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1 BACKGROUND

After over Fifty years of independence, Africa continues to lag behind other continents in terms of meeting the socio-economic and political aspirations of its people. Various analyses have pointed out that the slow progress of Africa's development has been caused by many (external and internal) factors and elements among them are the problems related to the practice of genuine and effective democracy and governance. However, Africa has embraced democracy¹ and good forms of governance, which are some of the universal modernisation prescriptions, in most cases, without recourse to local or national contexts. Nevertheless, the practices of these prescriptions have not met the aspirations of the African peoples with regard to true emancipation and development: welfare, progress and shared prosperity.

In spite of her human, mineral and material wealth², Africa and Africans still remind the principal development challenge in the world as grinding poverty³; widening and spiralling inequality, more profound amongst women and the rural populace; endemic unemployment and under-employment, with youth⁴ constituting a larger part of the profile; weak and abysmally low industrial capacity utilisation; lack of and in most cases, weak infrastructure capacity, policy and institution to support production and manufacturing; weak and inadequate public health care, sanitation and hygiene services are dysfunctional; amongst other economic, social, political, cultural and environmental crises. The continent is one with the highest number of civil wars, crass public and private sector corruption and other forms of violent attacks all posing serious challenges to peace, security and stability. Clearly, these developments represent failures and the ills of governance.

Therefore, democracy quickly comes and continues to come under cynical, real and moral attacks when these failures that are littered in most African democracies remind largely unresolved as if they are rocket science. The recent austerity measures prescription and enforcement management of the global financial and economic crises that started in 2008 have also deepen this doubt about democracy. This is so people are grossly disappointed that government could easily bail out banks and businesses; continue to remain reluctant to regulate discipline reckless banking and business practices; but quick to pass private sector debts to the public by cutting public services and failing to rehabilitate households affected by the crises.

Indeed, freedom and other civil liberties, which are fundamental in a democracy, remain sacred, especially as they are expected to be guaranteed under the situation where the system and institutions for the effective implementation of the rule of law exist. However, the situations where countries are seen as democratic, yet their people can hardly boast of stable electricity supply, efficient, affordable and accessible health care to the point that some of their leaders have died in foreign hospitals in search of health care make the issues of priorities and choices in relation to democracy and governance critical for debate.

Nevertheless, the clamour for the renaissance and true transformation of Africa remains loud, real and urgent. In the words of Nelson Mandela, "we must face the matter squarely that where there is

¹ At the moment, especially from the 1980s, more than 30 African countries are multi-party democracies. Democracy is now "the only game in town", but the "turn-over-rule" yardstick (that is the high chances of having government change between and among political parties) is still weak.

² Africa Economic Outlook calculated Africa's income from its natural resources in 2012 stands at \$242 billion, which represent 46% from the total revenue sources. See <http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/>

³ Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the World Bank, is the only region in the world where the number of persons living in extreme poverty is increasing over the last 30 years. In the 1980s number of persons living in extreme poverty (less than 1.25 USD-a-day) was 205 million, but in 2010 that figure has more than doubled to 414 million. Furthermore, when the multi-dimensional poverty index indicators such as the level of access to nutrition; infant mortality; access to education, years of schooling and school attendance; type of housing and access to the basic supplies that this entails, as well as ownership of basic assets, are taken into consideration the number of extreme poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa will be higher.

⁴ More than 70 percent of Africa's 200 million young people (persons between aged 15 – 24 youth bracket) live on less than US\$ 2 per day⁴. The same report showed that underemployment is clearly not a solution to poverty as up to 82 percent of African workers are classified as "working poor"- the African Economic Outlook report.

something wrong in how we govern ourselves, it must be said that the fault is not in our stars but in ourselves that we are ill-governed". Pointing to the urgency, Mandela noted that "the time had now come for a **"new birth"** Charging Africans to effectively take up the challenge to move Africa forward, he affirmed "we know that we have it in ourselves, as Africans, to challenge and change all these. We must assert our will to do this. We must say that there is no obstacle big enough to stop us from bringing about an African renaissance"⁵. Besides, recent developments point to the fact that the world is back to the cold war era, given Africa's experiences under the competition by the West and East for their proxy wars, there are renewed concerns how Africa hopes to engage this time around.

It is to this end that the Pan-African trade union movement as represented by the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) and the African Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa)⁶ has elected to use the platform of their grassroots education programme (PANAF- Pan-African Trade Union Education Programme ⁷) to convene a Pan-African Trade Union Conference on Democracy and Governance on the theme: *Democracy and Governance: Mobilizing Africans for Africa's Transformation*. The PANAF programme organised a similar international conference on Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in October 2010, in Nairobi Kenya. This was done as an urgent response to arrest the rising spate of sectarian, civil and violent conflict on the continent.

The African trade union movement is convinced that a 'New Africa' that will fulfil her potentials can emerge if rigorous and imaginative efforts are engineered rather accept, recite and lament the [foreign and national, continental] reasons why democracy and governance have not delivered genuine and enduring dividends Africans.

In essence, the conference will provide the space for robust discussion on the issues, help point to best practices and alternatives, as well as contribute to galvanise the African elite and peoples for the task of the transformation of Africa.

2 JUSTIFICATION FOR TRADE UNION INVOLVEMENT IN DEMOCRACY

The talk about Africa' democracy and governance is essentially a post-independence discourse. After independence, Africa had to contend with the challenges of neo-colonialism and the Cold War politics/competition of the West and the East. Fifty years after, most dictators and military rule thrown up largely by these contending forces have mostly fallen and defeated by the will of the people. Democracy is now the accepted and legitimate vehicle to power and authority.

However, governance outcomes from democratic rule have remained largely far and in-between leaving the people almost disillusioned and distraught, as well as raise doubts and cynicism around and about the values of democracy.

In a similar vein, the commentary that Africa is rich, but her peoples live in misery and hardship is a common, but profoundly disturbing fact. For instance, amongst the 42 countries on the lower rank of the United Nations Development programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) scale, 35 are African countries, representing 80% of that group. Botswana⁸ is the highest ranking Sub-Saharan African country at 109 out of 187 countries ranked. The African Union during its 50th anniversary

⁵ Quotes from President Nelson Mandel's address to an Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU) summit in June 1994; See Marin Meredith's 'Fate of Africa', page 686.

⁶ www.ituc-africa.org

⁷ PANAF is a grassroot oriented trade union education programme started in 1988 and managed by the two continental trade union organisations (ITUC-Africa and OATTU) and their partners from LO and TCO- Sweden, FGTB-Belgium and CUT-Brasil. The programme currently covers 16 African countries and trains between 70, 000 to 100,000 workers annually on issues such as work place Health and Safety; Trade union and Human rights; HIV and AIDS; Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

⁸ Botswana is regarded as one of the African countries with effective governance practice given its relative success at managing its mineral wealth in the interest of her people. Erstwhile President Festus Mogae won the Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership in 2008 for his startling leadership.

noted these disturbing situations and pledged to give true and shared expression to the African transformation aspiration under the 2063 Africa Renaissance agenda.

African working families, like most Africans believe that democracy, especially multi-party democracy is not negotiable. However, finding accommodation and application for a democracy practice that will deliver effectively on governance is a challenge that must be urgently addressed. But the wonder could be why African trade unions are interested in democracy and governance, which are not seen as “bread and butter”- work places terms and conditions of employment issues. The bewilderment could be profound given the rather narrow perception of trade unions as “professional agitators and trouble-makers” serving only the interests of its members.

Historically, African trade unions have been part of the decolonization, liberation and apartheid struggles in Africa. Besides queuing behind Africa’s ‘nationalists’ and freedom fighters in these struggles, they also donated their best hands to join the founding and early national governments that emerged.

Furthermore, African trade unions’ belief in the sanctity of democracy accounted for their massive contributions to the defeat of dictatorship and military rule and the subsequent restoration of democracy and democratic rules from the 1980s till date. African trade unions take it as sacrosanct the presence of a healthy, genuine and enduring democracy as one of the conditions for the enjoyment of freedom and other forms of civil liberties (including human and trade union rights), as well as seeing it as the fulcrum for effective governance. Workers and trade unions have been victims of rights abuses, especially in democracies where the rule of law is patently weak and constantly being manipulated to the service and benefit of a few. Besides, the commentary that Africa is patently under-developed is a lamentation that organised labour rejects given that it is easy to blame persons, forces and circumstances for the failure of democracy and governance practices in Africa, rather the ideal should be to continue to seek effective alternatives to address and change the narrative.

Therefore, the two continental organisations (Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) and the African Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa) will be convoking a Pan-African Trade Union Conference on Democracy and Governance under the theme: *Democracy and Governance: Mobilizing Africans for Africa’s Transformation*. Different stakeholders such as African governments; Employers’ Associations; the African Union, Regional Economic Communities (RECs); African Diaspora, and the academia will be consciously invited to attend and participate in the conference. Others that will be invited to join workers and their trade union organisations include continental and international multilateral/development agencies; CSOs; national, continental and international media and the general public. It will take place in Kigali, Rwanda in October, 2015.

The conference is a platform to seek pragmatic answers to questions such as: Is Africa nationalism under the democratic governance arrangement along the semblance of what the East Africa Community is proposing a more effective way to achieve Africa’s renaissance?, Is the current African winner-takes-all election arrangements sustainable and engendering democracy? Is government a business venture where almost all politicians after ascension to public offices enter into immediate wealth to the exclusion of the people? If recent commentaries suggest that the world is returning to the cold war era, how should Africa construct and manage its democracy and governance without suffering the fate of the past?

Amongst other objectives, the conference will be to attempt to further the discourse on how to revive, strengthen and marshal the African renaissance agenda. It is expected that a sets of action plans will be developed that the African trade unions will use to further the engagement on the transformation agenda with the various stakeholders.

3 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME OF THE CONFERENCE

3.1 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the conference are follows:

- To give the opportunity to participants to debate and discuss on the values and principles of democracy and governance.
- To provide a mass base platform to further the discussion on how to give effect to Africa's renaissance and transformation
- To find effective ways and strategies to build synergies on the implementation of local, national, regional and continental transformation initiatives
- To develop and agree on stakeholders' actions to advance democracy and effective governance in Africa

3.2 OUTCOME

The following will be the main outcomes of the conference:

- Shared experiences among participants on democracy and governance practices in Africa will contribute to knowledge; understanding on different national realities, and, assist in the identification and promotion of alternatives and best practices
- Strengthened momentum on the processes for continental and national implementation of pro-people agenda and policies such as the UN Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals⁹ (SDGs) and the African Union 2063 development agenda.
- African social partners built common understanding on how to contribute to the 2016 ILO discussion on Decent Work for Peace, Security and Disaster Resilience.
- Enhanced social dialogue and collaboration for effective mobilisation of Africans and resources on eradication of poverty and inequality, as well as the creation of shared prosperity on the continent.

3.3 OUTPUTS

The following will be the main outputs of the conference:

- Background document on democracy and governance in Africa
- Thematic presentation
- Conclusions and recommendations on the way forward
- Communiqué

4 METHODOLOGY

The Conference will take place for a period of three days. The conference will provide the opportunity to debate and share experience and knowledge on democracy and governance in Africa. This multi-disciplinary conference will bring together about three hundred (300) participants from the African continent. The Conference sessions will include the combination of Keynote speeches, panel discussions, breakout sessions/group discussion and presentations. Presenters and Speakers will be drawn from social partners, academia, practitioners specialized in the area of democracy and governance.

The main theme of the conference is **Democracy and Governance: Mobilising Africans for Africa's Transformation**. Therefore the main background document in line with this theme will be

⁹ So far, 17 SDGs have been proposed, which, all things being equal, will be adopted in September, 2015. See: www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal.html

developed and presented in the conference. Accordingly, the following sub-themes will also be discussed at the conference:

The issues and questions on democracy and governance for whom; the role of social dialogue in enhancing democracy and governance in Africa will be cross-cutting issues under the below discussions:

- Corruption and accountability
- Effective electoral management for consolidation of democracy in Africa
- *Citizens'* participation in democracy and governance
 - Addressing women and youth limited access and participation
 - Advancing other vulnerable groups exclusion and marginalisation
- Economic transformation:
 - the role of the public and private sector
 - management of Africa's natural resources
- Resources mobilisation : Financing African transformation and renewal
 - Taxation: Illicit Financial Flows and other forms of harmful tax practices
 - Contribution of migration and Diaspora to Africa's development
- Designing an effective African security architecture in pursuit of Peace and stability

Summaries of sessions will be presented and discussed at the plenary. The conference will also include press conference, field visits and side events.

The conference will nominate a drafting committee to come up with conclusions and recommendations to be adopted by the delegates.

5 TARGET GROUP

5.1 TARGET GROUPS

Workers, trade union organisations

Government and their Officials

Business, employers and their associations

African Union

Political parties/ politicians/political forums

Civil Society Organisations

Continental and international multilateral / development agencies

Regional Economic Communities

Embassies

African diaspora

Academia

National, continental and international media

The general public

About 300 participants are expected for the conference.

6 DATE AND VENUE

The conference will take place from **28 – 30 October 2015 in Kigali-Rwanda**¹⁰

7 OUR EXPECTATION FROM COLLABORATING PARTNERS

The conference is planned to be organised in partnership with the host government and other relevant continental and international governance/development structures identified in this concept note.

In order to make this conference successful, we are expecting that the full participation of all invited guests, partners and friends of the African working class and the continent.

We equally look forward to working together to follow through with the implementation of the conference outcomes.

¹⁰ Rwanda is being proposed as the venue by considering the following reasons namely rapid and inclusive development strides post genocide, progressive integration policy of visa on arrival for African passport bears, commendable and exemplary gender promotion achievement and high environmental protection and consciousness.