

Summit of the African Union Heads of State – Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, September 8-9 2004.

Last 8 and 9 September, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, hosted the third session of the Extraordinary Summit of the African Union Heads of State and Governments on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa.

The joint appearance of these two economic issues at such an important meeting conveys Africa's desire to set its new priorities and focus on poverty reduction through job creation and productive investments.

The choice of Ouagadougou as a venue for the summit is significant: Burkina Faso is among the five poorest countries of the world and is almost completely ignored by foreign investors and organizations. Half of its population lives with less than a euro per day.

Juan Somavia, Director General of the International Labour Organization and Ivano Barberini, President of International Co-operative Alliance, were invited at the meeting, along with representatives of the following international organizations: ONU, WORLD BANK, IMF, FAO, UNDP, UNFPA, ADB.

In his welcome statement, Mr. Blaise Compaoré, President of Burkina Faso, expressed the need for a fairer mundialization and an easier access for African products to the markets of developed countries.

Distribution of international aid must be reassessed, said Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Chairperson of the African Union

Speaking on the occasion, ICA President Ivano Barberini pointed out that every aid given to Africa by developed countries has to incentive the local productive efforts and self help, respecting the culture and the dignity of the beneficiaries, and he emphasized the commitment of the co-operative movement in the achievement of this goal.

"The real problem of globalization is the inequality in taking part in it" Barberini said.

The co-operative model appears to be the best suited to meet the economic and social challenges of the 21st century, and this is testified by the good examples of co-operative development present in many African countries, Burkina included.

Heads of state went behind closed doors for the afternoon session, which was to produce remedies for the unemployment problem, affecting hundreds of million of Africans.