Your Excellency John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana
Honourable Ministers
Distinguished Local Leaders
Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen;
All protocols observed.

In my house I have 5 employees. Elisabeth my housekeeper, Boniface my gardener and driver, and my three guards James, Dismas and Silas. According to some studies they represent the African middle class. I dare say; I know that they don’t consider themselves being representatives of a middle class even if they are better off than many others, people living in deeper poverty. They do not represent income levels that can help pull the country out of poverty.

In my employees I see a lot of talent and I see missed opportunities, not only for them but for the country, Kenya. There is certainly no lack of talent in Africa, but too often lack of opportunities. Knowing my employees well, I believe they would have been senior business accountant, technician, civil engineer, psychologist, business owner, had the opportunities been there. Maybe then, they would have labelled themselves as African middle class.

Sweden’s Finance Minister, Mr. Anders Borg, has been rated Europe’s best finance minister. In Europe he often speaks about madness, madness in repeating bad formulas of the past and expecting different results. He is a keen believer in “Africa rising”, even when some of us, like me, are
suggesting to him that maybe it is not so rise and shining for all. He is not naïve, he understands the challenges and the various steps required for African countries to pull themselves out of poverty and into middle income countries. But, he has a vision, a dream, that one day he will tell his great grandchildren that “once upon a time, Africa was a poor continent... I know it’s difficult to imagine but that was back in the early days of this century”.

I hope, and I am sure many more with me hope, that we get strong political engagement and leverage to tackle inequalities. I sincerely thank the Government of Ghana for hosting this conference and I hope Your Excellency that you will welcome us back for monitoring and follow up of progress. We need to be kept on our toes, whichever part of society we are representing. We need to forge partnerships between different parts of society; Government, private sector, civil society etc. Our talking will need to be turned into walking or even running at times.

On Thursday IMF launched the Regional Economic Outlook for subSaharan Africa 2014 in Nairobi with the theme “Fostering Durable and Inclusive Growth”. The outlook is that robust growth continues. However, after 10-15 years of good growth there is a need to shift from sustaining growth to also look at the quality of growth and how effectively it transforms into human development and poverty reduction.

IMF made an interesting comparison between Mozambique and Vietnam the last decade, both having experienced growth rates of 8 per cent. Whilst Mozambique had done well, Vietnam had much more effectively managed to transform the growth to poverty reduction through higher productivity growth in the agricultural sector and a much more rapid growth in the manufacturing employment making use of the pull factor – labourers being pulled out of the agricultural sector. As we all know, the lion’s share of the workforce in Africa is in the agriculture and household enterprises and this will remain for some time. Policies, investments and improvements in these sectors will therefore still be very important, while working on industrialization etc.

IMF concluded that by and large growth has been accompanied by improvements in human development outcomes in most African countries. However, surveys conducted by Afrobarometer in 34 African countries over a decade demonstrate that “lived poverty” remains pervasive across the continent even though five countries stand out with a
positive trend, Ghana being one of them. Despite high growth rates its effects are not trickling down to the poorest, that is, the large mass of populations on the continent. Add to that a population growth and we know that we have a challenge ahead of us.

Therefore, as a representative of Sweden I am very pleased that we have been able to support the preparations for this conference on tackling inequalities. Again, thank you Gov. of Ghana and collaborating partners. I wish you all a successful conference. Thank you!