Reflections of the Pan-African Trade Unions in the Development of the International Labour Organization:

Contribution to the ILO History Project

by

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Former General Secretary,
African Regional Organisation of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, Nairobi, Kenya

Draft date: 25 March 2009
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Summary

This year, 2009, the International Labour Organization is celebrating 90th anniversary of its foundation. The trade union movement in Africa has had immense linkages with the modern day International Labour Organization since the pre-independence period. Throughout this period the trade unions have offered ideas, options and policy instruments in the pursuit of social justice, which is the cornerstone of the ILO. By bringing together the actors of the world of work, the ILO has been able to forge solutions to some of the most pressing problems of our times.

Just like the ILO, trade unions have had a rich and varied history. For all the time workers in the continent can pride themselves to have built free and independent trade unions in Africa, an uphill task, and consequently to contribute to the strengthening of the ILO in ensuring harmonious industrial relations.

Of course, the development of trade unionism was slow in some parts of Africa, but some success has been achieved in some areas, thanks to the notable collaboration with various arms of the ILO. African workers and their sectoral, national, sub-regional and regional trade union organizations look to the future with even greater confidence working with the ILO.

The aim of this paper is to examine not only achievements, but also challenges and difficulties that African trade union movement has faced during the period of interaction with the ILO. The publication considers how the economic and political interests of trade unions in Africa have influenced or oriented the ILO’s action, and the ways in which continental concerns of workers have been dealt with. It also considers how far the ILO’s methods of dialogue and debate have succeeded in building bridges between the distinct perspectives of its workers’ constituents in the African context. Through reviews of trade union activities in Africa, the publication explores how the ILO has adapted its goals to the challenges facing in the continent, and the lessons for the future.

Probably one of the most direct contributions by trade unions in Africa is the support for a stronger ILO for social justice for all. This is derived from the belief that social justice is the guiding principle of the ILO and, of course by extension, the main tenet of all ILO Member States. It is, thus, imperative that there is strong support for the
ILO in pursuit of its enduring historical mandate to promote social justice and the rights and interests of working people. It is in this context that trade unions in Africa unreservedly welcomed groundbreaking report published by the ILO entitled “A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All,” urging that building a fair and inclusive globalisation must become a worldwide priority. There must be an urgent rethink of current policies and institutions of global governance.

The co-operation between African trade unions and the ILO began well before many countries in the continent gained their political independence. At the regional level, the interaction was more intense following the establishment of the African Regional Organisation of the International confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU-AFRO) in 1957. Since then the ICFTU-AFRO and the Organization of African Trade Unity (OATUU) worked with various units and departments of the ILO to build free and independent trade unions in Africa.

While noting the success of the First Labour Conference of American States in 1936 encouraged the ILO to gradually introduce Regional Conferences. In 1947, the first Regional Conference in Asia was held at New Delhi, in 1955, the first Regional Conference in Europe was held at Geneva, and in 1960, the first Regional Conference in Africa was held at Lagos. The advantages of tripartite regional conferences are clear: focused on one area of the world, they permit intensive examination of questions of interest relative to one particular region. The participation of unions in these conferences deserves their mention in the co-operation with the ILO.

However, there was a rather slow progress of trade unionism growth in some parts of Africa, but some success has been achieved in some areas. The labour movement in the continent looks to the future with even greater confidence working with the rejuvenated mandate of the ILO in the context of the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization.

The existing working modalities are expected to provide even firmer ground to promote workers rights and protect labour conditions in the globalized world. As before, the areas of co-operation will include the creation of sustainable employment for all, promotion of basic social security and social protection, democratization and promotion of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, ensure equal opportunities in all areas of life, for men and women.

In addition, as the continent waits for a better place tomorrow as a land of literate people, trade unions wishes to continue the tremendous efforts in the elimination all forms of child labour. Trade unions in Africa are of the view that allowing child labour today is like welcoming an illiterate Africa tomorrow. These children should be the people in various lines of art and sciences tomorrow, which Africa needs for its growth. For the continent to compete effectively with the rest of the world, it must stop child labour.

Trade unions will also continue working to put Africa in a place of respect and honour. In this context, the promotion of social dialogue and tripartism with employers and governments is crucial so to have to accept that workers must be properly compensated for their efforts as they continue to build all economies in respective countries.
Some achievements realised by trade unions in collaboration with ILO in post independence Africa include the following

• Built firm trade unions in Africa;
• Trained workers and leaders in different fields;
• Encouraged exchange of experiences and information among trade unionists and workers
• Made workers and unionists learn their rights as members of trade unions and as citizens
• Taught trade unionists and workers how the economies of countries work
• Shown workers how to accept their role in respecting dignity of work
• Conducted democratization programmes in a way to make workers understand the value of democracy
• Made workers know how to defend trade union rights
• Informed all concerned that “Workers Rights are….Human Rights”
• Established education systems for workers
• Assisted growth of labour colleges and institutes of learning in Africa
• Taught workers to hate poverty and how to fight it
• Taught that education fights ignorance, poverty and diseases
• Liberation wars and showed the world the language of boycott and sanctions
• Participated with Africans in the war of liberalisation and uprooting of colonialism
• It strengthened the voice of women in the world of work and employment, leadership and earnings
• It launched the fight against child labour; to ensure schools exist for children; factory plants for adults. Today’s African child; is tomorrow’s African adult – must be made to compete with their equals everywhere in the world
• It sourced funds to assist the activities of trade unions in the fields of education and training
• It assisted Africa in fighting against the ideals of the Structural Adjustment Programmes
• It put the case of Africa trade unions at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund
• It opened ways to develop workers colleges and centres of learning
• It strengthened the hands of trade unions in the fight against the principles of Export Processing Zones
• Pushed for trade unions in Africa to discuss African debt crisis.
Some African trade unionists who have served as ILO specialists

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<td>Assane Diop</td>
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<td>Elias Mashasi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moussa Sow</td>
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</tbody>
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## CONTENTS

I Introduction................................................................................................................................... 1

II The Biographical Approach at looking at Trade Union Movement in Africa ......................... 2

III Origins of Pan-African trade unions and the evolution of the ILO and international trade union movement..................................................................................................................... 5

IV: The role of trade unions in the struggle for independence ...................................................... 11

V: The ILO and the campaign against Apartheid in South Africa ................................................ 26

VI: Role of trade unions in the campaign against Apartheid ........................................................ 28

VII: Promotion of workers’ rights in Independent Africa............................................................. 35

VIII: Trade unions supporting a stronger ILO for social justice for all........................................ 40

IX: ILO commitment to trade union education and training in Africa........................................ 46

X: Trade union support ILO in challenging Structural Adjustment Programmes ..................... 49

XI: Trade unions and fair globalization for social justice ............................................................... 53

XII: Trade unions views on African debt problems ...................................................................... 55

XIII: Women issues and equality promotion in trade unions......................................................... 57

XIV: Young workers in trade unions ............................................................................................ 58

XV: Trade unions combating child labour .................................................................................... 59

XVI: Trade unions and ILO together fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic..................................... 62

XVII: Trade unions demanding basic social security for all.......................................................... 68

XVIII: Trade unions and in the informal economy: Organizing the un-Organized ...................... 71

XIX: Toward conflict resolution, prevention and peace building in Africa................................. 73
I Introduction

There are not many established researchers interested in making a contribution to the writing and re-establishing the identity of Africa’s trade union movement, but those that have committed themselves in this subject have done so in a modest way. For instance, Ioan Davies, while discussing the role of the labour movement in British colonial Africa in his 1966 book entitled *African Trade Unions*, noted how trade unions were radicalised during the colonial period through affiliation to political parties. Davies observed that when political parties were forced to operate underground, trade unions took the mantle of political organisation and struggle for independence. He wrote that the reverse happened in the post-independence period where the close administrative control prepared the way for the integration of party, bureaucracy and trade unions.

In his part, Wogu Ananaba (1979), an African educationist in the trade union movement fraternity, noted that the activities of trade unions in the 1960s and 1970s were characterised by a higher degree of government interference in the programmes. This, he argued, almost stifled the unions’ basic tenet of fighting for the economic betterment of the members.

While such studies have been possible, they have nonetheless extended the debate about the workings of trade unions in Africa into unexpected areas of general African history.

What has probably eluded many commentators and writers is the incredible role played by the African trade union movement to the development of the longest-servicing UN agency: the International Labour Organization. This is the subject of this publication.

Through a chronological approach, this paper adopts a ‘layman’ analysis in the broadening of the scope of the Pan-African trade union movement in understand the underlying features and activities of workers of Africa in the development and shaping of the work of the International
Labour Organization (ILO). The prominent point to be derived in this exercise is the fact that African trade unions have not lacked leadership, diversity of ideas and, and spontaneity in reactions to shape the ILO.

While historians and other academicians continue the debate about the nature of African trade unionism, this layman approach has substantially turned to biographical studies with the hope of forming, at least, a provisional understanding of the trade union movement in Africa and its contribution to the ILO’s Decent Work agenda.

II The Biographical Approach at looking at Trade Union Movement in Africa

The institution of society can be viewed as consisting of actions of a number of individual souls. However, in any society there is a minority of individuals who are creative and possess above-average abilities. Through the actions of these minorities upon the majority, they are able to influence the souls of the larger society. They are the prime movers of action in society. Through such creative individuals, the larger societies are able to respond, partially or effectively, to human and physical challenges. These creative individuals have been termed ‘great men,’ ‘heroes,’ ‘prime movers,’ or ‘the vanguard’ of society.

The biographical approach of the present paper is aimed at portraying the role the trade union movement in Africa as a social entity, and how has impacted on the work of the ILO. The approach is taken due to the belief that the establishment and continued success of such formal organisations as the ILO (and others) can fully be understood if we do not limit ourselves to only the abstract study of their structures. Instead, there is need to analyse them in the way they appear in the personal experience of the various individual characters in the workings of social movements (the trade union movement included).

This methodology further informs us that life histories of individuals therefore reveal a lot about society. Broad aspects of society are seen in the acts of these individuals. Issues such as living conditions, the type of education, labour and political conditions of their times are revealed. Through such expositions, major historical episodes have been brought to light and have come to be understood better. Similarly, lessons for the future are learnt from the study of these personalities.
In this context, Africa has had its prime movers in the economic, social and political arenas. Like the great African personalities that led movements against colonial intrusions (Samori Toure of the Mandinka Empire, Nana Olun of Itsekiri in Nigeria, the Nandi Orkoiyot in Kenya) certain individuals among the trade union movement also performed this role of initiating action against colonial occupation and the vagaries associated with it. They have equally been prime movers of action in post independence Africa. We have in mind figures like Wogu Ananaba and Haroun P. Adebola (Nigeria), Amos Gray (Liberia), Rashid Kawawa and Andrew Kailembo (Tanzania), Tom Mboya, Arthur Ochwada and Clement Lubembe (Kenya), John Tettegah and Emmanuel A. Mettle-Nunoo (Ghana) and Mamadou E. Jallow (Gambia). The list is long. Other than leading their various trade union national centres, they were also involved in regional matters that concerned labour. These men and women did great justice for Africa. They demanded for changes in the colonial structures, better wages, living and working conditions. On occasions when colonial and post-colonial governments failed to hear their voices and those of the masses of workers, they downed their tools. Somehow, at the end, they forced something out of the colonial and post-colonial states. Even in the wake of the emerging one-party states after independence, these individuals have risen up to the occasion to condemn totalitarian regimes. Some have ended up in jail. Others have weathered the storm and come up on top; they are leaders of their respective countries today (e.g. President Frederick Chiluba of Zambia). These were the conspirators, those who inspired others to act. While we cannot rule out the inevitability of their actions, their zeal to act and move masses of workers calls for their study. Indeed, without them the trade union movement in Africa may not have succeeded as it has done.

From the foregoing justification, it will, therefore, be noticeable that the author if paper wishes to try and unravel the passions and fascinations of his own personality; to explain the understanding of trade unionism in Africa and its contribution to the rich history of the ILO.

His personal zeal to take on the colonial and post-colonial states almost on a personal basis with the sole aim of bettering their fellow workers wages and working conditions, is probably one of the cornerstones of the labour movement and the resulting contribution to the work of world body of social justice. His characters and his centrality in the decisions taken in the process of the various struggles, reveals a lot about African trade unionism. From his, and his associates, today’s trade unions can learn something simple but crucial: these personages can
form role models whose virtues can serve as a sort of looking glass, through which they can see
the style and structure of African trade union movement—a looking glass in which today’s
trade unionist can see how to adjust and adorn their own current lives and activities as trade
unionists.

All these issues call for the undertaking of biographical studies of these figures. The role of the
project will be to receive, in the process of inquiry, each successive guest and select from their
actions all that is noblest and worthiest to know about trade unionism or otherwise.

The growth of African Trade Unionism through the lenses of Andrew Kailembo

The ILOs Bureau for Workers’ Activities in association with the ILO Office in Dar-es-
Salaam supported a very significant projected dubbed “Makers of African Trade Unionism”. The
project sought to offer a perceptive interpretation of character that brings the pattern of life into
focus, an evocation of cultural background, and an insightful evaluation of achievements and
roles of selected senior trade unionists.

A very comprehensive and thorough book titled “Life and Times of an African Trade Unionist”
on the life of one, Andrew Mtawaba Kailembo, a veteran trade unionist and the incumbent
General Secretary of the ICFTU-AFRO who has guided the body from 1993 when it was
reinvigorated, was published in 2002 under the project. Perhaps, the book is one of the most
significant landmarks in the ICFTU-AFRO.

Much of the story in the book draws from his speeches at seminars and conferences. Some of the
material is from his contributions to journals, media and reports. The story highlights his travels,
endeavours and dreams, all of which were shaped by trade union work. Kailembo is one among
unique individuals that have made a mark in the labour movement in Africa and internationally.
Other notable unionists include Tom Mboya of Kenya, Ahmed Tlili of Tunisia, Clement Kadate
of Malawi, H.P. Adebola of Nigeria and Rashid Kawawa of Tanzania. Though Kailembo may not
have attracted a lot of media attention, he is among the greatest in the African labour movement.

The book distinguishes him as one who personalizes African labour problems just like a medical
practitioner endeavours for the main reward of curing patients. Kailembo’s dedicated service to
the free trade union movement and what he has strived to achieve in the career is captured in the
book.

He joined the trade union movement in 1954. He was a deputy general secretary of the
Tanganyika Local Government Workers Union in 1957. He established Young Christian
Workers Movement in Tanganyika in 1958 and between 1959 and 1962, studied economics and
industrial relations at Oxford University. He started working for ICFTU as an advisor on African
affairs in July 1962 and he was head of Africa Department in Brussels between 1979 and 1992.

He was elected AFRO General Secretary for the first time during the 11th ICFTU-AFRO
Congress in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1993 and re-elected for a second term in Dakar, Senegal, in
May 1997 and for the third in May 2001 ICFTU-AFRO Congress in Nairobi. Kailembo was re-
elected in September 2005 at the ICFTU-AFRO 14th Congress in Tunis, Tunisia, after defeating
Guillaume Attigbe, the then outgoing President.

The book describes how, at work, Kailembo combines wit and understanding that has endeared
him in the hearts of men and women both at the workplace and in public. For more than 40 years Kailembo has been a force in the African workers’ struggle against colonialism, apartheid, low wages, poor working conditions, violations of human and trade union rights, unemployment, poverty and many other injustices.

He fought when African governments tried to muzzle alternative voices, particularly those of trade unions. As a trade unionist, he has been part of the history of the labour movement in Africa during the most exciting and dynamic periods.

### III Origins of Pan-African trade unions and the evolution of the ILO and international trade union movement

The origins of unions' existence at the global level can be traced from the eighteenth century, where the rapid expansion of industrial society drew women, children, rural workers, and immigrants to the work force in larger numbers and in new roles. This pool of unskilled and semi-skilled labour spontaneously organized in fits and starts throughout its beginnings,\(^1\) and would later be an important arena for the development of trade unions. Trade unions as such were endorsed by the Catholic Church towards the end of the 19th Century. Pope Leo XIII in his 'Magna Carta': *Rerum Novarum*, spoke against the atrocities workers faced and demanded that workers should be granted certain rights and safety regulations.

In Africa, the early forms of trade unionism are probably found in South Africa. Trade unions in South Africa have a history dating back to the 1880s. From the beginning unions could be viewed as a reflection of the racial disunity of the country, with the earliest unions being predominantly for white workers.\(^2\) Through the turbulent years of 1948 - 1991 trade unions played an important part in developing political and economic resistance, and eventually were one of the driving forces in realising the transition to an inclusive democratic government.

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Originally, ILO membership was identical with League of Nations\(^3\) membership, since adherence to the League carried with it participation in the ILO. However, several countries that were not members of the League were admitted to the ILO, notably the US, which joined in 1934. South Africa, was, therefore one of the first members of the ILO under the British Empire “mandatory power” (together with Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and India).

On the hand, the First World War transformed the world's social and economic map. The ILO emerged together with the League of Nations from the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. It gave expression to the concern for social reform that grew with the industrial revolution, and the conviction that realistic reform had to be conducted on an international level.

Twenty-five years on, the ILO entered the reconstruction period following World War II with the Declaration of Philadelphia, a dynamic restatement and enlargement of its basic goals and principles. The Declaration anticipated the postwar growth in national independence and heralded the birth of large-scale technical cooperation with the developing world, side by side with the standard-setting function which began in 1919.

In 1946 the ILO became the first specialized agency associated with the United Nations. On its 50th anniversary in 1969 it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. South Africa was re-admitted as a member of the ILO on 26 May 1994. This followed a period of 30 years of isolation from international labour forums after the country withdrew from the ILO in 1964 as a result of political pressure.

Among the early interactions amongst African unionists at the international level, included the authors travel to England when he visited various workers’ unions and attended meetings and workers conferences. For instance, in September 1959, the author was invited to attend the All Worker’s Conference in Great Britain which was held at Blackpool. Such contacts were to prove useful in the future, including entrance in to the world of the ILO.

At the ILO, various contacts were made with officials in Geneva. Through the initiative of Father J. Joblin he was able to have discussions with these officials who agreed to start sending in some literature on labour movement to Africa.

\(^3\) The League of Nations was an inter-governmental organization founded as a result of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919–1920. At its greatest extent from 28 September 1934 to 23 February 1935, it had 58 members.
The main aim for visiting these European countries was: to ask the brothers there to be kind enough and endeavour to help my other brothers of Tanganyika in obtaining for them vacancies in various colleges.\(^4\) It was while in Fribourg and Basle in Switzerland that the author obtained a two-year scholarship. Even after obtaining such a scholarship, for himself he did not cease to solicit assistance for others. Writing to the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employers, he said

\[
\text{I would like to prostrate myself before you that you be of a similar assistance to my other African brothers who have the feeling and wish to study abroad particularly for attaining a good educational standard of running and organising the workers trade unions. Most of us have no financial background.}\(^5\)
\]

**International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, African Regional Organisation**

In 1949, the year the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions was founded in London in November/December, the world had awoken to find that workers had declared to build solidarity. Three African national trade union centres from the Gambia, Congo and Sierra Leone attended the founding congress.

By virtue of their presence at the Congress, Africa participated in the deliberations that were to form the basis of future policies of the ICFTU, hence becoming party to ideals of the organization. Founders of the ICFTU clearly saw that the fight for trade union objectives and national liberation could never be apart, but had to be brought together. The ICFTU, therefore, has not been a European organization from its inception but rather a workers body that has strove to achieve for the free labour world, including in Africa, Bread, Peace and Freedom. At that founding Congress, a resolution on colonialism was passed.

This resolution in effect condemned colonialism and further sought to strengthen trade unions in Africa. Soon after formation, the ICFTU recognised the importance of union organization

\(^4\) Kailembo to Father Crane 5 February, 1960.

\(^5\) AK, ‘Autobiography’ p.2
and sent missions to most Africa countries. Practical steps were soon taken to implement the missions’ recommendations. Out of the recommendations sub regional centres were created to help in the organizing and strengthening of African trade unions.

For the first few years the ICFTU established regional offices in East and West Africa with the responsibility of providing services to affiliates in the regions and encouraging others to organize. Training was done in North, East and West Africa.

Field representatives, often working with Force Ouvreire, went to the different countries to assist in organizational work. Many of those assisting in French – Speaking Africa usually operated from Brussels or Paris. At an administrative level, the ICFTU sent to Africa its representatives to various regions to do educational and organizational work. They also provided advising services to African trade unions. The first ICFTU representative to Africa was Albert Hamerton who was based at Accra, Ghana. He laid the foundation of educational and organizational work particularly in English West Africa. He was the first person to come up with educational materials for African countries. By 1972, ICFTU had the following regional field representatives in Africa; Lennart Kindstrom in East Africa; William G. Lawrence in Central – Southern Africa, Grace Mwonge in Western Africa; and Salam Gaye in Dakar.

One of the main tasks of the ICFTU since inception has been to defend and promote the universal recognition and application of human and trade union rights. The ICFTU, in close coordination with its affiliated organizations and the international trade Secretariats, has stepped up actions for the defence and promotion of trade union rights in all parts of the world including Africa. Its action and activities have varied from country to country, depending on the nature of the regimes and the extent of violation of trade union rights.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, African Regional Organisation (ICFTU-AFRO) was established up at the ICFTU first African conference held in Accra, Ghana, from 14-19 January 1957 as an African regional outfit of the then ICFTU. However, the ICFTU, founded in 1949, ceased to exist on 31October 2006 after dedicatedly serving workers of the world for 57 years. In its place – from 1st November 2006 – is the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), unifying the affiliated organisations of the former ICFTU and the World Confederation of Labour (WCL), together with eight other national trade union organisations with no prior affiliation at international level.
Until 1993, the ICFTU operated a regional office in Africa with a Regional Secretary serving on part-time basis contrary to ICFTU’s regional structure. ICFTU often sent representatives on fact-finding missions to various national centres. A majority of the national centres expressed the wish for reactivation of an autonomous African regional organization in tune with ICFTU’s regional structure. The opinion was reiterated at various ICFTU Consultative Meetings with African national centres, whenever such meetings took place.

### Significant Events in ICFTU’s Calendar in Africa

**December 1949** – World Labour Conference, London, the ICFTU is born and commits itself to free labour world: bread, peace and freedom

**1953** – The ICFTU at its World Congress in Stockholm, draws world attention to the detrimental effects of the colonial system ‘which prevents people from achieving full development and expression of their characteristics’

**January 1957** – ICFTU first congress in Africa in Accra, Ghana. The congress sets pace for building strong independent trade unions and an equally important task to ensure self-determination and political freedom of the continent’s workers.

**April 1964** – The 4th Africa Regional Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, resolves to reconstruct AFRO, to give it a wider berth in striving for political, economic and social aspirations of workers in Africa. The conference elects Mamadou Jallow and Alhaji Haroun Adebola, as Regional Secretary and Chairman respectively, of the temporary AFRO Secretariat

**1970s** – ICFTU works hard in educational activities, research, information and advisory services in affiliates and national centres. Financial assistance is given for financing national centres programmes

**1976** – With upsurge of apartheid in South Africa, the ICFTU calls an International Conference on Apartheid to define concerted trade union action at world level. This is subsequently followed by a series of others in the 78—80 period

**1980s** – ICFTU already in the struggle against apartheid continues to support the South African Development Cooperation in the fight. ICFTU also remains in the forefront of sanctions lobby. It lays emphasis on assistance to the independent black trade union movement. Some parts of Africa are by now plagued by political instability and deep economic crises. At the height of these problems, ICFTU expands its realm and becomes deeply entrenched in seeking and supporting solutions to these problems

**1990s** – ICFTU leads vision of Society for democratic governance, a commitment to the universal principles of human and trade union rights and a strong infrastructure of institutions, to promote full employment and social justice.

**1993** – African Regional Organisation (AFRO) is fully established. AFRO, with a permanent secretariat and a General Secretary, coordinates its activities from Nairobi, Kenya. Andrew Kailembo is given the mantle as to lead AFRO as General Secretary, while Madia Diop is elected President

**1999** – ICFTU turns 50, a great milestone and marvels at AFRO’s six years of autonomy and service to workers in Africa. For organisations however, age is just a figure and an indication to where they are headed
2000 and the future – A commitment to all its ideals, attention to all areas central to its concerns and faithful devotion to the workers of AFRICA. Areas to delve into include child labour issues, cooperation with ITUs, education and information, Democracy, SAPs, globalization, women and youth among many others.

31 October 2006 – ICFTU holds the 19th Congress (its last) in Vienna, Austria to dissolve and join the new international trade union (International Trade Union Confederation, ITUC) which will include the ICFTU’s affiliated organisations, those of the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) and eight other organisations. The new international trade union ITUC, was founded on 1st November 2006 in Vienna. The ICFTU closed down with a proud history of serving the world’s workers for almost 57 years. This followed the decision of the 2004 ICFTU Congress in Miyazaki, Japan, that the organisation should take part in a process of strengthening the international union movement.

At the 11th Regional Conference in Harare (2-3 April 1993), a decision to reactivate the organization was taken. Two considerations were taken: one that ICFTU African affiliates had increased in number deserving a regional organization with a permanent secretariat and General Secretary based on the continent to serve members more effectively. Deterioration of human conditions in Africa due to economic, social and political problems (structural adjustment, child labour, debt crisis, gender issues, the struggle for democracy and development, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), migrant workers, famine and unemployment situation of the youth needed a close scrutiny.

This could not be done from Europe or without a regional organization. An ICFTU regional organisation befitted Africa. Following adoption of the amendments to the ICFTU-AFRO Constitution, Andrew Kailembo was elected General Secretary of the ICFTU-AFRO. Headquarters of the ICFTU-AFRO was moved from Freetown, Sierra Leone, to Nairobi, Kenya. By 31st December 1996, the Nairobi office had 11 staff members and one part-time worker. There were also two refugees from Rwanda; one was involved in research activities in French-speaking countries and the other in general duties including filing.

The secretariat grew fast and comprises seven departments viz. Education, Press and Information, Finance and Administration, Human and Trade Union Rights, Economic and Social Policy, Gender and Equality and HIV and AIDS. It remained a powerful force in a continent facing severe socio-economic and political problems, authoritarian and dictatorial regimes, violation of human and trade union rights. The anniversary is as yet the most significant event on the organisation’s calendar.
IV: The role of trade unions in the struggle for independence

The independence struggles of many African countries cannot be complete without mentioning the role of African workers and trade unions. It is also a matter of pride that a number of the founding fathers of the former Organization of African Unity (OAU) were trade union leaders. Not only did they use trade union tactics, but also, the trade union platform to launch the struggle for independence.

The presence of many former trade unionists in high political office is frequently cited as evidence that the labour movements of Africa have been institutions of wide political influence. The list of African political leaders with previous trade union experience is indeed impressive; Sekou Touré in Guinea, Rueben Um Nyobe - the French Cameroons; Ouezzin Coulibaly, a founder of the teachers’ union in French Africa and later second in command to Honghouet - Boigny, in the Ivory Coast, Adoula in the Congo; Tom Mboya in Kenya; Rashid Kawawa in Tanganyika; Joshua Nkomo in Southern Rhodesia and others could be named.6

The late Patrice Lumumba of the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Congo Leopoldville/Kinshasa) was one of the African political liberators, who was murdered in the prime of his youth, after the independence of his country.

The late Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea was a trade unionist and political leader who mobilized the Guinean people to vote for independence from France in 1958 when other political leaders voted yes to the French Referendum to choose between continued French colonialism and instant independence. Sékou Touré was a founding father of the former OAU.

The late President Hamani Diori was the founding President of Niger, and a founding father of the OAU. He was a trade unionist as well as an astute political leader who fought against French colonialism in Niger.

The late President Modibo Keita of Mali was the first President of Mali and a founding father of the OAU. He was a trade unionist. He was a visionary Pan-Africanist, who, along with the

late President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and late President Ahmed Sékou Touré of Guinea started the Ghana, Guinea, Mali Union, which although did not last long, can be considered the first genuine attempt at African Unity!!

The contribution of African Trade Unions to the political independence of a number of African countries, include the following:-

Agreement by historians that the trigger for Nigeria’s independence started with the great six weeks general strike of 1945 led by the late Chief Michael O. A. Imoudu of the Railway Workers’ Union, which paralyzed the entire country. This was followed by the Coalminers strike of 1949, which led to the shooting to death of several coalminers. From that time on, the Nigerian Trade Union Movement was in the vanguard of the struggle for Nigeria’s independence until it was achieved on 1st October, 1960.

In Kenya, the late Tom Mboya led the Kenyan Trade Union Movement in support of the political struggle for Kenya’s independence. If Tom Mboya was not assassinated, perhaps he would have been the natural successor to the founding President of Kenya, the late Jomo Kenyatta.

South Africa should also be cited as one of the African countries that greatly benefited from trade union support for the defeat of apartheid, and the emergence of democratic, multiracial South Africa in April 1994. The trade union contribution to South Africa’s liberation started with the founding of South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) by the African National Congress (ANC) in the 1960s. Members of SACTU were in addition to their trade union work, also active in other ANC Structures, including Mkhonto We Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC. The founding of COSATU in the early 1980s gave an added impetus to trade union action against apartheid. Trade union action made apartheid too economically expensive to operate and the ideologues of apartheid and white supremacy had no alternative than negotiate with the ANC.

Mention should also be made of the contribution to the liberation struggle in Namibia by the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), which great support helped SWAPO win independence for Namibia on 21st March, 1990. NUNW organized several international
solidarity Conferences, Rallies, Meetings, etc., for the re-integration of the Walvis Bay into independent Namibia.

The Ghana Trade Union Movement also played a great role in the struggle for Ghana’s independence. It is in appreciation of this, that the Government of Osagyfo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah built a massive 6 storey building, “Hall of Trade Unions” in the Centre of Accra, for the Ghana Trades Union Congress.

With all the above examples, it will be seen that the African Trade Union Movement has contributed greatly to the political emancipation of African countries. They are still capable of contributing more to the political, social and economic development and integration in Africa.

Yet caution is required in interpreting the presence of numerous trade unionists in positions of political responsibility. One may not conclude - as is so commonly done - that the labour movement has been a prolific source of political leadership.\(^7\)

For many of these men the trade union was simply one of many organisational channels used by them in their rise to power. The union had an established organisational structure that the party would easily work with to reach and organise the masses. In most cases these latter-day political leaders were often youth leaders and party militants before or at the same time that they were trade union activists.

Trade unions were normally drawn into political contacts through the efforts of political-oriented leaders in their society who sought to enlist the unions as an ally in the independence struggle. This was particularly true in the period before political parties were recognised by the colonial authorities. The trade union political party identification in some cases became a formal affiliation once the political party was legitimised, as was the case of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUCN) and the National Council of Nigerian citizens (NCNC) from 1949 to 1950. But more generally, it was an informal alliance, for example, such as that of the

\(^7\) Ibid
Kenya African National Union (KANU) and the Kenya Federation of Labour (KFL) or the Parti Democratique de Guinee (PDG) and the Confederation du Travail d’ Afrique (CGTA).

The relationship between parties and trade unions to a large measure were personal ones between the top leadership of the union and the relation of the political movement and had relatively little impact upon the daily economic and social activities of the unions. There continued to operate with greatest results on the local basis, largely unaffected by these political contacts at the higher levels of the national centre.

Accordingly the worker’s role as a citizen seeking independence frequently entailed his membership in the independence movement in addition to the trade union membership. Thus these trade unions - political party relationships were found beneficial to both sides.

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**Trade unions at the ILO: Search for political independence in North Africa**

Among the many questions trade unions asked in struggle against colonialism were: What weapons should we use? Who could be the friend to help? The coming of the ICFTU and its linkage with the ILO was seen to be part of the answer to the questions.

The struggle of the African trade union movement against colonialism and racial domination assumed international dimensions and solidarity when the ICFTU called for freedom. It also assured freedom fighters of support in the quest for self-determination at its general council meeting in Berlin, July 1952 and, at its World congress in Stockholm 1953.

This drew the attention of the world to the detrimental effects of the colonial system that prevented peoples from achieving full development and expression of their characteristics. The Congress proclaimed “the will of the ICFTU to combat colonial oppression wherever it exists and to give active and effective aid to the free trade unions of non-self-governing countries in their national struggle on behalf of the workers.”

The Berlin declaration and the Stockholm resolution provided the guiding lines for ICFTU policy and action in support of the colonized people’s struggle for emancipation. In general the action was an appeal and representations to the colonial powers and to the United Nations, seeking the redress of particular grievances, as well as a general speeding up of the advance towards full self-government and independence.

One particular form of ICFTU activity, which passed almost unnoticed at the time, but which helped in the process of emancipation, was the successful ICFTU campaign to secure the right

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9 Ibid

10 Ibid.
of representation for non-self-governing territories in the ILO. ICFTU policy on colonialism was further defined at its 5th World Congress in Tunis in 1957, which reaffirmed the faith of workers in the colonial countries in the aims and objectives of the ICFTU as a world organization of free labour in which all workers were linked together in the struggle for “Bread, Peace and Freedom”. The congress called the attention of the world to the absolute right of people to self-determination.

Algeria: The ICFTU and its affiliates strongly supported the Algerian people’s revolution and demanded self-determination and national independence. The demands of the Algerian people were legitimate; trade unions allied to the nationalist movement had been denied all bargaining rights, their leaders were arrested and detained without trial. Their publications were systematically seized and finally banned. In response and in line with its support for anti-colonialism, the ICFTU accepted the Algerian trade centre UGTA to be affiliated to it. By 1956 the ICFTU had already expressed concern over the deteriorating situation in Algeria. The sub-committee of the ICFTU meeting in Brussels from 9 to 11 April 1956 said in part: In this tragic situation we feel duty bound to raise an earnest appeal both to the France and Algerian peoples to reject the counsels of despair and common endeavour to solve the Algerian problem by peaceful means.

The meeting further observed that solution to the political problem was inherent in the strenuous stopping of misery in Algerian to ensure rapid economic and social progress. Then French settlers and government officials showed little signs of changing; violent suppression was the order of the day. During the years, the ICFTU used all the means at its disposal to ensure that the cause of Algerian freedom was kept in the limelight. Literally not a single world congress or meeting of an ICFTU executive body passed without a declaration of protest at the denial of democratic and labour rights to the Algerian people and the reiteration of their policy; the immediate cessation of hostilities and the opening of negotiation on the issue of self-determination.

ICFTU aid for the Algerian cause was not limited to moral and political support. They contributed considerable sums from the solidarity fund for the relief of Algerian refugees who had found refuge in Tunisia and Morocco from the devastation of the fighting in their country. This represented one of the biggest single efforts the international free trade union movement has made for any group of refugees.

ICFTU also provided legal aid for Algerian trade unionist such as Aissat Ichir when brought to trial. It also provided material assistance to families of those involved.

Tunisia: Tunisia was the first of the North African territories to gain independence and the first to receive ICFTU support in the struggle against colonialism.

In March, 1952 a sub committee of the ICFTU executive board adopted a statement expressing its solidarity and sympathy with the Tunisia trade union federation UGTT, protesting at the arrest of many trade unionists and at restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly. It supported Tunisian demand for self-determination and called on the French government to reopen negotiations with accredited representatives of the Tunisian people.

The ICFTU general council (Berlin, July 1952), to which Tunisian delegates were prevented from attending French authorities, adopted another resolution on Tunisia. This meeting protested strongly at the repressive policy of the French on Tunisia. It regretted that numerous ICFTU appeals to the French government to find a solution to the national aspirations of Tunisians had met no response and approved the ICFTU for lodging a complaint with the ILO (May 1952).

Later the same year the ICFTU general secretary submitted detailed proposals to the French
Prime Minister, M. Pinay calling for the recognition of Tunisian sovereignty and for adoption of an agreement between France and Tunisia providing for transference of power on a clearly defined timetable. At the New York Executive Board meeting in (December 1952) it was noted that Farhat Hached (General Secretary of UGTT) who had again been prevented from leaving the country to attend an ICFTU meeting had been brutally murdered. The board expressed horror and indignation at this cowardly act. Strongly aware that workers of the free world were solidly behind them, and despite further arrests and other repressive measures, the Tunisian trade unions continued taking a leading role in the freedom and independence movement. For its part the ICFTU continuously kept pushing the question of Tunisia before the world. Following a joint appeal by the ICFTU, the UGTT and the ICFTU affiliated, CGT-FO, talks were held leading to signing of a freely negotiated treaty that subsequently led to the independence of Tunisia in March 1956.

Morocco: In Morocco like in Tunisia, trade union freedom was bound up with the demand for national self-determination. In 1953 French authorities deposed and deported the sultan, whom they regarded as the symbol of Moroccan national aspirations. The ICFTU protested and later the same year again raised the question in a message to the general assembly of the United Nations, meeting in New York.

Further protests followed from the executive board (May 1954) and from the fourth World Congress (Vienna 1954). Visits to Morocco by the ICFTU president Omer Becu and general secretary, J. Holdenbroek in 1955 heightened activities. Trade unionists began to defy the law and to set up their own national centre, the UMT.

They applied for affiliation with the ICFTU which was granted in May 1953. Labour laws were not changed until September 1953. Things looked bright for the Morocco trade union movement after the formation of an all-Moroccan government. But this was short-lived. Soon trade union leaders were getting arrested; there was violent suppression of strikes and other obstacles to the legitimate trade union activity. This clearly brought to light ICFTU’s worry that the price of freedom was eternal vigilance that national sovereignty was not in itself any guarantee of trade union freedom.

The emergence of Pan-Africanism trade union movement and its links with the ILO best its nuances of the plethora of ideas, and sentiments that came with it. In the midst of Pan Africanism other postulations emerged; namely, African Socialism, the African Personality, Non-alignment, Negritude and the one party state system. These were concepts that were used, particularly after African states gained independence to define the African and his condition and the way forward for Africa. These terms were debated widely, at times dismissed as mere rhetoric. Yet they formed the core of what came to be known as the African essence in the ILO. It is interesting to re-live the author’s views and understanding of these issues within the framework of the trade union movement in Africa. Pan-Africanism has a long history. We would not belabour that long journey. Nonetheless a brief survey of the subject will suffice.

Pan-Africanism emerged out of:

Africa’s passionate and compulsive desire to achieve oneness of purpose with a view to rebuilding both the spiritual and material Africa, to rediscover the lost image which has
suffered the most brutal form of human degradation - the heartless slave trade; the inhuman practice of racial discrimination and segregation”

Thus Pan-Africanism came to encompass all the efforts to fight for, revive, protect, develop and sustain that oneness, that Africaness, that identity. The struggle and fight against colonialism and degradation, the will to pressure the African identity in one body was influenced by several actions and forces. The African descendants who found themselves in the midst of the white American cultures which rejected them, began looking back across the Atlantic in search of a lost dignity and identity. He saw the influence of these African descendants as central to the emergence of Pan-Africanism.

It was through Negro intellectuals like (Claude) McKay, Sylvester Williams, W.E.B. Dubois, George Padmore and Marcus Garvey Pan-Africanism, later to transform into a movement for African unity, sprang up as a force which was to help eradicate imperialism in Africa, thereby making Africans masters of their own continent, as well as pressing and projecting the blackman’s personality, identity and dignity.

Africanism was given life and impetus through the various Pan-African congresses organised in different parts of the world. In 1900 Sylvester William, A West Indian lawyer, convened the first Pan-African congress meeting in London. He viewed this congress as significant for Africa in that for the first time a meeting of a group of people motivated by a common sense of alienation and awareness of the blackman’s plight, feeling the need for unity of action came together to discuss a problem.

At the second congress held in 1919 participants resolved that:

….the land and its national resources should be held in trust for the natives…the investment of capital and grating of capital and grating of concessions should be so regulated as to prevent the spoliation of the natives and the exhaustion of natural wealth…slavery and corporal punishment should be abolished except in punishment of

12 Ibid
13 Ibid
14 Ibid
crime…and the natives of African should have the right to participate in government as fast as their development might permit.\textsuperscript{15}

The same meeting also declared that Africa should be ruled ‘by consent of the Africans’. This idea of consent was the forerunner of the principle of self-determination of later days and a cornerstone of the Charter of African Unity”.\textsuperscript{16}

The London (1921), Lisbon (1923) and New York (1927) Congresses gave momentum to Pan-Africanism within social and economic as well as political confines. These congresses were dominated by Africans studying in Europe who awakened to the plight of their mother Africa in the humiliations and racial discrimination they suffered.

A historic Pan-African conference was held in Manchester immediately after the Second World War. Organised by Dubois and George Padmore and attended by later day African nationalists like Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Chief Akintola (Nigeria) and Johnson from Sierra Leone. The idea of Pan-Africanism was considerably transformed at this conference. This transformation was qualitative in the sense that:

Pan Africanism, which started as a movement in search of identity among people of African descant, and later on, was used by African nationalists as a force to inspire their struggle for independence was now lifted to the level of state relationship among African nations.\textsuperscript{17}

Accordingly, this change was inaugurated by the first conference of Independent African states in Accra in April 1958. This conference was an important event that led to a watershed in the account of the development of Pan-Africanism.\textsuperscript{18} From a historical point of view, the later day phenomenon of Pan-Africanism:

evolved into the movement of African unity, which became the essence, origin and import of African emergence into independence.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{15} Resolution of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Pan-African Congress, quoted in Ibid.

\textsuperscript{16} Andrew Kailembo, “Talk to Foreign students” \textit{op. cit}

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid
While the Accra Conference of 1958 was a limited affair involving eight independent African states as most African states were still colonies, it nonetheless launched a movement for African unity. The participants “agreed on unilateral purpose and action among themselves to cooperate in safeguarding their independence and to work for total emancipation of Africa.”

The second conference of Independent African states was held in Addis Ababa in May 1960 during which it was resolved, among other things, to create such organisations as the African Council of Economic Co-operation, and the Council for Educational, Cultural and Scientific Co-operation. The idea of Pan-Africanism also received impetus from the formation of the Pan-African Freedom Movement for East and Central Africa (PAFMECA) later to be known as the Pan African Freedom Movement of East, Central and Southern Africa (PAFMECSA. Founded in 1958 at Mwanza, Tanganyika by African leaders of political parties and liberation movements within East, Central and Southern Africa, it resolved “to foster the spirit of Pan-Africanism in order to rid East and Central African territories of imperialism, while supremacy, economic exploitation and social degradation, by stepping up nationalistic activities aimed at attaining self-government and establishing parliamentary democracy.”

Trade unionists admired the strong spiritual appeal of Pan-Africanism. They saw Pan-Africanism as a way of solving worker’s African problems; of discovering and reinvigorating African culture; of re-examining western philosophies; of expanding their peoples loyalty from tribe to nation and from nation to continent. Yet existence of the various groupings and initiatives that contributed to the development of Pan-Africanism helps to explain the fact that Africans were varied in their dispositions and culture. While the idea of Pan-Africanism was noble, its universality within African itself was difficult to achieve.

It was not long before such difficulty became a reality. Many other intervening forces including those of cold war politics came into play making Pan-Africanism even more difficult to realise. This was evidenced by the different groups that emerged in the trade union movement all purporting to escape some form of Pan-Africanism.

20 Ibid

21 PAFMECA resolution quoted in Ibid
All African Trade Union Federation and African Trade Union Confederation

Wogu Ananaba\textsuperscript{22} gives an elaborate account of the events that led to the formation of the All-African Trade Union Federation (AATUF) and the African Trade Union Confederation (ATUC). AATUF was founded in Casablanca, Morocco in May 1961. At this conference, leaders of Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Egypt, Morocco and the Algerian Liberation Front met and established consultative instruments. This group came to be known as the Casablanca group or the radical group. Prior to the May 1961 conference, difference had emerged at the preparatory stage of the conference. Ananaba notes:

One of differences was that in order to become and remain a member of AATUF a national trade union centre must sever links with any international trade union organisation to which it was affiliated. It was argued that international affiliation was contrary to the policy of non-alignment which almost every independent African country had adopted as the cornerstone of its foreign policy.\textsuperscript{23}

Some African states held different views to those of the Casablanca group. They criticised and opposed AATUF arguing that it did not guarantee ‘vital principles’ of democracy both in the political arena and voluntary organisations like trade unions. This opposition group came to be known as the Monrovia group or the conservative group - named after the Liberian capital where it first met.

Among the radical trade unionists were Mahjoub Ben Seddik (Morocco), John Tettegah (Ghana), Dennis Akumu and Ochola Makanyengo (Kenya). Supported by Nkrumah they argued for immediate closer union among African states and trade unions before smaller countries found themselves exposed to the vagaries of the cold war.

Our understanding of the radicals was that they felt Africa had reached a point in the political continuum when unity, both inside their countries and in external affairs, was a more important principle than absolute correctness in interpreting such things as the freedom of the press, freedom to organise political opposition, freedom of association, etc. Yet while Pan-Africanism had assumed a new dimension that of a movement towards closer union throughout

\textsuperscript{22} Wogu Ananaba, The Trade Union Development in Africa; Promise and Performance. London, C. Hurst Company, 1979 pp. 140 - 152

\textsuperscript{23} Ananaba, \textit{op. cit.} pp 120 -121
the continent, this unity went against principles of democracy. To us, the tenets of democracy both in politics and in the trade union movement were universal and were not to be applied selectively. In this case, closer union did not mean isolation or segregation.

With vigour and veracity the leadership of AATUF went all over the continent spreading its gospel of non-affiliation and closer union. John Tettegah visited Tanzania in 1964, Sudan in 1966 emphasising that AATUF was the only solution of African trade unions and to be long to it one had to sever relations with international trade union bodied. While purporting to talk for Africa trade union unity, in effect Tettegah was fronting the encroachment of the Eastern bloc sponsored World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) as a counter to the Western bloc sponsored ICFTU. Thus, underlying the furore of non-affiliation was also the cold war that was fought over influence in the African trade union movement by the ICFTU and WFTU each representing West and East ideological positions.

Chief among the conservative group was Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and almost all the French speaking African countries. Among trade unionists in this group were Mamadou Jallow (Gambia), Tom Mboya (Kenya), Cyril Adula (Congo, Kinshasa) and Amos Gray (Liberia). They wanted to explore all others methods of co-operation before finally committing themselves to complete political integration. Convinced that the Casablanca group could not guarantee African trade unions free trade unionism they decided to explore the possibilities of setting up a genuine Pan-African trade union organisation in response to the decisions of the All African conferences of 1958 and 1960 and the subsequent failure of AATUF conference of May 1961. In January 1962 forty national centres met in Dakar, Senegal together with ICFTU affiliates, the International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions, the Pan-African Congress of Believing Workers (CATC) and Pan African Trade Union Confederation (ATUC) was born. Ahmed Tlili of Tunisia was elected President and David Soumah of CATC, Senegal was elected General Secretary. The emergence of ATUC signified an open split in the African

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25 AK, “Talk on African Unity to Foreign students” op. cit

26 Ananaba, op. cit, p. 132

Andrew Kailembo, 25 March 2009
trade movement. In the months and years that followed one question that dominated the thinking of union leaders in almost every country was that of how to achieve trade union unity in the continent that was acceptable to everybody and safeguarding the autonomy of trade union centres. The problem was complicated by the division in the political scene with the Casablanca and Monrovia groups of African states espousing and peddling Pan-Africanism and each group trying to impress public opinion that the solution to African problems could only be found through its own devices.

We saw this division in the African leadership ranks as a clear indication that there was no consensus about the road forward for the continent. Positive neutrality or non-alignment was not for most African trade unions the best way to achieve unity among African trade unionists. Our fear was that with most of African countries still depending on capitalist investment and development, not much could be made of the radicals argument that non-alignment had economic gains. Africa was to remain a capitalist or mixed economy; the conservative group had the advantage over the radicals. It was on this ground and particularly the flexible stance adopted by ATUC that the ICFTU threw their weight behind it.

Increasingly, debates on affiliation appeared to have centred on the ICFTU. In many instances, national centres wanted an explanation of the ICFTU’s position in the formation of AATUF and the issue of non-affiliation of African trade union centres to international organisations. In this respect it was explained that:

> the ICFTU is not African and therefore a foreign institution. The first part is true, but it is equally true that the ICFTU is neither African, European, Asian nor American. Its politics are essentially international, responding to national or continental politics only through the different national, continental or regional centres that constitute it. This is basic to its policy of autonomous trade unionism. The ICFTU can only identify itself with the aspirations and objectives of any given nationalism through its member organisations which are themselves, consciously or unconsciously an integral part of that nationalism.  

In this light, the debate of affiliation was elevated to that of Internationalism verses Pan-Africanism. At a conference on the occasion of the tenth anniversary celebrations of the organisations of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) we emphasized this internationalism:

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27 Ibid

28 AK, “Report on my visit to the Sudan” op. cit
the essence of trade unions is freedom and independence; it cornerstone is worker’s solidarity - worker’s solidarity which is the result of the free exercise of the basic civil liberty of freedom of association. Freedom of association exercised at the international level leads to international affiliation through which workers give a structure to international solidarity. If trade unionism, by losing its freedom and independence, ceases to be the authentic voice of the working people, it loses its value for the community both as a factor of stability and as a force for change. It is for this reason that ILO conventions put such a tremendous emphasis on freedom of association.29

Working under the banner of international acceptable labour standards and ILO conventions the ICFTU ignored or misread the mood of post-independent Africa. The circumstances were different. African leaders were demanding for non-interference in their internal affairs in their countries.

Trade unions were expected to take queue. Internationalism was not what African leaders would like. They wanted to map out the way forward on their own. We wanted them to remain in the fold of international labour solidarity as a safeguard against violation of trade union rights. Some of the fears of African leaders were that international bodies ended up controlling African trade unions particularly when it came to accepting financial assistance from them. While a great number of African states demonstrated genuine disinterestedness in the East-West ideological divide, they nonetheless could not pull out of it. With the benefit of hindsight we can note that Africa fought in the cold war - a war that was not theirs. In the struggle to sustain its internationalism the ICFTU lost ground in Africa.

Ananaba observers that the ICFTU lost affiliates in the 1960s and 1970s from twenty members in 1960 to only eight in 1977.30 Yet even with this dwindling numbers we stood firm on his believe that trade unions were meant to be independent institutions from the body politic of the state. Trade unions were supposed not to be part of the single-party system that most African states had adopted.
The Founding of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)

The founding of the OAU in 1963 was a significant effort by African leaders to elevate the idea of closer union to a practical solution to the divisions existing among the African leaders. We saw Pan-Africanism and the OAU bringing

the African states together, awakening a sense of national pride which overcomes francophone or anglo-phone divide.\(^{31}\)

The formation of the OAU was thus a compromise on Africa’s “ideological positions held by the various groups in existence”.\(^{32}\) The OAU politically stood above the Monrovia and Casablanca groups who attempted to create a form of Africanism with different accents on ideology. We thought that one derived pride in that effort by thirty two independent head of states who met in Addis Ababa in 1963 and concluded a Charter for the Organisation of African Unity whose basic aims embody the very core of the African Personality”\(^{33}\)

Eventually the OAU tried to bring the two different groups together to form a truly Pan-African trade union organisation. In 1972 while attending the ICFTU - Pan African conference in Addis Ababa, there was an expressed strong support for the efforts of the OAU to unite African workers.\(^{34}\)

Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU)

The founding of the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) did not happen without intrigue and drama. The main concerned was that the radicals may have an influence on the new organisation and this was to be avoided as much as possible. There was also the problem of where to situate the headquarters of the organisation, and thirdly, who were to take office particularly the General Secretary’s position. Perhaps if there was a moment when the politics of the cold war came to be manifested openly was at the founding of OATUU.

\(^{31}\) AK, “African priorities” Speech given at Surrey, UK 8\(^{th}\) December, 1978

\(^{32}\) Ibid

\(^{33}\) Ibid, p-15

\(^{34}\) Ibid
For five days the warring sides jostled for position and influence. The radicals wanted Isifu to be General Secretary but when they realised he could not put up with a lot of fighting, the radicals opted to have Dennis Akumu as their candidate.

Behind the scenes Sekou Toure, Nyerere and the delegates from Congo Brazzaville insisted on non-affiliation as part of the cornerstone of the OATUU constitution. The advice to the conservatives was that OATUU ought to be founded on an inclusive gesture that allowed freedom of choice where it involved the issue of international affiliation. We insisted that the conservative group would accept Akumu’s candidature as General Secretary only if the idea of freedom of choice of international affiliation was agreed to the Akumu and the radicals. On this occasion there was strong support of the conservative group while castigating Ekangaki, the OAU Secretary General.

At the second congress held in Tripoli, Libya, in April 1976 the question that took centre stage and generated a lot of debate was, once again, international affiliation. Ananaba has written:

> Several delegates including those whose organisations were affiliates to international trade union organisations as well as those from unaffiliated organisations maintained article 8 of the OATUU Charter infringed trade union autonomy and violated the principles enshrined in ILO Conventions 87.

> The Sierra Leone Labour Congress suggested that Article 8 be amended to include a provision of African trade union organisations whose autonomy, national and international policies, shall not be prejudiced by virtue of their membership.35

While this suggestion was accepted by the preparatory committee and later by the General Council, and included in the agenda of the congress, the congress subsequently turned to target countries that appeared to have supported the affiliation of OATUU members to whatever international organisations they wished to. Founding members and some organisations were deprived voting rights having on the basis that they had more than one national centre in their countries. Basing its argument on the OATUU constitution that recognised one national centre in each country, the steering committee of the congress made rules that were used in allowing

35 Ananaba, op. cit. pp 138
some unions and organisations undeservingly to be members of OATUU.\textsuperscript{36} In the final analysis the secretariat appeared to have targeted the affiliated organisations that seemingly had two national centres: Lesotho, Sierra Leone and Liberia and were supporters of international affiliation. He observed that the indication that the radicals under General Secretary Akumu were still at work came strongly in the speeches of General Secretary himself who named those organisations that were still maintaining international affiliation and asked these organisations to sever the connections as it compromised OATUU’s independence.

The OATUU is now recognized as the representative of African organized labour by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the ILO. OATUU is formally non-aligned and independent of all international trade union organizations, but maintains relations with trade unions worldwide. OATUU headquarters are in Accra, Ghana.

The OATUU has also played a major role in the transformation of the former OAU Conference of Ministers of Labour, which used to meet annually, and the OAU Conference of Ministers of Social Affairs, which used to meet every two years. Along with the ILO Africa Regional Office, and the Pan-African Employers Confederation, OATUU helped in the transformation of the above-named Conferences of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs into the present OAU and now African Union Tripartite Labour and Social Affairs Commission. This Tripartite Commission of the African Union has been promoting socio-economic policies within Africa and internationally in the ILO.

\textbf{V: The ILO and the campaign against Apartheid in South Africa}

The first international conference the author attended was the International Labour Conference of June 1963. Between 3 and 26 June he stayed in Geneva where he listened to conference papers, speeches and had the opportunity to be an observer in resolution drafting committees. He also attended the plenary session. At the committee level, he observed how delegates differed and interacted but finally came to amicable decisions. He noticed that ideology was the main constraining factor that hampered worker’s progress at the time. He learnt that the greatest job while at the ILO Conference was how to out-maneuver the opposing group on some issues to ones favour. These first lessons later proved to be useful especially when it can

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid
to dealing with the case of Apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s when there was strong opposition to isolate South Africa.

At the June 1963 ILO Conference he witnessed the evident strong intolerance of African nations and the international trade union fraternity of Apartheid. Delegates from African and from other parts of the world refused to listen to the South African representative and walked out rather than sit with them in conference.

He equally participated in the drafting of a workers’ resolution on South Africa which was submitted to the ILO conference emphasising the abhorrence of workers of the Apartheid policy. The resolution stated conviction of workers that no country responsible for such a policy could continue to participate in the ILO.37

His observation that ideological difference hampered the progress of workers was seen at the conference when for the second time during the conference the Soviet bloc delegate saved the South African government from a public defeat by vetoing the resolution of the workers.38

On 8 July 1964 the International Labour Conference in its 48th Session adopted unanimously a declaration concerning the policy of apartheid of the Republic of South Africa. In that declaration the ILO reaffirmed its condemnation of the policy of apartheid and called upon the Government of the Republic of South Africa to renounce this policy and specified the measures that should be taken to eliminate racial discrimination in employment and occupation. The Conference also approved an “ILO Programme for the Elimination of Apartheid in Labour Matters in the Republic of South Africa” which, after analyzing the situation in South Africa as regards discrimination in the fields of admission to employment and training, freedom from forced labour, and freedom of association and the right to organize, set out a series of recommendations for changes in these fields.


38 Ibid
It is to be noted that at its 45th Session (1961) the International Labour Conference had adopted a resolution condemning the racial policies of the Government of South Africa and calling upon it to withdraw from the membership of the Organization until such time as it abandoned apartheid. The Government of South Africa notified the Director-General of the International Labour Office on 11 March 1964 of its decision to withdraw from the Organisation. In accordance with the relevant provisions of the Constitution of the ILO the period of notice of withdrawn expired on 11 March 1966.

The 1964 ILO Declaration and Programme of Action broke new ground in several different ways. The Declaration placed the ILO approach to apartheid firmly in the context of principles already established through the Constitution, the Declaration of Philadelphia, and important fundamental labour standards on forced labour, discrimination freedom of association, and collective bargaining. In doing so, it rested its approach on the essential content of these principles, rather than the legal niceties that might have been invoked through ratification of ILO conventions.

The Programme of Action took this a stage further, by examining in great detail measures that had been put in place by the South African government in furtherance of apartheid, and then making clear which of these (in fields relating to inequality of opportunity and treatment, choice of employment, wages, conditions of work, collective bargaining and trade union rights, among others) required repeal or amendment. It also instructed the Director-General to submit a Special Report on action taken concerning the Declaration and Programme of Action to the International Labour Conference each year. This was indeed done, starting in 1965 and continuing until 1994.

**VI: Role of trade unions in the campaign against Apartheid**

As a movement fervently upholding the principles of democracy, trade unions champion the cause of human freedom, promote equal opportunity for all people, seek to eliminate everywhere in the world any form of discrimination or subjugation based on race, religion, sex or origin; oppose; and combat totalitarianism and aggression in any form. Trade unions pledge

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solidarity with and support to all working peoples deprived of their rights as workers and human beings by oppressive regimes.

Thus the trade union movement in Africa, and indeed internationally, considered the struggle against apartheid an integral part of the struggle for the defence of civil liberties and freedoms for where such civil liberties do not exist, trade union rights cannot exist.

In South Africa civil liberties were trampled and violated. The South African regime did not recognize Africans as employees and all registered unions were banned from enrolling Africans. Although no actual law prohibiting Africans from forming unions existed, every obstacle was put through a number of regulations and arbitrary forces in South African apartheid laws. Skilled and semi-skilled jobs were a taboo to Africans under job reservation policy. Wages to African labour reflected absence of an organised Africans labour movement.

While the urban Africans had higher wages than those in the later formed Bantustans, they paid for this by sacrificing their family life and other basic rights. Africans’ strikes were illegal while legalisation of strike was so complex making strikes useless. With time violence against African workers became common. Increasingly, wage difference between Africans and white became wider and wider. Detentions became rampant too; conditions in South African mines were notorious; African workers shunned the sector; South Africa turned to neighbours for migrant labour.

At the international level, the ICFTU took up the defence of the South African majority, through its affiliates when it alerted the world about the evil South African Labour laws – embodied in the infamous Industrial Conciliation Act of 1956 and the Bantu Labour Laws – prohibiting trade union organizations and denying African workers all means to collective protection. Even before this, the General Council of the ICFTU, meeting in Berlin, 1-5 July 1952 had adopted a resolution on South Africa. The General Council resolved to urge the government of the union of South Africa to wipe out the practices bringing shame to the entire free world.

ICFTU policy was reiterated at the first African Regional Conference in January 1957 where a vigorous stand was taken against South Africa. The conference resolved to condemn the destructive racial policy of the Nationalist Government of South Africa; declared its total
opposition to the racial oppression practiced by this government in fragrant violation of fundamental human rights and in complete disregard for the disruptive moral, political, economic and social effects of the reactionary policy.

The conference also expressed its unswerving determination to struggle for the reversal of the racial policies of the South African government. It appealed to the United Nations to express clearly and unhesitatingly the condemnation of the racial oppression of South Africa. It declared that the government of South Africa did not deserve a place in the community of nations since it persistently violated the fundamental human rights, trade union freedom, practiced racial oppression and had introduced a political and social system that was contrary to democratic principles.

The 2nd ICFTU African Regional conference in Lagos in November 1959 again adopted similar resolutions on South Africa. Similar resolutions were adopted at the 3rd conference held in Tunis in November 1960 and while welcoming actions already taken by ICFTU on South Africa emphasized that concerted efforts were needed to put more pressure on South Africa to relent on apartheid. In September 1962, the ICFTU submitted complaints to the ILO about the Anti-Sabotage Bill (1962) and the new legislation enforced in May 1963.

They argued that the legislation reduced public freedom more in South Africa. The governing body of the ILO upheld the complaints, and up to 1963 alerted the government once more that the legislation in force contradicted the accepted principles on trade union rights.

The 4th AFRO Conference meeting in Addis Ababa 8-12 April 1964 was indignant on enforcement of apartheid and denounced with vigour the Verwoerd regime which was defying the conscience of mankind on human rights and the decisions. The conference urged the security council of the UN to take measures on the political, diplomatic and economic level to sensitize the government of South Africa.

Due to persistent presentations by the ICFTU to the ILO on apartheid, and with support of affiliates and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the general conference of the ILO unanimously adopted a declaration on 8 July 1964 concerning Apartheid in the Republic of South Africa; Apartheid was declared a crime against humanity. The programme to eradicate
apartheid adopted in 1964 included the annual Special Reports of the Director-General on Apartheid in South Africa and the expansion of ILO activities.

Even with the declarations and protests, the regime defied everything and everybody. By 1970, South Africa had become a police state. Many people were being killed or injured by the police or by their fellow citizens. From 1967 to 1970 some 132 people had been killed and 363 others wounded in course of their duties. In the first nine months police had killed 45, wounded 132, a rate of one person killed every one and a half day. All democratic organizations or their representatives wishing to take up the cause of the African majority were automatically expelled. Democratic trade unions catering for African workers were emasculated. South Africa’s legislation, though through interplay of overlapping phrases aimed at maintaining the white man’s economic paradise without so much as a moderate financial compensation, for Africans.

Thus the ICFTU welcomed the special UN Committee on Apartheid and expressed willingness to accept their role as consultative partner in the committee. Since the UN had declared 1971 “International Year for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination,” the ICFTU’s organ Free Labour World published two articles in special series not only illustrating the untold damage of the racist policies and discrimination but also suggesting action to remedy the situation. Circular letters were issued to ICFTU teaching staff and colleges to include in programmes and topics to create awareness on dangers of racist policies. ICFTU affiliates were invited to take similar action. In particular, they proposed to the special UN Committee on Apartheid concrete action, namely, first, a discontinuation of investment in apartheid and secondly, discouragement of immigration to South Africa; thirdly by isolating South Africa to make the apartheid regime realise its undesirability as a partner in sports or any other cultural activities. The situation for majority of Africans was worsening by the day, resulting in workers uprisings in 1972 and 1973.

Many employers were working with apartheid security forces. Informers were increasingly being placed in factories. Time and again security forces were called by employers armed with dogs to quell African strikes.

In 1973 ICFTU set up its Special Coordinating Committee on South Africa to co-ordinate material assistance to the independent black trade unions there. The committee aimed to
activate such campaigns, to coordinate them and ensure they were sustained until tangible results were obtained. Under stewardship of the ICFTU African Desk headed by Andrew Kailembo and assisted by Kelly Zidana as the on-the-spot person in South Africa, the Special Coordinating Committee on South Africa played a crucial role in the struggle against apartheid.

One of the major tasks of the committee was to produce a comprehensive list of companies investing in South Africa. All in all 1,632 companies were listed: the major investors being Britain (630); USA (494); and West Germany 132 followed by France (85): Australia (73) and Canada 15. This list was periodically revised to ensure it was of maximum practical use to expose these investing in South Africa. In its second task, the Co-ordinating committee was, in every possible way, to have South African black workers be unionized and be recognized by their employers. This called for mobilization of affiliates in countries where particular companies were based or had subsidiaries to support black workers demands on the need to be unionized and recognised.

Given the daily harassment and repression of the blacks’ trade unions, the committee also co-ordinated financial, material, technical, legal and relief assistance. The assistance helped the Africans to organize. Legal and relief assistance was for those in disputes with the system. The committee kept constant watch on advertisements inserted by the South African government agencies aimed at recruiting labour. The ICFTU circulated regularly a list of South African Recruitment offices and agencies opening in Europe and the USA and these were investigated by national affiliates.

On recommendations of the committee, study circles were organised in several countries to inform workers of the true picture in South Africa and thus ensure the workers were not enticed by South Africa propaganda. Leaflets were published discouraging workers from going to South Africa. The leaflets stated clearly that by going to South Africa somebody was robbing an African of their job and helping to perpetuate the evils of the apartheid system.

In this campaign against apartheid, the ICFTU received support from its affiliates in the industrialised world. Scandinavian countries were instrumental in the plan of action on apartheid in the 1980s. The British TUC was in the fore-front trying to push subsidiary British companies operating in South Africa to recognize black South African trade unions and sign collective agreements with them.
When evident that the South African government was not stopping atrocities on African workers, more radical action was inevitable. From 1976, the campaign shifted from sanctions to discouraging investment in South Africa. On 21 September 1976, the ICFTU called an emergency international trade union conference with representatives of all ICFTU affiliates in the industrialized countries, International Secretariats and Socialist parties. The conference aimed at defining concerted trade union action at world level.

The final communiqué issued by the conference contained a warning against manoeuvres by multinational corporations and diplomatic efforts which would result in minor improvements but were aimed at protecting interest rather than the total abolition of apartheid. With increasing arrest and deaths in detention of African workers, the Executive Board meeting in November 1976, endorsed the decisions of the emergency Conference against South Africa. It endorsed the conference decisions that a week of action should begin on 17 January 1977.

The OAU approached African trade unions and governments asking for withdrawal of airspace to South African aircraft. ICFTU affiliates produced the posters and pamphlets, organised large-scale rallies, press conferences, radio and television interviews. Many affiliates like the British TUC and Dutch unions intensified the campaign for boycott of companies dealing with South Africa. By 1980 the efforts were bearing fruits. Three major independent black workers federations were receiving support from the ICFTU. These were the Federation of South Africa (CUSA) and the General Workers Unions. The ICFTU also continued to assist independent black unions, such as the Media Workers Association of South Africa (MWASA), and the South African Workers Union (SAAWU), and many others in co-operation with various International Trade Secretariats.

In February 1980, the ICFTU organised a two-day seminar to look into various codes of conduct, giving special attention to the EEC code of conduct, which was at the time the most comprehensive. The ICFTU called for application of the codes of conduct by the companies operating in South Africa and trade unions involved in monitoring the codes.

In further enhancing the spirit against apartheid, the ICFTU organised an international trade union conference in London in November 1980 in order to draw the world’s attention to the South Africa’s regime’s struggle to strangulate independent black trade union movement inside.
the Republic, and to expose the hypocrisy of the so-called reforms in South Africa, which were basically aimed at streamlining the apartheid system. The conference adopted a comprehensive programme of action, which was endorsed by the ICFTU Executive Board.

The ICFTU Programme of Action stressed that it was unethical for companies in search of short-term profits, to increase their involvement with a system of government which was so universally hated and which would undoubtedly be swept away in favour of majority rule. The programme emphasized continued support for financial, technical, legal and relief aid, as well as political support for the black independent trade union movement in its struggle to obtain recognition by employers.

The Programme of Action was given further support at the 13th World Congress of the ICFTU, 23-30 June 1983. The congress adopted resolution on South Africa that called on its affiliates to give immediate impetus to ICFTU Action Programme in support of the independent black trade union movement in South Africa. The congress urged affiliated organizations to organize solidarity campaigns to promote awareness. The ICFTU Programme of Action was updated in January 1984. ICFTU affiliated organizations and representatives of International Trade Secretariats met in Dusseldorf from 19-20 January 1984 to evaluate the ICFTU Programme of Action having realized that the South African government was increasingly trampling on the black South Africans. The Dusseldorf meeting recommended an intensification of the financial, technical, legal and relief aid to independent black trade unions.

The meeting called for support for the organisation, recognition and collective bargaining campaign of blacks, discouragement of white emigrations into South Africa and stepping up economic pressure on the apartheid regime. Support for the front line states and Namibia was also urged.

The ICFTU maintained close relations with the International Labour Organisation and thanks to the efforts; the ILO set many international standards for protection of workers. Through the influence of the ICFTU, the ILO Workers Group remained dominated by workers. Through the efforts of the ILO Workers Group, a special committee on Apartheid was established in 1980 as a permanent ILO conference committee to monitor the ILO Updated Declaration concerning Apartheid in South Africa.
The apartheid committee secretary came from the ICFTU and its president from the workers (CLC). Thus the Workers Group played an important role under ICFTU leadership in the fight against apartheid. When the dark curtain of apartheid was finally removed there was no doubt that the ICFTU and the free labour world had, to a large extent, contributed to development of the powerful black trade union movement in South Africa. When Nelson Mandela was finally released in 1990 and subsequently won the presidential elections and became the first black South African President, the ICFTU and its affiliates saluted South Africans with the realization that theirs were not efforts in vain. It was a win they were proud to have been part of.

VII: Promotion of workers’ rights in Independent Africa

As discussed earlier, the International Labour Organization was formed in 1919 as part of the League of Nations to protect worker’s rights. The ILO later became incorporated into the United Nations. The UN itself backed workers rights by incorporating several into two articles of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. These read:

**Article 23**

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.\(^{40}\)

\(^{40}\) United Nations Department of Public Information, OHCHR: English (English) - Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
Reflections of the Pan-African Trade Unions in the Development of the International Labour Organization: Contribution to the ILO History Project

Article 24

1. Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

The African trade union voice in the ILO, and several other groups, has sought international labour standards to create legal rights for workers across the world. Recent movements have also been made to encourage countries to promote labour rights at the international level through fair trade.

The concern for human and trade union rights were not confirmed to the African region. The example of Columbia and the State of Palestine helps to illustrate this deep concern and the extent to which African trade unions could go to help out. This is not a case of simply helping compatriots but a matter of international concern, that of violation of international accepted human and trade union rights.

The author was equally instrumental in the mobilisation of ICFTU’s legal and relief aid to the Malawi trade unionists detained by Kamuzu Banda in 1964. Similarly, when the massacre of Easterners in Nigeria was at its pick in 1966, He stood up to voice the concerns of the international free labour movement against these innocent workers. He did this when the Nigerian national trade union leadership was doing nothing about the killings whether by error or judgement; gross incompetence in discharging their responsibilities or simply because those massacred were Easterners and they would not help them. Whatever the reason for the quiescence of the national trade union leadership on this episode in Nigerian history, he was able to galvanise and rally support of other friendly organisations like the AFL-CIO to master the courage to offer a relief programme for the affected areas. Substantial donations were made to assist the internal displaced workers and the returnees coming back to Eastern Nigeria from other parts of Nigeria.

In Ghana the growing authoritarianism of Kwame Nkrumah did not spare trade unions. In 1961, there were strikes in the railway and harbours protesting the CPP rule. This was the first strike since CPP took power in 1957. Nkrumah purged the party and replaced experienced politicians with weaker figures who were happy to preach the quasi-Marxist doctrine of ‘Nkrumahism’. The leftist inclination of party ideology was seen in the state’s industrialisation programme, which restricted private enterprise and established many state-run enterprises. There was the nationalisation of the Gold mines.
The strikes of 1961 were viewed by Nkrumah as a threat to his authority. The CPP government reaction was repressive, arrested strike leaders and supports and detained members of the United Party opposition. This spelt doom for union leaders. The consequence of this was Nkrumah’s decision to intensify the existing range of state controls over organised labour by infiltrating the unions with reliably party activists.

Between 1964 and 1966 Ghana witnessed attrition in union authority over labour force and an elimination of the unions’ roles as a broker between labour, capital and state. He viewed these developments as an intrusion into rights of association and expression. Indeed Nkrumah was instrumental in the ouster of the democratically elected trade union leadership of Ghana led by ………and replaced it with the group lead by John Tettegah. Commenting on Tettegah’s leadership of the Ghana trade union movement he noted:

    as regards John Tettegah, he was never elected by the workers but was imposed on the trade union movement of Ghana by the Government and that he professed to be the Pan-African Labour movement was in trade union movement which would eventually be subservient to or the tools of the various African governments.41

He was aware of the dangers involved in voicing criticism of actions in the newly independent countries in Africa and elsewhere, in the belief that each country had the right to seek the methods and ways best suited to its own particular circumstances. But when the fundamental precepts of human rights of which trade union rights are but a form, were threatened there was no way that he and the international labour fraternity was going to remain silent, let alone co-operate with a system in which trade union rights were violated. While care was taken when criticism was levelled against some African governments for their transgressions on human and trade union rights, they were nonetheless not spared lambasting when they violated the same.

In the case of Ghana, he feared and refrained from arraigning her publicly for her pioneering role in the struggle for independence and for his personal admiration for Nkrumah. But subsequently Ghana’s bad trade union rights record had to be exposed. It leads to concessions and a relaxation of the control of trade unions. In this way, His value and effect of responsible and constructive criticism was vindicated, even where it was least expected. Since he believed

41 Andrew Kailembo ‘Report on my visit to the Sudan, 15 to 19 September, 1966’.
in free trade unionism in which trade unions served the interest of those who created them, he did not see how a trade union with party or state affiliation would serve the interest of workers. He thus believed that a democratic trade union movement was a beginning for a democratic Africa.

His criticism of Ghana, Malawi and Tanzania had to do with his abhorrence of uninvited interference by post-colonial states in strike situations and in the general running of trade unions. On the specific case of strikes, he loathed the idea of state’s using their power to counter the worker’s course especially where strikes were never legal. This state intervention in labour-management relations was to him a move toward a shrinking of the space in which labour and management could play out their roles and attain an amicable position without government interference. The result of this government interference was the emergence of one-party system in Africa.

In the case of Tanzania, when Nyerere asked the Attorney General to draft a constitution for the unions, this, to him was the beginning of the interference of the state in the affairs of trade unions. In essence, to him, a trade should not be guided by a political party or government. Leadership in trade unions should be responsible to those who elect them and not to government or parties.

By 1968 the rising tide against trade union in Africa had reached alarming levels. The incarceration of trade unionists was one of the many ways in which post-colonial governments muzzled alternative voices to their programmes. In the end democratic institutions were sacrificed at the alter of developmentalism or nation building. The case of the stage-managed mutiny in Tanzania in 1964 illustrates well the intention of Nyerere and his ilk: arresting trade unionists and opposition groups who were seen to hold different views to those of the government.

In brief, the repression and oppression that was meted on independent institutions was a precursor to the establishment of the one-party system in Africa.
According to the author the development of one-party state systems in Africa had to do with the interpretation of the concept of democracy.\textsuperscript{42} He viewed democracy as a concept understood and applied differently by different societies, the most common description being: first, the chance to participate by all concerned in making any decision or through a chosen representative; second the prevalence of the will of the majority. Yet the principle of “government of the people by the people for the people” advocated by European class societies to him did not and does not include the whole population.\textsuperscript{43} In this connection, political powers have hitherto been monopolised by a handful of aristocratic landowners and big capitalists, excluding the vast majority of the poor and middle classes.\textsuperscript{44}

In protecting and upholding workers’ rights in the continent, trade unions continued to help Africa trade unions in various activities even after attainment of independence. Yet, relations between African governments and African trade unions were not as amicable as during the period of nationalism period.

Single-party and military regimes in post-colonial Africa did not augur well for flourishing trade union movements. From the civil society, the trade union movement was the greatest bone of contention, whether under military or single party system.

Just like in the times of colonial domination, trade unions wished to continue representing legitimate interest of their members; hence they were first and foremost in suspension subjects. Most African governments were keen to muzzle free trade unions and deprive them their rightful role to participate in the formulation of political and economic programmes.

The Pan-African trade union organization had to come to rescue of its affiliates. Most African governments wished that trade unions were in the political wings of ruling parties. In Ghana, for instance, the Industrial Relations Act of December 1958 codified the relations between the CPP and the unions. This gave the TUC, Ghana almost exclusive rights as the workers’ representative organization: only those unions affiliated to the TUC were recognized and could

\textsuperscript{42} Andrew Kailembo “Development of a one-party government in Africa 1970”.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid p.1
benefit from legislation in favour of trade unionism. It was impossible for other unions to enter into collective bargaining or be represented in certain organizations.

The trade union movement did not welcome the restrictions placed on the right to strike, especially given that the labour minister had to authorize the strike, and they strongly protested to the ILO.

The 1960s thus witnessed an increase in incarceration of trade unionists and democratic forces. Little could be done against the forces. Political instability continued in many African countries.

The role of trade unions in the immediate post colonial period should not be viewed as anti-system or only condemning one-party governments or dictatorships. In spite of the setbacks, the movement ICFTU helped to texture and colour Africa’s political independence, ensuring that permanent political structures, viable economic units and meaningful social patterns were constructed. It continued to help African unions to strengthen leadership capacities by training leaders in leadership skills, health and safety at the work place.

Thanks to the support from the ILO and international trade union solidarity: shop-stewards and trainers of unions were trained. They became instrumental in training the rank and file workers on trade union matters such as the right to belong to a union, right of association, right of to collective bargaining and right to strike.

**VIII: Trade unions supporting a stronger ILO for social justice for all**

Social justice is the guiding principle of the ILO and, of course by extension, the main tenet of all ILO Member States. It is, thus, imperative that there is strong support for the ILO in pursuit of its enduring historical mandate to promote social justice and the rights and interests of working people. The trade union movement in Africa welcomes groundbreaking Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 2008. This Declaration is about creating opportunities for all and is about urging that building a fair and inclusive globalisation must become a worldwide priority. There must be an urgent rethink of current policies and institutions of global governance.
African unionists reaffirm that there must be respect for and proper implementation of the conclusions and recommendations of the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association and the International Labour Conference Committee of Experts on the Application of Standards. Similarly, the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda which has increased the organisation’s standing and visibility needs to be built upon to maximise the organisation’s concrete contribution to making effective access to freely chosen work available to all, undertaken in full respect of fundamental rights, with good levels of social protection.

The trade union movement also believes that by respecting and reinforcing tripartism in its own activities, strengthening the capacities of democratic workers’ and employers’ organisations, and promoting social dialogue at all levels, the ILO will contribute importantly to achieving the Decent Work Agenda. In this respect, it is critical to support tripartism that has continuously provided the ILO with key comparative advantage and the basis for its advocacy and practice of freedom of association and social dialogue.

Towards this end, the unions in Africa are encouraged to support the visibility of the global UN specialised agency specialising in social justice and rights and interests of working people in the continent.

**African trade unions agitated for democracy and respect for workers rights**

Democracy is not only an essential prerequisite for sustainable development, but also equally important to promote employment, social justice and labour standards and to strengthen democratic system and prospects for growth. Trade unions had a vision of society based on democracy and a commitment to universal principles of human and trade union rights, and infrastructure and institutions that promote full employment and social justice.

Trade unions consistently argued that the elements are closely interlinked and must be simultaneously promoted to achieve “Bread, Peace and Freedom” objectives. They also emphasized that policies that undermine free trade unions are destined to fail: they suppress democratic participation in all situations.
The human rights situation in most African countries is unsatisfactory, and as a consequence, basic trade union rights are restricted. The adverse political climate compounded by tremendous economic difficulties makes it difficult for trade unions to fully exercise their rights.

In several countries, such as Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, Tanzania and Zambia, a single trade union structure has been imposed in legislation. This is contrary to principles of freedom of association enshrined in the ILO normative principles. Government interference in trade union affairs is frequent. In many countries the political party dominated the movement. That remained until start of democratization in the 1980’s. Moreover, the right to strike continues to be seriously restricted or entirely prohibited in countries such as Algeria, Angola, Chad, Ethiopia, Gabon, Mauritania, Nigeria, Sudan and Tanzania. The situation is worse for public employees.

Trade unions demanded for ratification and full implementation by African countries of the relevant ILO Conventions on freedom of association and trade union rights, in particular the ILO Conventions 87 and 98. It has emphasized this fundamental objective in its many contacts with African governments and in all its statements to ILO conferences and meetings.

It has further pursued the matter of ratification by insisting that principles of the Conventions be included in social clauses for multilateral and bilateral agreements regulating trade investment and development cooperation.

The trade union movement publicised violations of trade union rights and the actions taken by the movement to counter. Such periodicals as the Free Labour World and Annual Surveys on Violations of rights since 1984 have exposed the violators.

Selected cases of violation of trade union rights reported to the ILO

In the early years after many countries gained political independence the role of the trade unions in Africa was mainly prescribed by international solidarity which took the form of
financial assistance increasingly at the national centres level aimed at organizing the non-organized and support towards increasing membership dues.

The international assistance and advice rendered, favourably affected not only on the general attitude of African trade unions towards the international labour movement, but also on relations between the former and their respective governments. This happened for example, in Malawi, Cote d’Ivoire, Togo, Niger and Gabon.

For instance, up till the 9th ICFTU World Congress, four elements that constituted the bulk of ICFTU activities and services in Africa were: advisory services, educational activities, research, and information services. Majority of African countries were without systematic ICFTU representation. In light of this, the 49th ICFTU Executive Board meeting, in line with the Congress statement concerning AFRO reactivation, suggested that responsibilities of all ICFTU field personnel be integrated into one operation. All this was to be under supervision of the ICFTU Secretariat, thus preparing ground for reactivation of the regional organisation. It was recommended that a high-level representative be appointed for Africa.

Responsibilities of ICFTU field representatives were accordingly extended to cover the whole continent, in educational programmes and advisory services: Lennart Kindstrom in Eastern Africa; William G. Lawrence in Central-Southern Africa, Grace Muwonge in Western Africa; and as from January, 1971 Salam Gaye was stationed as a permanent on-the-spot representative in Dakar for French-speaking Africa.

Research services were, as was in the past, provided or supervised by Paul Kanyago from Addis Ababa and preparations were made to appoint an assistant to cater particularly to French-speaking African countries. Information services continued to be supervised by Gab Atitsogbui, ICFTU Press Officer in Lagos, on the understanding that a French version of African Labour News could be produced in Dakar. Missions by S. Gaye and R. Goose to French-speaking Africa were well received. A majority of the national centres visited wished for reactivation of an autonomous African Regional Organisation in line with ICFTU’s regional structure. The opinion was strongly reiterated at the ICFTU Consultative meetings with African national centres, in 1970 and 1971, during the ILO Conference in Geneva.
Reflections of the Pan-African Trade Unions in the Development of the International Labour Organization: Contribution to the ILO History Project

Examples of trade union complaints to the ILO

**Chad**: In the 1980s the ICFTU collaborated with the World Confederation of Labour to complain to the ILO against the Chad government for the arrest of seven UNARTRAT national leaders. While the government released some, the ICFTU said that trade unionism and freedoms were not fully respected.

Again in 1993, the national centre in Chad (UST) was under serious threat. Five Unionists – Samuel Mbaiguedun, Haoukoura Tatoroum, M'Balao Miambe, Dr Djidda Kedoi and Dr Sabra Koulo – were murdered. The ICFTU-AFRO condemned the violent attacks on unions and denounced the authorities. The ICFTU-AFRO also provided relief aid to UST. The following year, authorities employed strike breakers and UST leadership was threatened and accused of destabilizing the country. The ICFTU-AFRO strongly protested, warning that such actions could trigger an international campaign against the country. The authorities intensified threats and adopted a decree restricting the right to strike. The ICFTU-AFRO again supported its affiliate and sent a protest. Violation of union rights was raised at the ILO.

**Central African Republic**: UGTC was dissolved by presidential decree in May, 1981; After the coup d’Etat led by General Andre’ Kolingba in August, 1981, all trade union activities were suspended until 1985. Despite the suspension, the UGTC maintained contacts with its members with the assistance of the ICFTU.

The situation deteriorated drastically at 1983 beginning with the arrest and detention without trial of the UGTC General Secretary, Theophile Sonny-Cole, and four UGTC officials on charges of incitement to strike. The ICFTU complained to the ILO and launched an international protests campaign. Protests and letters of appeal were sent to the government, and an ICFTU representative went to the country to make representations. The ICFTU gave relief to families of the detained. The detention lasted five months. The UGTC General Secretary visited the ICFTU in October 1986; he expected the ban on trade union activities to be lifted by the end of 1986. The UGTC received organizational assistance.

**Ethiopia**: The ICFTU gave relief assistance to Beyene Solomon, President of ICFTU’s former affiliate in Ethiopia, until he obtained a contract with the ILO office in Addis-Ababa in 1986. The ICFTU also assisted in the education of two of his children.

In 1994, there was interference, harassment and intimidation of unionists by authorities. The authorities were blamed for removal of the CETU President Ibrahim Dawey, and closure of CETU offices. CETU was also de-registered.

The ICFTU-AFRO condemned the government interference. The situation was also discussed at the ICFTU-AFRO Executive Board in Nairobi (November, 1994); and in Brussels (December, 1994) followed by a resolution, condemning government interference. CETU got legal and relief aid. The following year, the situation remained bad and the ICFTU-AFRO sent a mission reiterating its position regarding the violation. Ethiopia was again the subject of a report to the ICFTU-AFRO Executive Board meeting in Tunis (September 1995). The ICFTU-AFRO also discussed Ethiopia with ILO, and the Social Interest Groups of EU/ACT

**Cameroon**: In 1993, the national centre (CSTC) was under constant attack. A leader Robert Kengui was arrested and detained. The ICFTU protested. In 1994, unionists faced threats, intimidation and harassment. Efforts were made to destabilize the CSTC, through a split; its General Secretary Louis Sombes was unconstitutionally removed, and once detained. Offices of the CSTC were closed by armed forces. The ICFTU sent two missions. They investigated and made presentations to authorities. The Cameroonian case was also mentioned at the ILO when the authorities nominated a group to represent workers at the International Labour Conference.
Djibouti: In 1994 trade unionists were harassed and threatened for legitimate trade union activities. Offices of the UDT were raided and sealed by police. Trade unionists were arrested and beaten-up. These included Djama guh, President and Mohamed Boulaleh, Assistant General Secretary. The ICFTU-AFRO protested to the authorities and denounced violation of rights. In letters to international financial institutions, the ICFTU requested support for democratic reforms and consultations. An ICFTU-AFRO representative visited Djibouti and appealed for respect to union rights. The case was presented to the ILO.

Kenya: COTU (K) Secretary General, Joseph Mugalla, Deputy Secretary General, Boniface Munyao and General Secretary of a COTU (K) affiliates, Joseph Bolo were arrested following warning of a possible strike. They were released following international protests. The ICFTU-AFRO strongly protested.

A government-backed group subsequently removed COTU leadership from office. The ICFTUAFRO supported the legitimate leadership and provided legal support to court case. The ICFTU-AFRO also provided relief support to COTU (K). The ICFTU-AFRO also requested the ILO to intervene and urged international financial institutions and donors to review their relations with Kenya.

Malawi: In 1994, the Secretary General of the Southern African Trade Union Coordination Council, Chakufwa Chihana, previously for two years involvement in campaigns for democratization in Malawi remained in jail. In April, the ICFTU-AFRO renewed demands for his unconditional release and increased international campaign for his freedom.

The ICFTU and its affiliates achieved the freezing of bilateral and multilateral assistance to Malawi. In 1996, victimization of trade unionists emerged again. Reports of victimization included that of Dorothy Makhasu, General Secretary of the hotel union. She was dismissed when selected to attend an ILO course. The matter was taken up with the authorities in Malawi followed by a protest note to Malawi President.

Morocco: In 1993, over 200 trade unionists were reported arrested or detained. Most were local leaders, involved in organizing activities or taking part in strike. Several were beaten up and tortured. The ICFTU-AFRO protested and complained to the ILO.

Nigeria: In 1993, the government dissolved the executive committees of the Nigeria Labour Congress and two national unions in the petroleum sector by decree, on pretext that they were involved in political matters. Government appointed administrators who replaced them. A number of trade union leaders were locked up including Frank Kokori, General Secretary of NUPENG and Milton Dabibi, President of PENGASSAN.

The ICFTU-AFRO condemned the violations. The following year (1994), the ICFTUAFRO General Secretary visited Nigeria to express solidarity with the workers. His mission was followed by an ICFTU mission which made representation to the authorities. The ICFTU-AFRO led to a resolution “The Trade Union Role in the Lome IV Convention” calling on the European Union to impose sanctions against the Nigeria government. The situation was the subject of a special report to the ICFTU-AFRO Executive Board meeting in Tunis (September 1995) which expressed concern.

At the ILO the Nigerian authorities were condemned for violating trade union rights.

There was no improvement in the rights situation in 1996. Union leaders in the petroleum sector remained in prison. The authorities also issued a decree (No. 4) barring fulltime trade union officials from vying for office at the national centre. This move was condemned and Nigeria was again the subject of another special report to the ICFTU-AFRO Executive Board meeting in Nairobi (October 1996). The board denounced the authorities and pledged support to trade unions working genuinely and freely for democracy. At the ILO, Nigeria was again strongly condemned.
In 1997, the government issued decree No. 29 to ban trade unions from affiliating to international organizations. The ICFTU-AFRO protested. Nigeria was, through the ICFTU-AFRO, the subject of another special paragraph at the ILO, because of continued violation of union rights.

**Sudan**: Nothing was said of several unionists, arrested in 1997. Fears were that the unionists were still being held at secret detention centres. Reports of repeated slavery in Sudan appeared. In June, Sudan was severely condemned by the ILO (with full support of ICFTUAFRO), for abuse of human and trade union rights.

**Swaziland**: In 1993, unionists lived under constant threats, intimidation and harassment. Towards the end of 1993, the SFTU submitted 27 demands to the government seeking improvement in conditions of employment and reforms in the social and political systems. The authorities did not respond positively to the demands, and in 1994, introduced legislation in Parliament to undermine and weaken militancy of trade unions.

Violation of trade union rights was raised at the ILO when the authorities imposed a non-representative group for workers at the ILO. The ICFTU-AFRO immediately protested and co-ordinated moves to challenge credentials of the delegate concerned.

Swaziland was also the subject of a special report to the ICFTU-AFRO Executive Board. The board gave full support to the SFTU in demands for improved social and economic conditions and for the democratization of the country. It was also the subject of a complaint at the ILO, which the ICFTU-AFRO supported.

**IX: ILO commitment to trade union education and training in Africa**

Trade unions in Africa believe that education transforms an individual into an active citizen in the living cultural society. It enables individuals to acquire the tools necessary to master public affairs and empowers them to contribute to the task of changing society through democratic participation. It serves as a natural vehicle for development and for the preservation of the health of society.

Labour education is the anvil upon which the trade union culture is created and adapted to changing needs. Its main goal is to enable union members have deeper insights into their trade union organisations and strengthens their capacity to play a constructive, purposeful and creative role in the social, economic and political life of their industry and nation.
Through labour education trade unions have come to the realisation that their most valuable asset is the brainpower of their members against the background that the members were best able to articulate their interests and make informed choices in shaping their own destinies. Suffice to say that the trade union movement is at risk from the rising tide of mediocrity if it fails to put emphasise on the education of its members, particularly during this era of globalized interdependence and technological advancement.

On account of the above, trade unions in collaboration with the ILO, and in particular with the ILO’s Bureau for Workers’ Activities (ACTAV) prioritised education as a key trade union function. In addition, African workers continued to work in close partnership with trade unions in the developed countries and other well wishers to provide relevant education and training opportunities for members taken into careful consideration the following:

Thus, from the early days of independence, the ILO and the trade union movement in Africa had a special obligation not only to support the Africans’ right to organize, but also to give assistance in building strong and efficient trade unions, capable of serving interests of members and being active in the life of new societies emerging in Africa. For example, at the first ICFTU African Regional Conference in 1957, it was clearly stated that the main task of the newly formed organization was building of powerful, independent trade unions and that this task would not be fulfilled without education and training of trade union leaders and its rank–and–file.

Thus over the years, the ILO gave financial and technical assistance to help unions in Africa in their organizational efforts. This support had gone into helping the unions in their recruitment campaigns, and in some cases, such as in Ethiopia permanent representatives were stationed on the spot to help the workers build up unions. They were also posted to Nairobi where an ICFTU research office existed, with an adviser to provide on-the-spot advice and education on matters affecting trade unions in East and Central Africa.

The education and research centres have been much appreciated since then. At the first AFRO meeting in Accra Rashid Kawawa, the delegate from the Tanganyika Federation of Labour, mentioned that the very existence of an ICFTU office in neighbouring Kenya had stimulated growth of his national centre. The greatest task to be undertaken, he thought, was in the field of
trade union education. Similarly, Tom Mboya in his book *Freedom and After* paid tribute to the adviser posted to Nairobi for his work in Uganda where he selected officials for overseas training and gave lectures himself.

**Case study of the ILO/ICFTU-AFRO/CISL-Italy trade union capacity building education project on partnership for democracy, peace and development**

The joint CISL-Italy/ILO-ACTRAV/ICFTU-AFRO Trade Union Capacity Building Education Project is a practical contribution toward the realisation of democratic governance, peace and development in Africa. The project was sponsored by CISL-Italy with ILO-ACTRAV and ICFTU-AFRO as executing and implementing partners respectively.

The first year of the project which commenced in mid-March 2003 involved national and local workshops that were implemented in Benin, Mozambique, Rwanda, Swaziland, Sierra Leone and Mainland Tanzania. The second year of the project which consisted of national workshops and the development of a generic resource-training manual, kicked-off in September 2004. This phase of the project covered a new batch of countries namely: Burundi, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Sao Tome and Zanzibar. Already the national strategic planning workshops have been completed in Kenya, Zanzibar, Eritrea, Ghana and Liberia. All pending project activities will continue to be implemented as planned.

The project seeks to strengthen the capacity of trade unions, to proactively contribute to the ongoing democratization, social and economic processes in each of the twelve countries. The main task is to empower the trade unions to intervene in the struggle for deepening and sustaining democracy, fight against injustice, human and trade union rights abuses, combat social exclusion and disintegration, ensure productive and quality employment and awaken a new awareness of social responsibility in Africa.

In specific terms, the project aims at enhancing the capacity of trade unions through relevant education and technical support to cope with new and emerging challenges resulting from the ever-dynamic political, social and economic environment. It is envisioned that the project will ultimately help to sustain democracy, stability and justice in the labour markets in the countries concerned through the process of tripartite consultations and/or negotiations between credible actors.

The project continues to contribute to the process of promoting democratic ideals, including the realization of a strategic planning toward sustainable capacity building in the areas of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, Human and Trade Union Rights, Principles of Democracy, Internal Democracy, NEPAD, and Membership Recruitment and Organization.

The project has made considerable achievements. To begin with a total of 16 national and 21 local workshops have been successfully completed under this project within two years following its inception in 2003. 896 participants including 304 female participants representing 34% of the overall number of participants attended these workshops.

This action-oriented project has had tremendous impact on working people, trade unions and the wider society, especially in the participating project countries. The impacts so far recorded are as follows:

- Enhanced knowledge and skills of trade union leaders and activists on issues of democracy, trade union and other human rights, role of women in development, economic globalisation and organising with particular reference to the recruitment of workers within the informal
Reflections of the Pan-African Trade Unions in the Development of the International Labour Organization: Contribution to the ILO History Project

Andrew Kailembo, 25 March 2009

Enhanced capacity and increased possibility for trade unions to play a credible, dynamic and constructive role in the on-going democratisation, economic regeneration and overall development processes in their respective countries. The trade unions in the project countries on the basis of the enhanced capacity acquired through their involvement in this project are today at the cutting edge of attempts to find practical economic and political solutions to the problems plaguing their countries. A classical example is the SFTU's resilience in the campaign for a people driven and ownership over the constitutional making process and the overall democratisation process in Swaziland.

Enabled trade unions to consistently campaign for pro-poor development policies within the framework of their respective in-country PRSP and NEPAD processes with a view to ensuring that the majority of the people derive maximum benefits. This has largely been achieved through their presentation of clear and unambiguous demands as basis for popularising their policies on socio-economic issues of vital importance. The waves of workers strikes in the project countries on the need to improve salaries and basic socio-economic needs are glaring testimonies.

Enabled trade unions to continue to play a front-line role in enthroning democracy in Africa by moving beyond their traditional role, to provide a model of democratic accountability and campaign for governments' openness and the fostering of the culture of popular participation through well established decentralised democratic structures. The recent successful holding of local government elections for the first time in thirty years in Sierra Leone was not without agitation by the SLLC and other pro-democratic forces in that country. Equally, COSYBU and other progressive forces in Burundi are pushing for both the consolidation of peace and the return to constitutional rule within the shortest possible time.

In countries where there is heavy fragmentation of the trade union movement, the project provided a united platform for the majority of the national trade union centres that in no small measure strengthened the ability to live up to their responsibilities while preciously maintaining their independence even in the face of calculated efforts to undermine them. This project has helped the trade unions to demonstrate a unique capacity to provide a united platform for workers regardless of political, ethnic, religious and geographical considerations.

Recognition of the importance of labour education as evidenced by its being prioritised as a key trade union activity. Measures aimed at revamping and/or establishing effective structures for the delivery of labour education at all levels are underway in each project country. Already each national trade union centre has in place an effective network of volunteer activists with highly developed communication and facilitation skills as well as resource materials that can enable them to continue the provision of education at the grassroots.

X: Trade union support ILO in challenging Structural Adjustment Programmes

In the 1980s and 1990s, a majority of trade unions in Africa faced serious economic difficulties and high unemployment. In Africa poverty, unemployment and underemployment, were exacerbated by the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) recommended by the
International Monetary Fund and World Bank. SAPs aimed to curb government expenditure, which reportedly were excessive and the root cause of the poor economic performance. The stabilization measures, subsequently adopted across Africa, saw government withdrawal from the economy. The measures had immediate and long-term effects on unions through public enterprise divestitures, closure of businesses, cost sharing in education and health services and loss of jobs.

SAPs entailed re-introduction of crude and destructive free market economics that have remained dominant and of little help. The trade unions ensured that workers’ concerns formed part of the adjustment programmes. For instance, at its 11th Regional Conference (Harare 2-3 April, 1993), ICFTU-AFRO committed to help African trade unions working towards full justice and social progress through equitable development at national and international levels. Great efforts were put ensuring that adjustments address social, human resources, environmental and development needs in Africa.

The Congress endorsed the Harare Trade Union Declaration and called for equity and democracy in adjustments. Trade unions held series of conferences on social dimensions of structural adjustments. Assistance came from donors including the African American Labour Centre (AALC), Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), CGT-FO (France), LO-Denmark, LO-Sweden, LO-Norway, CLC (Canada), FNV (Netherlands) and RENGO (Japan). The conferences were a forum for governments, employers, international financial institutions, the ILO, the media, and other interested groups such as NGOs, ITS, Pan African and sub-regional organizations to debate national economic and social policies on trade unions agenda.

Thus trade unions brought governments under public scrutiny and debated unpopular policies such as privatization and deregulation. Policies of the IMF and World Bank, too, were strongly criticised. Emphasis was put on need for the institutions to reach a broader-based understanding of national economic and social priorities.

As a long-term objective, the conferences promoted effective consultation among social partners and tried to make the IMF and World Bank see the need to change their policies to make them supportive of long-term development efforts of African countries. They also sought change of government policy and contributed to awareness by the governments, IMF and World Bank on the need to consider poverty and living standards in design of policy. The need
for effective consultations and in involvement of all stakeholders in the adjustment process was urged.

In total, 22 conferences and meetings were held: in 1992 in Zambia (November) and three in 1993 in Mali (April), Niger (October) and Ghana (December). In 1994 another three were held in Uganda (August), Morocco (October) and Chad (November). In 1995, other conferences were in Burkina Faso (March), Kenya (April), Senegal (July), Gabon (July), Mozambique (November) and Central African Republic (December). In 1996, they were held in Tanzania (February), Cameroon (May), Guinea (September) and Zimbabwe (October). In Togo, Benin, and Mauritius and in Rwanda and Malawi they were held 1997 and 1998.

The ICFTU-AFRO organised a major Pan-African Symposium titled “Building democracy and Equity into Adjustment and Development” in Zimbabwe (March 1993). Two trade unions conferences in French speaking African countries, Senegal (October 1991) and Benin (September) 1993) discussed economic and social progress, human and trade union rights, the rural sector, structural adjustment, the informal sector and role of the women.

Following the devaluation of the CFA franc in January 1994, the ICFTU-AFRO organised an important conference on “Trade union response to the devaluation of the CFA franc” (Senegal, April 1994). ICFTU also played a major role in an ILO tripartite conference on the effects of the devaluation (Senegal, October 1994).

A related conference on “Democratisation and Strengthening of the Free Trade Union Movement” took place in Cote d’Ivoire (Abidjan, May 1994). Despite not originally being part of the series of structural adjustments conferences, it covered many similar themes. Two seminars on Structural Adjustment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and on Regional Integration, Development and the Social Dimensions: a Plan of Action to Re-Launch Zaire’s Economy was held in Zaire (October 1995 and January 1996) respectively. Both were organised by ICFTU-AFRO in conjunction with CDT and UNTZ and the latter one also in conjunction with the ILO.

Following the success of these conferences, a mission led by ICFTU-AFRO President and General Secretary to the IMF and World Bank and joined by senior trade unionists from Francophone Africa was organised (Washington, 4-8 December 1995). Another group of trade
unionists from Francophone Africa together with representatives from the ICFTU-AFRO and ILO met and deliberated with IMF and World Bank officials on a number of issues related to workers concerns the world over.

In a follow-up to these positive gestures, the ICFTU-AFRO in conjunction with the ILO, SATUCC, the World Bank and IMF, organised a seminar on Policies for Economic Growth and development in Southern Africa (Harare, 1-3 April 1996) to enable further deliberations. Senior officials from the World Bank and IMF and ILO participated in the seminar. Trade unionists from Southern Africa, Kenya, Uganda and WCL were represented. Participants talked on structural adjustments and the 1995 World Development Report. Conclusions and recommendations outlined trade union concerns about SAPs and possible remedies.

On the part of the role of OATUU, it has taken the area of socio-economic policy formulation by African countries as an most important part of its. OATUU regrets that people-centred policy initiatives of the OAU and the African Union, which African Heads of State and Government signed, have been abandoned, under the pressure of the International Financial Institutions and Africa’s “Development Partners”. The feeling is that not only did African leaders abandon their people-centred socio-economic policy initiatives, but they also warmly embraced neo-liberal, anti-people, debt and poverty inducing anti-development socio-economic policies. Most of the anti-people policies were adopted without the approval of the Parliaments or National Assemblies of African countries. In the processes, the sovereignty of our countries has been eroded and taken away by unelected faceless bureaucrats of the IMF, World Bank and the WTO. OATUU identifies part of the conflicts, indebtedness, poverty and under-development of Africa is traceable to the neo-liberal economic policies being imposed on African countries since the 1980s.

Those people-centred socio-economic initiatives of the OAU such as:

- The Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos, which were adopted by the African Heads of State and Government in 1980, with a view to achieving the goal of African Economic Community by the year 2000.

Today, we have the Constitutive Act of the African Union, which will lead to Africa’s economic integration and Government of the United States of Africa.

Nonetheless, the OATUU believes that it is the Patriotic and Pan-Africanist duties of African Workers and Trade Unions, working in strategic alliances with African civil Society, Intellectuals, Women, Youth, Farmers, Business Organizations and Political Parties that would rescue Africa from the economic slave masters of neo-liberalism. The collective struggle is to restore sovereignty back to African peoples and governments, to strengthen and transform African Public Services into development-oriented public services with commensurate salaries and allowances. Another major task is the implementation of the Decent Work Agenda within the framework of the Basic Needs Development Agenda. Henceforth in Africa, Social Development should be the foundation for Economic Development.

**XI: Trade unions and fair globalization for social justice**

Probably one of the most direct interactions between trade unions in Africa and the ILO is the former’s support for a stronger ILO for social justice for all. This is derived from the belief that social justice is the guiding principle of the ILO and, of course by extension, the main tenet of all ILO Member States. It is, thus, imperative that there is strong support for the ILO in pursuit of its enduring historical mandate to promote social justice and the rights and interests of working people. It is in this context that trade unions in Africa unreservedly welcomed groundbreaking report published by the ILO entitled “A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All,” urging that building a fair and inclusive globalisation must become a worldwide priority. There must be an urgent rethink of current policies and institutions of global governance.

In this context, the ICFTU-AFRO organised a conference (Nairobi 30 March – 1 April 1998) where its affiliates and friendly organizations from 46 African countries, international trade secretariats, trade unions from industrialized countries and the ILO discussed the effects of the global economy on workers’ human rights. The conference was opened by the then President of the Republic of Kenya, H.E. Daniel arap Moi.
The Guest of Honour noted that increased globalization had bred poverty, inequality, unemployment and environmental degradation causing insecurity. Increased international competition from globalization had increased pressure to cut production and labour costs. Further, to attract more Foreign Direct Investment, governments make big concessions, while workers remain in a weakened bargaining position due to threats of relocation by MNCs. Participants deplored continued exploitation of workers in EPZs. Despite some success in some countries, EPZs were generally not worth pursuing. Alternative development strategies with involvement of the stakeholders, notably trade unions were recommended.

With globalization, workers’ human rights will continue to be violated since Multinational Corporations connive with some governments to violate core labour standards. Further, IMF and World Bank have pushed for changes in labour laws which they argued were too costly for poor countries and too restrictive for employers. Hence many governments have relaxed basic labour laws exposing workers to job insecurity.

The conference heard that Africa leads in defending workers’ human rights in the world economy by including workers rights clauses in international trade agreements to eliminate unfair trade competition arising from labour exploitation. As a first step, the WTO Ministerial conference (Geneva, 18-20 May 1998) was expected to support co-operation between the ILO and the WTO. A WTO Working Group on relationships between trade and International Labour Standards was set up.

Trade unions were urged to co-ordinate a global campaign for introduction of a worker’ rights clause into the WTO. It was urged to maintain its campaigns in all areas concerning workers’ rights viz. trade union rights, equality, changes to IMF and World Bank structural adjustments programmes and to work with affiliates of industrialized countries, and to provide immediate and substantial debt relief. It was also required to maintain working relations with Global Union Federations (GUFs) hitherto referred to as International Trade Secretariats (ITSs) on Multinational Companies codes of conduct.

In similar vein, trade unions in Africa have organized activities on working conditions in the Export Processing Zones. For instance, ICFTU-AFRO organised a regional conference on Organising Workers in Export Processing Zones (Accra, 10-12 September 1996): Over 25
countries in Africa had already set up EPZs, believing they would boost exports driven growth and promote jobs creation.

However, EPZs have obstructed trade unions’ in their efforts to promote workers’ rights and organize more members. Attended by representatives of 30 affiliated organizations, all ITTs in African, ILO, AALC and FES, the conference observed that countries were using various inducements to investors including exemptions to labour legislation, and banning of trade union activities. Enormous resources were injected to attract and create EPZs. Even in EPZs where trade unions were legally operating a number of informal obstacles were in place.

Conclusions and recommendations adopted at end of the three-day conference provided a way forward for trade unions relative to EPZs. Among others, the conference urged governments not to lower labour standards as an incentive to investors, to incorporate the social clause in all trade and investment agreements, to implement the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy and to show commitment to the resolutions of the World Summit on Social Development. Trade unions must allocate more resources to tackle EPZs challenges. Other human rights organizations should be involved. ICFTU-AFRO must ensure follow-up activities as a clearing-house for information about EPZs; and campaign for the social clause.

XII: Trade unions views on African debt problems

Africa’s economic progress has been in limbo due to the over-burdening the debt. It is therefore imperative that all concerned join hands with workers and trade unions in a search for solutions. Unions have long felt the urgency of the thousands of African workers have to live, work and build self and national dignity. The continent’s external debt burden is enormous and increasingly unmanageable. Given this, no meaningful development shall be achieved and Africa must stand up and strive to reverse the trend.

The African trade unions movement has argued that while Africa’s development agenda is noble, it would be constrained for as long as the debt issue is unresolved. Despite various debt cancellation, re-scheduling and debt restructuring efforts for African debtors, massive arrears
have been accumulated at frightening rates thus compounding the problems of repayment and ballooning of the overall debt.

The need to reassess these strategies remains as urgent as ever. Africa must not return to the financial distress realized during colonial times when economies were in hands of colonialists. Consequently, with the support of the ILO, the ICFTU-AFRO organised a conference in Libreville, Gabon (April 12-14, 1999) to reassess debt reduction strategies. The conference was momentous in ICFTU’s history since the organisation had just turned 50 after years of toiling for workers in a continent full of crises, political turmoil and unemployment.

The conference’s mood was also timely enabling unions to respond to Africa debt crisis and give proposals for more worker-friendly debt relief and development strategies. Trade union leaders exchanged experiences and formulated forward-looking policies on how best to manage national economies to avoid recurrence of debt, while ensuring equitable economic growth and development.


ICFTU-AFRO felt that debt relief under the HIPC programme approved by the World Bank and IMF was flawed in its design and implementation: Many African countries failed to meet conditionality of adjustment and reform, especially macro-economic targets set by the two institutions as they place too great a burden on people living in poverty. ICFTU-AFRO also established that the Bretton Woods’ Institution criteria for eligibility and debt sustainability left poor countries diverting resources from their much-needed reserves.

The HIPC process is also shrouded in secrecy and one of the conferences objectives was to call for a more transparent and participatory process to include trade unions and other representative organisations in drawing up a national debt and development plan and strategy.
The conference decried the time frame for receiving debt relief, which was long and anguishing. Consequently, various recommendations passed included: in correction of internal structural adjustment imbalances in Africa; in streamlining of the globalisation and liberalisation processes, free movement of capital and foreign direct investment; and in just and equitable international trade and investment systems.

The Libreville Conference also called for adherence to policies that effect meaningful social development. Industrialised countries were urged to increase their development assistance. Military spending must be transferred to basic health and education services, and there should be more commitment from the international community to the peaceful resolution of internal and international military conflicts.

In conclusions, the conference asked the African trade unions centres to present and discuss these conclusions with finance ministers and other senior government officials; co-ordinate actions across the African continent; set up national trade union follow-up committees; and to report back to their respective constitutional frameworks on actions taken as a basis for further consideration and follow-up action.

**XIII: Women issues and equality promotion in trade unions**

Trade unions in Africa always struggled against discrimination and promoted equal opportunities for women workers for many years. The main organ that co-ordinated gender issues in most national trade centres is the Women’s Committee. The important role of the Women’s Committee as a policy–making body for promotion of equality in society and employment within the trade unions was always re-affirmed and supported at national constitutional meetings.

In pursuance of above ideals, several women programmes, projects and activities were organised and many were supported by ILO Gender Bureau, the Bureau for Workers’ Activities and some field offices, especially the Regional Office for Africa. Most of the activities were organised by women themselves, in collaboration with education departments and/or officers of the national centres.
In various international forums such as the 1984 regional preparatory seminar to the ICFTU World Women’s Conference (Madrid, April 1985) and the UN World Decade Conference (Nairobi, July 1995) African women trade unionists expressed concern over discrimination on working mothers, maternity protection and insecurity in employment. They decried high girls’ dropout from school. In general, conference participants deplored deterioration of living standards caused by economic recession and inflation. Another seminar for Egypt and Sudan women union leaders was held in December 1984 in Khartoum. Between 1987 and 1990 several Women’s activities took place.

In a similar vein, the OATUU, in collaboration with the ILO developed a Gender Mainstreaming programme for African Trade Unions (GEPATU), for National Trade Union Centres of 6 African countries, which was funded by the Dutch Government. The countries are Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Sudan and Tanzania. The 18 months Programme was very successful, and received praises from External Evaluators. OATUU wants to extend it to its members in other African countries. The Gender Mainstreaming area is one that the African Union and OATUU can have very successful collaboration.

**XIV: Young workers in trade unions**

Young workers have been a priority group for trade unions in Africa for many years. Young women and men face specific problems at work such as acquiring appropriate skills and achieving equitable pay and good working conditions. Problems facing young workers are of major concern in many countries. Many unions established youth committees to provide a focal point for trade union activities. The aim was to ensure that young people play full roles in economic, social and political life and from an early age acquire democratic values. At the same time, trade unions needed to organise and express young workers’ interests.

At the international level, at the 13th World Congress, the ICFTU adopted the ICFTU Youth Charter with guidelines and principles for guiding youth activities, namely, promotion of proper standards and principles and determining young workers issues in education, training and employment; implementation of educational activities and training courses for young workers; promotion of self-help socioeconomic projects; and strengthening of young workers international solidarity.
In the 1990s, the ICFTU Youth Committee assumed responsibility for expanding ICFTU policy and programmes on child labour. In June 1994 the ICFTU launched a campaign to stop child labour; three immediate tasks were promotion and observance of the ILO Convention 138 on the Minimum Age of Employment; two, to develop community awareness on problems related to child labour; three, to promote adoption of multilateral and unilateral instruments to stop trade in goods produced by children.

Unfortunately, young workers’ issues in Africa have for long not been adequately addressed due to the lack of funds. This could form a good bonding point between the ILO and trade unions.

**XV: Trade unions combating child labour**

For as long as trade unions have existed the child labour phenomenon in Africa is one problem it has actively addressed. This is more so because Africa has had the highest percentage of children involved in employment.

Many African children toil in most intolerable exploitive and slave-like conditions where girls mostly are employed as domestic servants and boys in plantations, construction sites, mines, garages, service industry and other enterprises in the informal sector. Some children are forced into prostitution or end up in streets in urban areas. Children face serious threats to their health and safety as they are exposed to biological, chemical and environmental hazards that often result in physical injury and illness.

According to ILO’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), many African children toil in private homes as servants, in farming, construction, mines and garages, shops and enterprises in the formal sector. Some live and work in slave-like conditions and are forced into prostitution or end up in the street of cities far away from their homes. Children face serious threats to their health and safety because they are exposed to biological, chemical and environmental hazards that often result in physical injury and illness. They also suffer psychological and emotional scars.
Trade unions have been involved in only limited projects under the ambit of the ILOs International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour since the 1990s. The concern was that, although accurate figures may not be available, it was clear that child labour was increasing at alarming rates in many African countries. One of the factors used to assess the state of child labour has been school children dropout rate and decline in enrolment.

Trade unions are directly affected by the phenomenon of child labour, largely because it negatively impacts on employment situation and on working and living conditions of workers. For instance, the ICFTU-AFRO’s Trade Union Action to Combat Child Labour in Africa project’s follow up activities seek to intensify inter-linkages with existing programmes of the international trade union organization, the ILO, and the Global Unions. Although no positive response had been realized from other partners, the project was still on the table unions continued to seek support.

In any case, unions have continued to undertake activities with other organizations. Of particular concern were a number of countries in western Africa such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Cote d’Ivoire, Benin and Togo. In Central Africa, activities have been carried out in Gabon, while in eastern Africa, activities have been carried out in Kenya and Tanzania; and also in Malawi, and in southern Africa.

There exist low levels of awareness, lack of consciousness and very unsympathetic nature towards child labourers. Significantly, cost cutting measures on social expenditure, retrenchment of employee, coupled with increased cost of education and health services have worsened the problem of child labour as seen in plantations and streets of Africa.

Trade unions must be at the forefront in advocating elimination of child labour, in tandem with their historical role of advocating for international labour standards on minimum age for employment. They should conduct awareness among other campaigns to fight child labour.

Trade unions have continued to urge governments to ratify and implement those treaties especially of OAU, UN and regional and sub-regional government organisations relevant to elimination of child labour. This is long overdue and causing undue suffering and violations to the Rights and Welfare of the child. Governments should also put in place effective enforcement mechanism. They should strengthen inspectorate branches of the ministry of
labour with more human and material resources. The problem of understaffing and lack of mobility should be addressed. Proper training of these officers too is necessary.

In a conference on child labour in Africa held in December 1997 trade unionists from Africa and other continents’, GUFs and representatives of ILO, OAU, UNICEF debated the issue of child labour in Africa. The conference stated in no uncertain terms that Child labour is exploitative, detrimental, hazardous and abusive; it affects their overall physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

The conference saluted supported the idea that trade unions bargain on improved wages, terms and conditions of employment; carry out educational activities on child labour for union leaders, shop-stewards members and ensure that collective agreements involve the prohibition of child labour; employers on their part should strive not to employ child labour but remunerate workers better terms and condition of employment.

At the same time, unionist called for a code of conduct on child labour. They also called on governments to effect adequate measures to combat child labour in all sectors of economies. Introduction of free and compulsory primary level education is an important step in raising the issue nationally.

Bringing up the problem of child labour to the attention of sub-regional grouping/regional organisations carrying out educational activities on child labour also remains vital. Trade union campaign techniques include: documentation and case studies, supporting consumer boycott action, publicity, education and awareness raising, submitting complaints to the ILO conventions, and increasing working in direct action to get children out of the work place into schools. This campaign strategy stresses the role of young trade unionists in developing trade union action.

Unions have also condemned the use of children soldiers in armed conflict and lashed out at some of the policies pursued by the international financing institution particularly SAP’s and various conditionalities which have aggravated the child labour problem especially in Africa.

In a national workshop held in Kampala in December 1999 trade unions assessed the current situation in Uganda with regard to child labour and programme of action to deal with child
labour and looking at the prospects of ratification of ILO Convention 138 and 182. The organizers of the workshop invited ILO–IPEC and five nongovernmental organisations. Issues raised included a call on unions to take substantial interests in the matter and contribute substantially to its elimination. The workshop noted that many actors had learnt about the issues covered in convention 182 largely because of the campaign undertaken. The Global match against child labour led by the NGOs and supported by various organization including trade unions had also played an important role in highlighting the plight of child labourers. It concluded that conventions 138 and 182 should be ratified the soonest.

XVI: Trade unions and ILO together fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic

It is widely understood that HIV/AIDS pandemic is a major threat to the world of work, for it threatens its primary goal: the promotion of opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity. HIV/AIDS is an immense human tragedy, and with no cure in sight, the ILO has been called upon by its constituencies to provide a ‘social vaccine’ to support those who suffer its terrible menace.

At the same time, the ILO has the relevant expertise and the capacity to undertake measures to educate and inform the working people and their communities about what could be done to minimise and eventually eradicate HIV/AIDS.

On the part, trade unions in Africa contend that HIV/AIDS has transformed from a few cases in the early 1980’s to a human tragedy of great notoriety. AIDS has been spreading at frightening rates with some of the hardest hit countries having infection rates at about 30% among adult populations.

Like the rest of the world, trade unions in Africa have noted with concern, the negative impact HIV/AIDS is having on humans. They also recognize the importance of tackling HIV/AIDS from the workers point of view. After all, labour force is one of the hardest hit human areas.

The ILO has documented that HIV/AIDS threatens the world of work in many ways. People living with the disease are subject to stigmatisation, discrimination, and hostility in the community and at work. HIV/AIDS affects development, having profound negative impacts on
the economy, the workforce, the business, and on individual workers and their families. It also has a significant impact on the composition of the labour force in terms of age, skills, and experience. Other negative effects include its threat to enterprise performance (through increased costs due to health care, absenteeism, burial fees, recruitment, training and re-training); gender equality (with women being highly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS for both biological and cultural reasons); and increased incidences of child labour caused by the excessive pressure on households and families caused by HIV/AIDS.

The particular concern of organised labour through their respective trade unions has been the disturbing implications of HIV/AIDS in the workplace. This fear is derived from the realisation that HIV/AIDS affects both old and young people, but mainly those in their prime and most productive years. Statistics show that eight out every ten deaths from AIDS occur within the age group of 20-49 years.

It is on this understanding that HIV/AIDS should be considered as more than just a health issue. It is also a human rights issue, a social issue, an economic issue, and a general development issue. It is important to recall the remarks made by Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General, and Al Gore, Vice-President of the United States, that stated that the effect that the impact of AIDS in Africa is no less destructive than that of the warfare itself – AIDS has already killed about ten times more teachers, health workers, and created more orphans than has any armed conflict.

In addition to having a direct effect on the workers themselves, HIV/AIDS is a major problem at the workplace in terms of pre-employment, the terms and conditions of employment, and post-employment issues. All these areas are directly or indirectly covered by International Labour Organization’s instruments, including Conventions and Recommendations on confidentiality, discrimination, termination of employment and social security aspects. These instruments should be used as entry points to get commitments from the ILO’s constituent partner organisations to deal with HIV/AIDS in a much more aggressive manner.

Organised labour considers the workplace to be a very important and effective starting point for tackling the disastrous effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The workplace is a particularly effective forum for the following reasons:
o Large numbers of the age groups at risk (between 20-49 years), including men who are difficult to reach in community initiatives, are brought together

o Many workplaces have facilities that can be used for group discussions, and the infrastructure in terms of clinics and provision of condoms. Privacy is also ensured. Workers take awareness campaigns more seriously if they associate their work with economic security.

o The works councils/health safety committees already existing within enterprises (comprising both management and workers) provide a good entry point for HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns and educational programmes.

o Trade union leaders are also opinion leaders, and as such they command considerable respect and understanding among the societies in which they live.

o Organised workers are more likely to accept change and through the contacts they retain within their communities they are also be able to influence other people outside the workplace.

o Existing education and training programmes and facilities.
The ILO has developed a Code of Practice in response to many requests for guidance, through a widespread process of consultation with government, employer, and worker constituents in all regions. The Code represents the ILO’s commitment to help secure conditions of decent work and social protection in the face of the epidemic: its implementation is at the core of the Programme's strategic plan. The Code contains fundamental principles for policy development and practical guidelines from which concrete responses can be developed at enterprise, community, and national levels in the following key areas:

- Prevention of HIV/AIDS
- Management and mitigation of the impact of HIV/AIDS on the world of work
- Care and support of workers infected and affected by HIV/AIDS
- Elimination of stigma and discrimination on the basis of real or perceived HIV status

The Code is the product of an intensive process of consultation between the ILO and its tripartite constituents. It was reviewed and revised by a tripartite group of experts from all regions and subsequently adopted by the ILO Governing Body in June 2001. Formally launched at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (New York, 25-27 June 2001), it received the support of the UN Secretary General and UN system, as well
as that of national leaders, corporations, labour organisations, and NGOs. The Declaration of Commitment approved at the Special Session makes reference to the need for national laws and policies to take account ‘of established international guidelines on HIV/AIDS in the workplace’.

With the support of the ILO trade unions have for long called for deliberate intervention in the HIV/AIDS issue. Together, they have given thought and consideration to how to combat this scourge.

One of the threshold was for instance at its at the 17th Congress of the ICFTU in April 2000, when the ICFTU-AFRO led the trade unions in adopting a resolution favouring launch of a trade union action against AIDS. The ICFTU identified three priorities for such action including: adoption of preventive measures to mobilise against any form of discrimination and urged pharmaceutical companies to lower prices. The Executive Board of ICFTU-AFRO mandated the Secretariat to ensure systematic steps to make the organization incorporate HIV/AIDS in all its programmes and activities.

At the Nairobi meeting in January 2000, the ICFTU-AFRO invited representatives of various diplomatic missions based in Nairobi, ICFTU/AFRO friendly organizations, including the ILO’s Bureau for Workers’ Activities and the International Trade Secretariats. The meeting concluded that the workplace served as an excellent forum for combating HIV/AIDS and for awareness and prevention. The meeting discussed the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS in Africa, among them the decimation of its productive population.

Another reason for singling out the work place is that many work places have facilities that can be used for group discussions. The meeting noted that infrastructure such as clinics can provide condoms for protection. Moreover women and children pay a heavier price. Women are both committed at home and the work place. Children might have to stop going to school when the family becomes impoverished and unable to pay school fees.

In launching its HIV/AIDS programme in April 2000, the ICFTU-AFRO set to spend US$6.3 million in combating HIV/AIDS starting at the workplace for five years. Launching the programme, General Secretary Andrew Kailembo, announced initial pilot implementation in Botswana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and
Reflections of the Pan-African Trade Unions in the Development of the International Labour Organization: Contribution to the ILO History Project

Andrew Kailembo, 25 March 2009

Zimbabwe through its national affiliates. This would eventually spread out. ICFTU-AFRO believed that only a multisectoral approach can tackle the scourge of HIV/AIDS.

With a strong presence of senior ILO specialists, Gaborone played host to two ICFTU-AFRO pan-African conferences on involving workers in the fight against HIV/AIDS in the work place in September and November 2000. The conferences produced the Gaborone Trade Union Declaration on involving workers in the fight against HIV/AIDS in the workplace. Amongst other issues in the declaration, it was agreed that the HIV/AIDS problem needs collective action. It is necessary to sensitise and train local leaders and shop stewards on ways to fight HIV/AIDS given their positions as opinion makers and leaders and their reaching influence. ICFTUAFRO should lobby governments to set up measures and stop the spread of HIV/AIDS: this should include awareness campaigns to eliminate the disease; fight the culture of denial of HIV/AIDS; campaign for the provision of low-cost life-saving drugs in part through the redefinition of WTO’s intellectual property agreement to enable production of cheaper drugs to fight the scourge; approach UN institutions such as ILO, WTO, WHO and UNAIDS among others to urge them to commit more resources to fight HIV/AIDS.

**Case of trade union-employer coalition against HIV/AIDS pandemic**

The event was organised by the ICFTUAFRO from 7-9 April 2003 in Nairobi in collaboration with the International Employers Organization (IOE) and Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE) to enhance the role of the Pan-African Employers Confederation (PEC) and ICFTU-AFRO in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa.

On May 12, 2003, General Secretary of the ICFTU and Secretary General of the IOE issued a joint Statement underscoring among other things the importance of employers, workers and their organizations working together at both local and international levels to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

As part of their joint commitment, PEC and ICFTU-AFRO on 24 September 2003 issued a communiqué titled “Fight HIV/AIDS Together” to add voice to mutual recognition of the devastating impact of the pandemic at workplace. They called on affiliates to prioritize the fights against HIV/AIDS. This was followed by another joint communiqué committing the ICFTU-AFRO and Public Service International (PSI) to fight HIV/AIDS among health workers.

During the 10th ILO Regional Meeting in Addis Ababa in December 2003, the ICFTU-AFRO and IOE jointly tabled a resolution on HIV/AIDS that called for a joint action between workers and employers which was adopted. Employers and trade union representatives from eight countries in Africa subsequently met at the ILO office in Geneva on 30th and 31st March 2004. The objective was developing bipartite national action plans for workplace responses to HIV/AIDS.

The meeting targeted eight countries considered to have high HIV infection rates in Africa. Joint presentations on the activities undertaken in Cote D’Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, among others, were made. On 9 June 2006, top leadership of
eight workers and eight employers’ organizations from Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, together with ILO-AIDS Geneva, IOE, ICFTU-AFRO and PSI met at the sideline of the International Labour Conference as a follow-up of the Geneva March 2004 meeting. Discussants further shared experiences on practical ways of developing and implementing country specific action plans following the model that was jointly developed by coordinators at the Geneva meeting. A capacity building conference under the title “Workers and Employers together against HIV/AIDS in the workplace: Building capacity for joint action programmes” co-organised by ICFTU-AFRO and the IOE was held in Kampala, Uganda from 12 to 14 December 2006. It as well involved Lo-Norway, the ILO with technical support of ILO International Training Centre based in Turin, Italy. The conference served to confirm that it was in the interest of everybody to strengthen work already being undertaken by ICFTU-AFRO and trade unions to fight HIV and AIDS challenges.

The achievements made by unions in implementing the training of shop-stewards on HIV/AIDS at the workplace have not been without challenges, among them lack of sufficient funds, sufficient support of the programme by employers and political commitment in some countries. A number of organizations lacked legislation and policies on HIV/AIDS.

By end of 2004, a few national centres including Kenya and South Africa were included in the Country Coordinating mechanisms (CCMs) Since launch of the project in 2001, the ICFTU-AFRO has participated in several conferences, workshops, meetings, symposiums and events related to HIV and AIDS. In addition, it has shared knowledge and exchanged experiences on achievements and challenges with many organizations; institutions as well as individuals and gained knowledge from all to carry on. In terms of impact, on-the-spot assessments indicated that seven years of groundwork, determination and commitment were paying dividends.

XVII: Trade unions demanding basic social security for all

Before independence, no country in English-speaking Africa had a national or formal social security system that covered all workers. Colonialists introduced non-contributory pension schemes to cover a limited group of senior African civil servants in places such as Tanzania and Ghana. In the private sector only a few workers were covered, mainly those who worked in major foreign trading and commercial firms for instance United African Company which operated a pension and provided provident fund scheme; benefits were paid at time of retirement of the senior Africans). Things changed after World War II when the colonialists were forced to introduce slightly better social security programmes, Workmen’s Compensation Schemes, general treatment services and payment of gratuity after retirement.
After independence, African governments including in Ghana, Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria developed compulsory saving schemes provident funds. National provident funds schemes were to be operated on short periods of five years and thereafter were to be converted into pension schemes. Many countries in Africa are now in various stages of converting the provident funds to social insurance schemes. Membership of these compulsory saving schemes generally consists of employees in the formal sector.

Social security is a basic requirement for all citizens but more particularly workers who have detached themselves from their communities and become wholly dependent on salaries. Trade unions in Africa deem it necessary that workers be involved in the design, management and co-ordination of social security schemes, through their respective organizations.

However, social security schemes that exist in African countries are limited in coverage to salaried employees leaving a large population uncovered. Women mostly engaged in domestic, informal and agricultural sectors are also excluded. Apart from their limited coverage, their benefits are also limited to long-term pension provisions of old age, invalidity and survivors. Unfortunately, governments in some countries have diverted social security at the expense of improved members’ benefits. The investment returns have been generally low and at times negative given the high rates of inflation. The other problems related to management of social security schemes are poor record maintenance, high administrative costs, lack of transparency, and poor investment of accumulated social security funds and low levels of benefits to members.

In recent years, debate on social security reforms has gained momentum and centred on issues of privatization, adoption of a three-tire structure of social security development, improvements in governance of social security schemes and the need to find ways of integrating excluded groups such as women, and the informal and agricultural sectors of economies. Social partners, particularly trade unions must take a leading role in the reforms, so that members are not disadvantaged due to inappropriate social security reforms. Establishment of formal social insurance schemes has been actively supported and promoted by the ILO. The current development patterns viz. industrialisation, urbanisation and liberalisation have made social security systems more pronounced. Today almost all countries in the world have some form of institutionalized social security systems.
Trade unions in Africa are keen on how social security funds are utilized and inverted; the benefits are structured and contribution levels are set over a span of time. Unions must also serve in boards of trustees and other appellate bodies dealing with social security, such as Social Security Appeals Tribunal. The formal social security schemes were conceptualised in a gender insensitive environment. Many African academicians and social security experts find the ILO definition on social security too restrictive. Given that social insurance programmes have potential gender bias, there is need to redefine the present social security concepts to incorporate informal systems provisions that can be sustained, regulated and supported. The possibilities of establishing special funds for people engaged in handicrafts, small enterprises, agriculture and domestic services are mooted. Such funds can cover most of the vulnerable people who need social security.

Governments and trade unions should encourage, support and develop self-help organizations with common funds and resources for emergencies, consumer and savings associations and co-operatives.

Over the last few years, trade unions embarked on an awareness programme that aimed at exposing weaknesses of security schemes in Africa. It was in this light that the first conference on national social security schemes in Francophone countries was held in Abidjan in September 1998. This conference made recommendations: the Abidjan Declaration which raised specific matters on; Social Security Institutions, malfunction and poor management of available resources caused mainly by State control and the delay in payment of social benefits due to non payment of contributions by State employers and public and private enterprises.

While the debate on social security reforms in English-speaking Africa has centred on issues of privatisation of social security schemes, adoption of the World Bank approach of the three-tier system in francophone countries was fundamental. Trade unions wish to to see:

- Improvement in management and governance of social security institutions
- Modalities of integrating the informal sector into the formal social security schemes
- Development of a social protection policy to address and guide future development of social security institutions. AFRO is opposed to the neoliberal approach advocated by
the international finance institutions and supports the core principles of social protection in accordance to ILO Convention 102.

Unions also defend the concept of financing grassroots regimes through share-out as done at present and not through individual capitalisation. Social protection should be based on equity and social justice to better ensure general protection of workers. Unions have called on governments to ratify and implement ILO core standards of social security in collaboration with the Inter-African Social Security Conference (CIPRES) and ILO. They further call for improvement in the quality of human resources within the National Social Security Funds by strengthening training of administrators and staff to better meet needs of a renewed and generalised social protection system.

Unions emphasised the need to accord women their full rights – pre-and post-maternity benefits and retirement among others. The conference recognized the role and mutual benefit health associations play and give in trade unions. They should be efficient and well managed to achieve their major objectives; and should serve better, and in a complementary manner, the most disadvantaged members of society and workers’ families. Participants called for a change in appointment of Managing Directors of national social security funds: the government usually appoints these without any consultation with social partners. Representatives of the productive sectors, namely; workers’ unions and employers, should appoint managing directors of national social security funds. The appointment should be based on proven criteria of competence. Governing Boards should have the power to vet the appointments.

**XVIII: Trade unions and in the informal economy: Organizing the un-Organized**

For trade unions, the informal economy is both a challenge and a dilemma. It is a challenge because trade unions are instrumental in improving the quality of jobs as well as working conditions, including those found in the informal economy. The informal economy poses a dilemma for the trade unions, as there are real and fundamental differences and constraints between informal and formal economy workers. For instance, the organisation and objectives of trade unions may not permit a simple extension of their traditional activities to cover informal economy issues.
Along with the growth of the informal economy, trade union-type of organisations and associations are being formed to address their special constraints. For example, in Tanzania, one study carried out under the ILO’s inter-departmental project estimated that the level of organisation that has already taken place in the informal sector, spontaneous or otherwise, to be 20%. This compares to 1% in Colombia and less than 9% in South Asia.

Another organisational support would be for trade unions to train the associations of informal workers on how to plan and organise peaceful demonstrations, pickets, lobby and other trade union actions, which might be needed to persuade the authorities against policies and actions that are detrimental to informal economy employment. Other services that the unions might offer to informal economy workers include providing provisional institutional support, or serving as intermediary with financial and donor agencies. The union can also set up programmes and schemes useful to informal economy workers.

Such alliances already exist. For example, the formation of the Cissin-Natanga Women’s Association of Burkina Faso is an illustrative example of the critical role that mainstream trade unions can play in the emancipation of informal economy associations. Originally organised as a group of women attending a literacy course, the formalisation of the group in 1985 was inspired by the country’s trade union centre, the National Organisation of Free Trade Unions (Organisation Nationale des Syndicats Libres, ONSL). The association has built craft and literacy centres for its members, where the latter are trained in various trade and thereby improve their economic well being.

There has been a fertile ground in Zambia for forming strategic alliances and arriving at common objectives and ways to address the problems and constraints of the informal economy. In so doing, the strength of the trade union movement in Zambia has become greater as its constituency and influence broadens and increases. Similar success stories abound in Benin, Ghana, Senegal, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.
XIX: Toward conflict resolution, prevention and peace building in Africa

In the search for peace and security in Africa, African workers and trade unions are playing their part. Most conflict situations have been blamed on colonial legacies and the unequal distribution of resources among the many ethnic communities. Ethnic and religious differences were also responsible for the continent’s conflicts. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, conflicts have been perpetuated mainly among the ethnic communities in the region, and exacerbated by external forces.

The African unions have responded to conflict resolution, conflict prevention, reconstruction and peace building, through a number of ways. For instance, in 2005 OATUU organized a Workshop for 25 African trade union leaders from 22 conflict-affected countries in Accra, with the financial and technical assistance of the ILO. A similar Workshop was held in January 2005, in Kinshasa for trade union leaders of Central Africa on “Conflict Prevention, Management and Post-Conflict Reconstruction”.

On its part, the ICFTU-AFRO, with the technical support of the ILO Bureau for Workers’ Activities and other funding from the Federation Generale du Travail de Belgique (FGTB) initiated a project entitled “African Trade Union Contribution in Countries Emerging from Armed Conflicts in the Great Lakes and other Conflict Affected Countries” in 2002. National trade union federations in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda were since 2002 the beneficiary organizations. The objective of the project was to enhance the trade union capacity and role in the Great Lakes Region to understand and develop long-term policies ensuring peaceful resolution of conflicts.

A preparatory meeting (Nairobi, January 2002), agreed to undertake missions to explore the facts on the ground and two were undertaken to both English-Speaking countries (Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) and to French-Speaking countries (Rwanda, Burundi and DRC). A follow up meeting in Brussels in February 2003 convened by the CSC, FGTB and the Centrale generale des syndicats liberaux de Belgique (CGSLB), brought together COSYBU and ASCUMULIMO (Burundi); UNTC, CDT, “Solidarite” and OTUC (DRC); and CESTRAR and STEB (Rwanda).
Similarly a meeting on the Role and Contribution of African Trade Unions in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building in the Great Lake Region (Nairobi, May 2003) gathered participants from Burundi, Rwanda, DRC, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the UN, COMESA, African Union (AU) and ILO. In August 2003, ICFTU-AFRO representatives held a meeting with Mr. Ibrahima Fall, the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the UN (SRSG). The SRSG underlined the need to include Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), NGOs, trade unions and other social actors e.g. women, youth and the religious leaders in the peace building process.

In 2004, national workshops were organized in Burundi (April); Uganda (April); Rwanda (May); Tanzania (May); Kenya (August); and the DR Congo (August). To prepare a trade union statement for the African Union/United Nations International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (Dar es Salaam, November 2004), a three-day Regional Conference on the Role and Contribution of African Trade Unions in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building in the Great Lakes Region was convened (Nairobi, May 2004). Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni graced another conference organized by the ICFTU-AFRO and hosted by its Uganda Affiliate, the National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU) on 4-6 April 2005.

Being aware that African countries were unstable due to turmoil and economic hardships, trade unions agreed to continue contributing to peaceful resolution of conflicts and appreciated their role as non-state actors in the process.

Other African trade unions roles in conflict prevention, management and post-conflict reconstruction in Africa include support to the Sierra Leone Labour Congress; the role of the workers and trade unions of Guinea in assisting the Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea during the Sierra Leone Civil war; the exemplary role of the Sudanese Workers and the Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation in the Sudanese Peace Agreement, and in the search for peace, unity and democracy in the Sudan; and the role of Chadian workers and trade unions in the search for peace, unity and democracy in Chad.

However, unions in Africa have not hesitated to express the unfortunate fact that the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, does neither recognize the important role of workers and trade unions, nor their potential contribution to conflict prevention, management and post-conflict reconstruction. Workers and trade unions are the most effective agents in the area of
conflict prevention, management and post-conflict reconstruction. All these elements, including trauma counseling have formed part of trade union education.

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<th>Trade union collaboration with ILO Office Dar es Salaam in Somalia</th>
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<td>The ILO collaborated with the ICFTU-AFRO in organizing a 5-day leadership capacity building workshop for the leaders of the Somaliland Trade Union Organisation (SOLTUO) in Hargeisa from 21-25 August 2004. 40 trade union leaders drawn from the affiliated trade unions of SOLTUO attended the workshop. The workshop among other things, discussed trade union structure and administration, internal democracy, gender equality, organizing and strategic planning. This workshop was the first to be organized in nearly 15 years for trade unions in Somaliland since the outbreak of the crisis in the early 1990s that resulted in the destabilization of Somalia.</td>
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Additional References


