

Press Release

Thursday, 9 December 2004

ILO GLOBAL CAMPAIGN ON SOCIAL SECURITY LAUNCHED IN KENYA

NAIROBI (ILO News) – The government of Kenya and the International Labour Organization launched on Thursday an interactive campaign to extend social security protection to some 30 million Kenyans.

The initiative comes under the *Global Campaign on Social Security and Coverage for All*, which was launched in 2003 by the ILO to encourage countries to formulate and implement people driven social protection policies. Kenya is the first English speaking African country to host such an event.

“We welcome the Campaign because this will help a great deal in creating public awareness and confidence in the national policy guidelines being formulated to entrench participatory social protection programmes”, said Kenya’s Vice President and Home Affairs Minister, Mr. Moody Awori at the launch event in Nairobi.

The one-day conference was designed to discuss and draw up strategies and programmes for poverty alleviation and to address the issue of access to affordable health care and the provision of basic social security.

Also present at the campaign launch were Mr. Newton Kalundu, Minister for Labour and Human Resources, Mrs Charity Kaluki Ngilu, Minister for Health and Mr. Peter Anyang Nyong’o, Minister for Planning and National Development, the ILO Executive Director for Social Protection, Mr. Assane Diop, Mr. Emmanuel Reynaud, Director of the ILO’s Social Security Policy and Development Branch and the ILO Director for East Africa, Mohamed Ali Ibrahim.

“Kenya is contributing to the momentum that the Global campaign on Social Security and Coverage for All is creating in the world, and more particularly in Africa”, stated Mr. Diop, who stressed the impetus the campaign received from the African Union Extraordinary Summit on Employment and Poverty Alleviation held in September 2004 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Campaign launch activities included three information sessions where representatives of the government and employers’ and workers’ organizations debated on reforming Kenya’s pension and health schemes.

“Today’s launch mark an important turning point in the manner in which opinion leaders regards the whole concept of social protection”, insisted Mr. Edgar Manasseh, Chairman Board of Trustee of the National Social Security Fund.

Several existing pension schemes in Kenya are limited to formal sector workers. About 84 per cent of the labour force is excluded, while many of those who are covered receive benefits that fall short of their basic needs. In addition, basic health care remains out of reach for the 56 per cent of Kenyans who live in poverty.

More generally, 90 percent of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa lack social security protection.

This new shift in Kenya – extending social security for all especially the conversion of the existing provident fund into a social insurance pension scheme – is a process that will take time but the views expressed in this conference will be reviewed and possibly incorporated in the development of the national Social Security Policy.

Kenya should also practically benefit from this campaign as ILO, together with WHO and GTZ, has developed innovative approaches to extend social security to Kenyans and Africans, particularly those working in the informal economy.

The Global campaign will provide a mechanism to channel resources and needed expertise to Kenya while ILO will build on its long experience in promoting social dialogue and tripartite involvement to effectively address the challenges ahead.

“To deliver effective social security programmes, we must have a growing and stable economy that will provide employment to the majority of our people because at the end of the day, the most decent form of social security is decent employment”, concluded Mr. Edgar Manasseh.

The ILO has organized similar launches in Mozambique and Senegal in 2004 while Nigeria and India are expected to host the global campaign launch in 2005.

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