deborah from Act/Emp for doing all they can with very limited resources, the employer spokespeople, my colleagues for their excellent presentations and interventions as well as the drafting team for all their hard work. Business Africa was also well represented by Azad who acted as the employer spokesperson. Thank you very much to the interpreters as well for making our work to so smoothly. Together, we can do so much more!

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for paying attention and look forward to prosperity for all.

Merci, obrigado, siyabonga!