

**Speech**  
**European Development Days**  
**Education and Employment opportunity for all – June2019**

**[Salutations]**

**I wish to thank the European Commission and the 'Boost Employability and Entrepreneurship 'Skills in Africa', BEES 55, for inviting me to this year's European Development Days.**

**I would like also to acknowledge the tireless endeavours of my dear friend Marie-Chantal, the Chief Executive Officer of BEES55, and her colleagues, in endeavouring to realise tangible, empowering projects for the young people of Africa.**

**It is truly a privilege to be present here with you to share, our thoughts, our experiences, and our aspirations.**

**I would like to start my contribution by making reference to a quote by the President of the European Commission Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, who during the African Union - European Union Summit held in November 2017 said:**

**“What happens in Africa matters for Europe, and what happens in Europe matters for Africa. Our partnership is an investment in our shared future. It is a partnership of equals in which we support each other, help each other to prosper and make the world a safer, more stable and more sustainable place to live”.**

**Education and employment are two pillars that are inherently linked to this inspiring vision. Education and employment define a person. In their broader sense, education and employment, also define a community.**

**The resulting opportunities brought about by education and employment, or the lack of these opportunities, have a profound impact on an individual's life and on that of their community. Given their impact, education and employment, not only they rightly deserve our attention today, but also this discussion comes at a most appropriate time.**

**Much has been said, over many decades, about Africa and its peoples.**

**Much has been promised, over many decades, however, the perspective of many of the international community, and unfortunately even in Europe itself, have fallen short of the necessary impact.**

**So much so, as although, enrolment in primary education in developing countries has reached 91 per cent, nonetheless, 57 million children are still without primary education. More than half of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa. This means that this is the region with the largest out-of-school children in the world.**

**The ramification of these indicators are significant. We all know the negative impact of lack of education. Education is the cornerstone in our lives - both as individuals, and also as one human family.**

**Evidence to the importance of education is definitely found in the targets set in the SDGs. Education in fact underpins the vast majority of these targets, which were agreed, and are acknowledged by the international community. In 2015, nearly five years ago, the International Community, through the United Nations established Agenda 2030.....the world's targets to be reached by 2030.**

**However, we are still far from reaching these targets yet. Before the SDGs we, as an international community, we had agreed on the Millenium Development Goals, however we failed.**

**We cannot continue to fail.**

**We cannot continue to speak.**

**We cannot continue to be complacent.**

**We need to pull up our socks and act effectively.**

**Education is definitely key to solving some of humanity's most enduring problems.**

**When people have access to education, they can overcome poverty.**

**Education provides the tools and the know-how on leading more healthy and sustainable lives.**

**Education reduces inequalities and accelerates the pace towards gender equality.**

**Education also creates the necessary environments for tolerance, respect, and peace.**

**Africa has the youngest population of any region in the world. It is therefore paramount to provide the young people of Africa with access to education.**

**Therefore, it is important to identify the barriers, that have restrained access to millions of children and young people, to quality education.**

**The lack of adequately trained teachers; ..... the poor conditions of schools; ..... the lack of opportunities available to children with different abilities; ..... and ..... the difficult access to educational facilities, such as for those children living in rural areas, all need to be examined in great detail.**

**According to a study by the World Bank published last year, Africa faces a severe learning crisis, that is undermining economic growth and the wellbeing of its citizens.**

**The study argues that learning levels across the region are alarmingly low. Many children remain out of school and those who attend are not acquiring the basic skills necessary for success later in their lives, and in the lives of their communities.**

**Creative strategies need to be devised.**



**In this respect, we need to make reference to the SDGs and their related targets. The SDGs provide us with a pathway, and with the direction on what needs to be done.**

**We actually do know what needs to be done.**

**Our energies as an international community need to be focused on ensuring the provision of free, equitable and quality education, for all of our children irrespective of who they are and where they come from.**

**This is our responsibility as one human family.**

**Proper early childhood development is necessary. Early childhood development prepares children for their educational development by giving them the necessary strong basic foundations.**

**We know from research, that lack of proper early childhood development puts such children in a disadvantage with their peers, who come from a difference background.**

**Therefore, we need to ensure, to put in place, the right value chain, which must include, proper early childhood development, equal access to education, and also the elimination of gender disparities.**

**We need, as an international community, belonging to one human family, to make sure that these opportunities are available to all, including the most vulnerable and marginalised in our communities.**

**We also need ensure that persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations, are at the heart of every step forward we take.**

**In practical terms we need to strive harder for universal literacy and numeracy.**

**Accessibility to quality education is the key solution to the empowerment of all of our children, and young people, to educational, technical and vocational training.**

**Quality education is also key to the advancement of all of our children and young people, to better their chances for entrepreneurship and employment.**

**The study conducted by The World Bank which I quoted earlier proposed a series of priority areas that can boost educational opportunities in Africa.**

**These are the provision of universal basic education with a focus on equitable access, ..... quality and retention; ..... ensuring effective management and support of teachers; ..... increasing financing for quality education and ..... boosting institutional capacity.**

**This necessary way forward needs the genuine will of the international community to provide resources and support that can determine the progress towards an Africa where quality education is effectively available for all.**

**Young Africans, like all the other young people in the world, have all the potential to transform their country, but they need the knowledge, the educational opportunities, and the necessary skills to be the agents of change that this continent of opportunity needs.**

**These endeavours can make Africa the next emerging economy in the next decade or so.**

**Employment is the other pillar in focus today. As with education, employment is a cornerstone upon which many other aspects of our lives rest. On a more macro level, employment opportunities also determine the direction and the progress which a community achieves.**

**Africa has the youngest population in the world with an estimated 10 to 12 million people joining the labour force each year, an indicator which is projected to increase even further. This huge potential is nonetheless hampered with struggles across the continent to create new productive jobs.**

**In the life of an individual, decent employment often means alleviation from poverty, and the fulfilment of dreams, and aspirations. Decent employment is therefore key for individuals to enjoy their life, their rights, their freedoms, and their human dignity.**

**In African countries, unemployment is nonetheless an issue that is compromising the prospects of our young people there, and of their respective communities.**

**The African Development Bank in fact notes that in most African countries youth unemployment is twice than that for adults.**

**Youth unemployment in Africa and elsewhere is a ticking time bomb, as lack of employment opportunities undermines social cohesion, creates social tensions, and bring political instability.**

**By contrast, given the right positive conditions and opportunities, young people can be actors of change that can further their community's, and their country's wellbeing.**

**At a communal level, employment opportunities provide a sense of purpose and can bring about prosperity. When decent employment is available, young people entering employment can choose to continue living in their towns, regions or respective countries. They are thus not placed in a position where they have to relocate to distant places, and countries to make a living.**

**In the African context, the World Bank proposes a job strategy that pays more attention to rural development.**

**The rationale behind this proposal is that investment in agriculture limits youth migration into urban centres.**

**This is of particular importance because young people migrating into these areas aggravate urban unemployment. Furthermore, they face numerous obstacles including discrimination because of their inexperience.**

**Last year the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), which I represent as a Goodwill Ambassador, took part in a Regional Youth Conference in Rwanda discussing youth employment in agriculture as a means to ending hunger and poverty in Africa.**

**During that event, UNIDO Director General LI Yong stressed the importance of integrating youth in the agriculture sector, particularly in rural areas, to address the challenge of decent and sustainable employment that is coupled with rapid urbanization and work-related migration.**



**Nonetheless, such strategies and endeavours need to be driven by a sustainable approach. If not, solutions will just be temporary and short term, thus compromising the positions of future generations.**

**Protecting the environment should also be a top priority when devising strategies towards increased employment opportunities.**

**In essence we need to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation.**

**Economic growth cannot come at the expense of the environment.**

**On the other hand, we need to focus on targets that are achievable. At community level and on a global scale we need to endeavour to achieve full employment and decent work for all women and men including all of our young people.**

**This is, after all, the commitment that the international community has ascribed to in 2015, when it committed itself to the targets outlined SDGs, to be reached by 2030.**

**In Africa, young women face more difficulties to find employment.**

**The African Development Bank found that in most countries of sub-Saharan Africa and those in North Africa, ..... it is easier for men to secure jobs than women, even if they have the equivalent skills and expertise as men applying for the same job opportunity.**

**These challenges need also to be overcome.**

**As progress is achieved, specific challenges will become more pronounced and gender equality needs always to remain central in our strategies and policies.**

**Another challenge is now also arising, in countries who have adopted Gender Equality strategies. The Gender Pay Gap, is now a new challenge to such countries.**

**The global gender pay gap needs to be tackled whilst also pursuing these goals, so as not to discourage further endeavours for equal opportunities.**

**Ignoring the gender pay gap will take decades until women overcome this discrimination. Not only is this another blatant injustice, but actors that continue to perpetuate this discriminatory practise are undermining human dignity, and human rights.**

**Humanity must be based on equality, social justice, and respect for human rights.**

**We need to put more pressure on governments, policy makers, regional and global actors to promote development-oriented policies that support decent job creation, quality employment, sustainable entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation in Africa.**

**It is also essential that our governments encourage small enterprises. Small enterprises, in fact, provide many employment opportunities.**

**Civil society organisations must also be encouraged to venture into social enterprises as they too can be catalysts for employment opportunities.**

**Furthermore, as committed by the targets set by the SDGs, the international community needs to continue, and even more so, it needs to, step up its efforts to eradicate forced labour, child labour, human trafficking and modern slavery.**

**When reflecting on education and employment, my thoughts always go back to what we, as individuals, can do, to build a world where no one is left behind.**

**In trying to figure this out, my thoughts take me back to my childhood and to my father.**

**My father was a teacher and a headmaster at the school in my village in Malta. Most days of the week he would encourage and welcome children from difficult and disadvantaged backgrounds to**

**come to our family home, where he would give them one-to-one tuition in academic and other subjects, so that they would better their chances at school. He didn't do this for financial gain or reward.**

**He did it, due to a sense of responsibility which he always felt for others, and to make sure that those children could become achievers, like all the rest.**

**My father believed that each and every one of us has a responsibility towards each other, to ensure that social justice truly prevails.**

**Years went by and those children then, became adults. Many progressed to become community leaders, business people and active citizens of our community. Decades later many would still**

**come and thank my father for the chance he had given them - to overcome the inequalities they had suffered.**

**That lesson stayed with me and I hope it can provide inspiration and direction for us here today.**

**Through my experience, since my childhood, I learnt that each and every one of us, as members of one human family, has a responsibility towards others.**

**I learnt that social justice is not simply a written policy, but it is a lifetime attitude and aspiration.**

**I learnt that each and every one of us can be game-changers.**

**On the other hand, as an international community, and specifically as Europe, we must, effectively, reflect on our perceptions, ..... on our outlook and ..... on our relations with the countries of Africa.**

**We must, as an international community, and specifically as Europeans move from words to action.**

**I believe we cannot continue to perceive Africa as a continent that creates insurmountable challenges to Europe.**

**I believe that we must stop looking at Africa as the land of migration.**

**I believe we must see ourselves as truly two complimentary continents.**

**Have we as Europeans and as the International Community truly invested in Africa or just thrown money at what is perceived as problematic, by our standards?**



**Africa does not need our charity!**

**Africa needs and deserves proper sustainable investment.**

**Africa must be looked at as a strategic partner and not as a mammoth problem.**

**Africa has the necessary resources but needs effective strategic sustainable partnerships.**

**Africa needs the necessary assistance to effectively and sustainably develop its full potential.**

**We have a responsibility to help and to provide necessary support.**

**We have a responsibility to encourage creative thinking, innovation and foresight to seek partnerships with a wide range of**

**stakeholders, like Global Africa, an organisation of which I am a proud patron, and similar organisations, such as UNIDO and the African Union, all of which have the sole objective of furthering Africa's interest and that of its people.**

**Africa is a continent of opportunity.**

**Africa has all the key ingredients for success.**

**A young and enterprising population; rapid urbanisation; natural resources; rich ecosystems and economies full of potential.**

**Africa is, and will even more be a player that needs to be given its rightful dignity, and more appreciation in the international community.**

**As described by President Juncker, Africa is an equal partner.**

**Thank you.**

