A CRITICAL AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ILO CONVENTION NO. 193 WITHIN THE AFRICAN DIGITAL WORK ENVIRONMENT: A SWOT ANALYSIS IN CONFORMITY WITH EXISTING GIG-WORKERS' LAWS AND TRADE UNION LEGISLATION

A SPEECH PRESENTED BY AT THE AFRICAN REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS' INTERVENTION PROGRAMME ON INFORMAL SECTORS. Held On the 17th day of August 2026 at Abuja, Nigeria.

Presented by Comrade Dr. Nwachukwu Chinedu Peter; National Ex-officio; National Chairman, Media, Publicity and Technical Committee; Amalgamated Union of App-Based Transporters of Nigeria (AUATON).

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Comrades, Representatives of the International Community, Senior Government Officials, Esteemed Development Partners, Distinguished Representatives of Trade Unions, Employers' Organisations, Civil Society, and Stakeholders across Africa,

I bring you warm and fraternal greetings on behalf of the Amalgamated Union of App-Based Transporters of Nigeria (AUATON), an affiliate of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC).

I stand before you today not merely as a Nigerian, but as a proud African digital worker, a trade unionist, an advocate of decent work, and a committed participant in the historic struggle to ensure that technological advancement becomes an instrument of human emancipation rather than a sophisticated mechanism for labour exploitation.

Our pride as app-based transporters in Nigeria and across Africa is profound, yet beautifully simple:

We move Africa.

We connect Africa.

We power Africa.

And increasingly, we power the digital economy.

Distinguished Comrades, the adoption of ILO Convention No. 193 on Decent Work in the Platform Economy represents a historic milestone in the evolution of international labour standards. It constitutes a decisive recognition that platform mediated work is indeed work, that digital workers are entitled to dignity and protection, and that technological sophistication must never be deployed as a pretext for social insecurity, discrimination, exploitation or the erosion of fundamental labour rights.

Convention No. 193 provides an important framework for addressing freedom of association and collective bargaining, occupational safety and health, social security, employment classification, formalisation, remuneration, algorithmic management, data protection and privacy, suspension and deactivation of accounts, access to justice and effective remedies.

Today, therefore, I shall present a critical and multidimensional approach to its implementation within the African context.

By multidimensional, I mean that the implementation of C193 must be interrogated through four inseparable and mutually reinforcing dimensions: the Legal Dimension, the Economic Dimension, the Social Dimension and the Technological Dimension.

These dimensions cannot be treated in isolation. A technologically advanced platform economy without legal protection produces exploitation; economic growth without social protection produces inequality; social protection without technological accountability produces algorithmic injustice; while legislation without enforcement remains nothing more than an elegant declaration of intent.

THE AFRICAN DIGITAL LABOUR REALITY

Distinguished Stakeholders, Africa is experiencing a profound transformation in the world of work. From e-hailing, delivery and logistics services in Abuja, Lagos, Nairobi and Accra to diverse forms of platform-mediated work across Johannesburg, Cairo, Kigali, Kampala and Casablanca, millions of Africans increasingly depend upon digital platforms for their livelihoods.

Yet, alongside these opportunities exists a disturbing contradiction: we are living in the age of digital work while millions of digital workers remain trapped in analogue systems of labour insecurity.

A worker may be controlled by an algorithm, evaluated by an algorithm, paid through an algorithm and even deactivated by an algorithm, yet still be described merely as an “independent contractor,” “partner,” “service provider” or “user.”

This is precisely where C193 becomes transformative.

The Convention establishes an international framework for protecting digital platform workers irrespective of simplistic contractual labels and seeks to ensure that the true nature of a working relationship is determined by the realities surrounding the performance of the work and remuneration.

The era in which contractual terminology could automatically erase the realities of employment must therefore give way to an era of substantive justice, legal recognition and worker protection.

II. SWOT ANALYSIS OF C193 IMPLEMENTATION IN AFRICA

Distinguished Comrades, permit me to examine the implementation of C193 through the classical SWOT framework Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

A. STRENGTHS

The first major strength of C193 is legal recognition and juridical clarity. It provides African governments, courts, regulators and trade unions with an authoritative international framework through which existing labour legislation can be reviewed, interpreted and strengthened.

This is particularly significant because platform workers frequently operate within legal grey areas. The Convention provides an opportunity to ensure that app-based and digital workers enjoy fundamental labour rights without being excluded merely because their workplace exists within a digital environment.

The second strength is the formalisation of the digital economy. Formalisation must not be reduced to taxation alone. It must encompass registration, rights, responsibilities, accountability, social protection and access to justice.

If governments expect digital workers to contribute to national revenues, then governments must equally ensure that those workers are visible and protected within national labour, economic and social-security frameworks.

The third strength is social protection. For the driver navigating the streets of Abuja, the rider confronting hazardous traffic in Lagos, the delivery worker operating in Nairobi, or the boda-boda operator in Kampala, social security is not an academic abstraction. It is the difference between vulnerability and security; between surviving an accident and being financially ruined by it; between working today and having dignity tomorrow.

The fourth and perhaps most technologically significant strength is protection against algorithmic injustice. Automated systems increasingly determine ratings, work allocation, performance assessment and account suspension. An algorithm must never become a judge without accountability. No worker should lose his or her livelihood through an opaque technological process without adequate explanation, review and appropriate human intervention.

B. WEAKNESSES

Distinguished Stakeholders, the greatest weakness may not reside within the Convention itself; rather, it may reside in our collective capacity to implement it.

Many African labour institutions do not yet possess the digital inspection infrastructure, algorithmic-auditing capacity, data expertise and specialised human resources required to effectively regulate sophisticated platform enterprises.

The fundamental question is therefore:

How does a conventional labour inspector inspect an algorithm?

How does a regulator determine whether an automated decision is discriminatory? How does a labour authority establish whether a worker was fairly deactivated? How does a trade union negotiate effectively when critical elements of the employment relationship are concealed within proprietary software?

These questions represent the new frontiers of labour administration.

A second weakness is fragmentation of national regulatory frameworks. African countries continue to adopt different combinations of labour laws, judicial decisions, taxation regimes, social-security mechanisms, data-protection regulations and platform-specific policies.

Such fragmentation creates uncertainty for workers, governments and responsible businesses and may encourage regulatory arbitrage. C193 consequently provides an opportunity to establish common principles while permitting each country to adapt implementation to its own constitutional, legal and socio-economic circumstances.

A third weakness is the imbalance of bargaining power between multinational digital platforms and individual workers. Many platform workers negotiate against corporations possessing enormous financial resources, sophisticated technologies and extensive legal expertise.

The appropriate response is not to leave the individual worker permanently exposed. The appropriate response is collective bargaining, social dialogue, transparent regulation and effective public oversight.

C. OPPORTUNITIES

The first major opportunity is the African youth employment dividend. Africa possesses an exceptionally youthful population, and the digital economy has the potential to generate substantial opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship and income generation.

However, Africa must not confuse quantity with quality.

Africa does not merely need digital jobs; Africa needs decent digital jobs.

Through the effective implementation of C193, platform work can be transformed from precarious survival activity into a recognised and regulated component of the modern African labour market.

The second opportunity is the green transition and electric mobility. AUATON's Electric Vehicle Pilot Programme under the leadership of our National President comrade David Nosa which demonstrates how worker centred technological innovation can connect decent work with environmental sustainability.

However, the transition to electric mobility must constitute a just transition. Drivers must not be compelled to finance the green transition alone. Governments, manufacturers, financial institutions, platforms, development partners and workers' organisations must collaborate in providing affordable financing, charging infrastructure, maintenance, training and social protection mechanisms.

The third opportunity is continental harmonisation. The African Union, ECOWAS and other regional institutions should develop common principles on platform work, social protection, data governance, algorithmic accountability and cross-border digital labour.

Africa must not wait for foreign jurisdictions to define the future of African digital work.

Africa must participate in defining its own digital labour future.

The fourth opportunity is platform cooperativism. Workers should, where practicable, have opportunities to participate in ownership, governance and decision-making rather than remaining perpetual users of platforms controlled exclusively by external investors.

D. THREATS

Distinguished Comrades, one of the gravest threats is regulatory capture. If the development of platform-work regulations is dominated by platform operators and powerful commercial interests, regulatory architecture may become more responsive to corporate profitability than to workers' welfare.

Regulation must therefore be founded upon genuine and inclusive social dialogue involving governments, employers, platforms, trade unions, platform workers, civil society, technology experts and development institutions.

A second threat is data colonialism.

In the digital economy, data is power. Platform workers generate enormous quantities of commercially valuable information through their daily activities, including location, mobility, transaction, behavioural and performance data.

Africa must ensure that the digital economy does not become a new form of extraction in which African workers generate the data, foreign corporations control its economic value, and African societies receive only a marginal share of the benefits.

The third threat is arbitrary deactivation and pervasive job insecurity.

For a platform worker, deactivation is not simply the loss of access to an application; it may constitute the instantaneous suspension of livelihood.

Therefore, every worker must have access to transparent procedures, adequate explanation, meaningful review and effective remedies when accounts are suspended or deactivated.

III. CONFORMITY WITH EXISTING LAWS: THE ROAD AHEAD

Distinguished Comrades, the question is no longer whether digital platform work should be regulated. The question is how we regulate it intelligently, fairly, transparently and effectively.

In Nigeria, there is an urgent need for comprehensive review and appropriate legislative action addressing digital labour platforms, gig workers, employment classification, social protection, algorithmic management, data protection, deactivation, collective bargaining and dispute resolution.

The Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, the National Assembly, workers' organisations, employers and platform operators should collaborate in developing a coherent national framework for the implementation of C193.

In South Africa and Kenya, existing labour institutions and jurisprudence provide a useful foundation for developing enforceable standards addressing employment classification, social protection, collective representation, algorithmic decision making and account deactivation.

Within ECOWAS, countries such as Ghana, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire should explore regional principles capable of preventing a regulatory race to the bottom in which platforms relocate activities to jurisdictions with weaker worker protections.

Similarly, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania should explore cooperative approaches to platform work, including models through which workers may participate in ownership, governance and collective decision making.

THE FOUR DIMENSIONAL ROADMAP

I therefore propose a Four Dimensional African Roadmap for the Implementation of C193.

First: The Legal Dimension

African governments should pursue ratification, legislative review, employment-status clarification, freedom of association, collective bargaining, protection against unlawful deactivation, effective dispute resolution and meaningful enforcement.

Second: The Economic Dimension

Governments and social partners should consider mechanisms such as a National Platform Work Welfare and Development Fund to support social security, pension participation, occupational safety, skills development, affordable vehicle financing, electric-mobility transition and emergency assistance for vulnerable workers.

Third: The Social Dimension

The future of platform work must be founded upon genuine social dialogue. Workers must not be invited merely to endorse decisions already made by governments or platforms. They must participate meaningfully in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Fourth: The Technological Dimension

African labour institutions must acquire the capacity to understand algorithms, artificial intelligence, automated decision making, digital surveillance, worker rating systems, data governance, algorithmic discrimination and digital evidence.

The labour inspector of tomorrow must therefore be more than an inspector of physical workplaces.

The future labour inspector must understand the digital workplace.

We need labour administrators who can interrogate algorithms, regulators who understand data, trade unions that understand technology, and workers who understand their digital rights.

CONCLUSION

Distinguished Comrades,

Let me conclude with this unequivocal proposition:

ILO Convention No. 193 is not an enemy of technology; it is an instrument for ensuring that technology serves humanity.

Technology must never become a sophisticated mechanism for transferring economic risk from corporations to workers.

We cannot build billion-dollar digital economies upon the economic insecurity of African workers.

We cannot celebrate artificial intelligence while tolerating artificial insecurity.

We cannot praise innovation while allowing exploitation to hide behind algorithms.

And we cannot speak eloquently about the future of work while excluding workers from the very conversations that determine that future.

Our greatest strength as app-based transporters is our resilience. But let us be unequivocal:

Resilience without rights is not empowerment.

Resilience without protection is not progress.

Resilience without dignity is merely survival.

We move Nigeria.

We move Kenya.

We move South Africa.

We move Ghana.

We move Rwanda.

We move Morocco.

We move Egypt.

We move Africa.

We connect communities.

We facilitate commerce.

We support families.

We contribute to national economies.

We power the digital economy.

Therefore:

We deserve dignity.

We deserve protection.

We deserve social security.

We deserve collective bargaining.

We deserve justice.

And we deserve a meaningful voice in the future of work.

Consequently, I call upon the Governments of African States, the African Union, ECOWAS, regional economic communities, national parliaments, labour ministries, employers' organisations, digital platforms, development partners and trade union federations from the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) to COTU-K in Kenya, COSATU in South Africa and the TUC in Ghana to embrace the implementation of ILO Convention No. 193 with urgency, seriousness, political will and genuine social dialogue.

Let us ensure that Africa does not merely consume the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Let Africa shape the rules of the digital economy.

Let us ensure that the platform economy becomes an engine of decent work rather than a new frontier of exploitation.

Let us build a digital economy that is:

Innovative, but humane.

Profitable, but responsible.

Technological, but inclusive.

Modern, but just.

Above all, let us build an Africa where no worker is invisible merely because the workplace is digital.

Let the African digital economy become an instrument of shared prosperity rather than a mechanism of concentrated wealth; a platform for empowerment rather than exploitation; and a catalyst for inclusive development rather than a new architecture of inequality.

The future of work is already here.

The question before us is not whether Africa will enter that future.

The question is whether African workers will enter it with dignity, rights, protection and a voice.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Comrade Dr. Nwachukwu Chinedu Peter.National Ex-officio National Chairman, Media, Publicity and Technical Committee, AUATON nedupeters@gmail.com