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**CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON THE AFRICOVER PROJECT**

**STATEMENT**

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**United Nations Economic Commission for Africa**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 4 July 1994**

Mr Chairman,  
Distinguished Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), to participate in this important meeting to review the draft "African Inventory and Comprehensive Observation of Vegetation/Land Cover and Environmental Resources - AFRICOVER PROJECT". As the documents indicate, this project is intended to produce a vegetation cover map and related geographic database and to upgrade methodologies for national and subregional capacities for mapping and monitoring vegetation and landcover changes in Africa.

At the outset, I want to laud and commend the cooperation that exists between FAO and ECA in the organization of this meeting. The organization of this meeting is only the beginning of much more intensive activities that will follow in the implementation of the project itself. In this particular areas of surveying, mapping and remote sensing FAO and ECA have collaborated closely in the past in the organization of seminars and workshops, the most recent of which was the seminar on remote sensing for decision-makers, held in Nairobi in August 1991. FAO and ECA have worked very closely on the establishment of remote sensing programmes in Africa. It is, therefore, a feeling of great satisfaction that this cooperation has continued and that it will be strengthened in the joint implementation of this project on AFRICOVER.

Resources management and the conservation of environment for sustainable development are two of the current major concerns of the international community. Vegetation constitutes an invaluable ecological resources as the basis for a large variety of human activity, in response to population growth, particularly where

agriculture and agro-pastoral activities, constitute the mainstay of the economy. Its destruction, therefore, poses a very serious threat to human survival.

One of the major problems of monitoring the exploitation of natural resources in Africa has been the near absence of a systematic resource inventory at the local, national, subregional and regional levels. The most important tools for this purpose are the use of remote sensing technology in the establishment of geographic databases, specially adapted to land resources development and management.

The development and operationalization of satellite remote sensing techniques and methodologies in the last two decades have improved the development and management of natural resources, and the monitoring of the environment on global, regional, national and local levels. Information derived from these imageries in combination with data from other sources into databases using a geographic information systems has been successfully used in various application areas such as mineral and ground water resources exploration, agriculture, land cover inventories and land use studies, to name a few.

For Africa, satellite remote sensing technology applications has brought substantial benefits in accelerating the production process of new maps and in up-dating the existing ones, specially in the regions where the physical infrastructure is either poor or non-existent. The mapping concept has over the years been going through evolution, in which emphasis had shifted from topographic to thematic maps. This demand driven change has come about to the realization of member countries for reliable information for locating their natural resources and assessing the quantity and quality.

Within this context, the timeliness of the venture cannot be overemphasized. Its timeliness also falls within the global context of the monitoring of land resources as an integral part of the implementation of Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

The UNECA, has developed programmes that will provide a basis for the use of such a data-base as envisaged in the project for the social and economic development of the region, for environmental management, food and agriculture, population, social development and human settlements activities. All these are key programme elements in combating desertification. UNECA is well equipped to provide the necessary technical back-stopping and to participate in the implementation of the project.

Capacity building in terms of human resources development is a key issue for future development in resource management. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa recognizing the importance of mapping as a base for planning and development assisted its Member states in the establishment of subregional institutions or centres with the task of human resources development in the fields of mapping, surveying, remote sensing and other related areas of resources survey. In connection with this, I note with appreciation the substantive role of participation that has been earmarked for the existing subregional and national institutions which is an important factor for the sustainability of the project.

Participation in the project should be an integrated activity of relevant ECA-sponsored institutions such as the Regional Centre for Services in Surveying, Mapping and Remote Sensing (RCSSMRS), The Regional Centre for Training in Aerospace Surveys (RECTAS), the African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development, etc. It should assist them in capacity building, and the monitoring and assessment of ecological degradation including the development of

related models. This is why UNECA should be the second major executing agency for the project after FAO. The activities of the joint FAO/ECA Division have gone a long way to underscore this.

In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director General of FAO and all his colleagues for their untiring efforts in making the organization relevant for development needs for Africa. I wish also to express our appreciation to the strong and fruitful co-operation which both sister organizations have been maintaining in the pursuit of our common objectives in the realization of our development efforts in the continent. I hope that the close collaboration that has always existed between the FAO and the UNECA will continue to yield the needed benefits of programme implementation to our member States in Africa,.

I thank you for your kind attention.