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-Briefing to the African Diplomatic Corps
on the May 1996 Conference of Ministers
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Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I. Welcome to the first meeting in this new conference centre, an initiative of the African delegates to the General Assembly over a decade ago. It is fitting that you have the first use. We will have an official dedication soon, but we hope that in this trial run, we can start sharing the pride together of meeting in this magnificent place.

II. Today there are three purposes for my remarks:

A. To Brief you on the up-coming Conference of Ministers

B. To particularly Brief you on the Process of Renewal at ECA, which will be the heart of the agenda of this meeting of the Conference.

C. And to Ask your help to make the Conference a major
Success.

III. The Conference of Ministers

A. Part I of the agenda for the Conference and the Conference

Theme is: Meeting the Challenges of Africa's development in the 21st Century: The Role of ECA. Within this Theme we

present our proposed Renewal and our proposed medium term plan.

The Renewal is enormously important for the success of your Commission. Permit me to explain.

B. Our Perspective is not different from Yours

1. We are Committed to Renew ECA to SERVE AFRICA BETTER

In so doing we, like you, have a Vision of Africa for the 21st Century. It is a progressive vision.

We see a Renewed Africa:

--with Rising GDP, taking advantage of solid global growth, projected at 5.2% over the next decade and slightly less, but still solid for Africa, a growth level which will help reduce poverty.

-- We see Continuing Reforms, carried out with more experience and prudence than the past, and

incorporating balance safety nets for the poor.

These reforms will transit into more normal patterns of good governance.

-- We see Improved Terms of Trade as Africa learns to live

in the post Uruguay Round World and where the pace of decline in terms of trade slows down;

-- We see Africa Connected within itself so that while proud cultural and linguistic traditions continue, the old divides of trade along artificial lines are replaced by new solidarities; and that Africa is profitably connected with the global economy.

C. Renewed ECA.

1. To make this vision happen will require work from all of us including a Renewed ECA:

-- ECA needs a renewal because, your Governments, the General Assembly and a number of global and regional fora have given us specific

Responsibilities;

-- Because there are excellent new opportunities;

as Africa is at a turning point;

-- Because you and I are part of a new generation

of workers and leaders, aware of the wretched

colonial past, but not immobilized by it;

-- Because marginalization must be arrested by
- a United Africa;

-- Because we have new UN Responsibilities,
including co-managing the UN System-wide
Special Initiative for Africa.

-- Because there is need for us to be a positive
force, to emphasize what works and to bolster

faith in itself:

-- And because We can Do Better.

2. In our renewal our Guiding Principles are:

--Excellence;

-- Cost Effectiveness; and

-- Partnership.

3. We aim to have:

-- sharper programme focus

-- far more use of new technologies in our
operations:

-- we will further foster Africa's

growing pluralistic forces, particularly the private sector and civil society;

-- we will strive for consensus;

-- we will have much greater outreach; and

-- we will increase our accountability

to Member States, the UN and

Africans at large.

4. The Process of Renewal has involved:

-- Expert Diagnosis by a number of world class centres of expertise;

-- Major Reviews in which there has been more in-house participation than in

any time in memory;

-- A major Consultation two months ago on our

improved programmes with an impressive

group of leading ministers, academics and

NGOs and private sector leaders. As well, I

visited a number of African capitals, most

recently in North Africa, meeting with

ministers and heads of state.

5. From all this we are underway to carry out:

-- a major reorganization

- a redeployment of staff based on careful skills assessments and strict adherence to UN personnel rules;
- a series of management reforms;
- systems to better assure full accountability;
- a much improved personnel system where fairness, transparency and high professionalism will be the rule;
- and a series of Institution Strengthening Steps
 - Training of staff;
 - Skills upgrading;
 - Fellowships to allow outstanding younger Africans to work with us; and
 - Sabbaticals to allow leading academics to spend time with us.

6. The background document presents to you and the Ministers an important proposal for Reforming ECA's Programmes. Our consultations, all my meetings with your governments, and a recent consultative meeting with 20 donors all urged us to Focus carefully.

a. From 21 programme areas in 9 themes, we will have

5 themes and two cross-cutting issues.

b. The themes are spelled out in the documentation.

I

will just mention them:

-- Facilitating economic and social policy analysis, where we will sharpen our focus to

give added emphasis to remedies to

poverty and to highlighting best practices

in Africa's economic and social policies;

-- Ensuring food security and sustainable development where the foundations of so much development: food security, population and environment, will be the focus.

-- Strengthening development management to continue key work on fostering effective

public sectors, the private sector and civil society;

-- Harnessing information for development, an expansion of existing work which could help Africa leapfrog years of effort; and

-- Promoting regional cooperation and integration to work on the Abuja Treaty

in carrying out shared responsibilities

with OAU and ADB, to help sub-regional

organizations, and to carry out

responsibilities in transport and energy.

7. Our Two Cross-Cutting Themes are

Gender where we will engender all our programmes and upgrade our African Centre for

Women. I believe the gender issue is one of the keys to progress in Africa and elsewhere;

and Capacity building, which also will cross-cut ECA's programmes.

We look forward to the discussion on these programme emphases in the Conference of Ministers. Our consultations within Africa and with the donors have been very constructive and have yielded consistently constructive views on these recommended programme frameworks. The advice and guidance from the Conference of Ministers will be the capstone of these discussions.

8. ECA's Operations will strive to position ECA to

become a much improved:

--Think tank for Africa:

-- a Clearing House for best practices in Africa;

-- a policy integrator being not the sole-source producer of thinking, but the integrator of the best minds we can find in Africa;

-- and a Catalyst for people with good Ideas

9. We will also reform ECA's Modalities of implementation creating New Ways to Operate commensurate with an organization aiming to be of service in the 21st century.

-- We will use more electronic means of communication.

-- We are improving Dissemination of our products:

-- We will improve country targeting to be of better service:

-- We will produce fewer, but more policy relevant reports:

-- We will hold fewer but more goal-oriented Meetings; and

-- We will work with Member States to rationalize sponsored institutions which are either duplicative or unviable.

D. We are Part of the United Nations

a
1. That brings us strengths by association with
number of essential institutions, and we will
work closer within the UN family.

* 2. We have new responsibilities from the UN in that

I co-chair the UN System-wide Special
Initiative on Africa, which so many of you

* helped to launch one month ago.

* and we are likely to receive new

responsibilities to help harmonize the UN's work

in Africa.

3. Even if the UN did not have a Budget Squeeze
we would undertake these reforms because we
must

Serve Africa Better.

* E. In all our work we will be Seeking Partnerships

Even the largest organizations in the world do
this.

A collection of 200 professionals can hardly do
less.

1. Within Africa we will be Networking

significantly with policy networks and
centres.

We will be helping to create firmer links
within and across sub-regional and
linguistic networks.

2. We will foster South-South cooperation with the help of regional UN commissions in Asia and Latin America.

This last week senior delegations from China, India and Indonesia came to discuss several concert linkages. There is great promise in working with these countries, as many of you know firsthand.

3. And we will partner With Donors, seeking help in capacity building tasks for the institution and for strengthened programmes. In our meeting last week with 20 donors, including the G-7 countries, the Scandinavians, Austria, Belgium, The Netherlands, the Bretton Woods institutions, the Carnegie Corporation, and, as

I said, China, India and Indonesia.

there was firm support for the renewal process:

consistent advice to focus ECA's programmes

sharply within the proposed programme framework and the promise that if the reforms

are implemented, important support will be

likely.

F. The spirit of all this, was caught by a leading South African academic who attended our January consultation when he said that the renewed ECA we proposed would allow Africa to say:

"This is our institution, carrying out our agenda on our continent."

IV. NEXT STEPS

- * Now let's talk about Next Steps
- * At the Conference of Ministers ECA's whole renewal and proposed focused programmes will be presented for approval and, I hope, for counsel by the Ministers on choosing priorities within the programme framework. We are ambitious but we are not large enough to do everything. I will pose trade-offs to the Ministers in the hope that they will help ECA determine where the demand for our national and regional services is greatest on given themes. To the extent we can focus sharply our effectiveness will rise. This also has implications on mandates. Too many mandates in the past has spread us too thin. We must work together to

focus on the essential, because the desireable is just too much.

Immediately after the Conference of Ministers

we will proceed with the Restructuring of the programme side of the House (the Administrative side having already been restructured).

We will then move to programme selection for the Medium Term Plan on a careful basis, within the framework approved by the Conference of Ministers, and

we will also rationalize current programmes within the

approved framework, as possible and feasible.

* The Medium Term Plan to be presented, is congruent with the consolidated Programme framework I have presented to you.

With these important steps in place the Future of ECA will

be much brighter.

I invite the support of your Governments to the renewal and the related Medium Term Plan.

V. OTHER AGENDA ITEMS

There are other agenda items also of importance

A. Part II of the agenda has three items:

#1. A review of Africa's socio-economic development situation and our projections for 1996.

#2. The UN System-wide Special Initiative on Africa. Here I would hope the spotlight will be on the great potentialities to Africa of this Special Initiative and, as well, the need for serious national planning if your countries wish to take advantage of the major components in the Special Initiative... basic education, health and household water supplies. The full report on the Special initiative has been circulated to you as a Conference document.

#3. Exploiting Information Technology. This is an Action Plan and it is close to my heart. A growing number of us recognize the enormous potentials for Africa from the information revolution. Africa could leapfrog years of development if it joins the information age. We have a chance at this Conference of Ministers to agree on a responsible, African-defined framework

for growing the information revolution on this continent. ECA is an active player now and hopes to be a very active partner with your countries in harnessing information for development.

Part III of the agenda has two very useful items:

First, is on follow-up to international and regional conferences. On this item you will find the U.N. far more organized than in the past. All UN agency heads now see the follow-ups in a far more integrated way, avoiding duplicative follow-up assignments when a similar conference action has been repeated conference after conference.

The Second item under Part III is a Joint OAU/ECA Progress Report on implementation of the Abuja Treaty. I want to stress this item given the importance of the Treaty and a of a new era of collaboration which OAU Secretary-General Salim Salim and I are leading for our two institutions.

This report is important. We hope to have a lot more to report to you in coming sessions.

Part IV are Statutory Issues, including a progress report on our important On-Going Programmes. We do have on-going responsibilities and we are working hard not to neglect them despite the difficult budget situation of the UN and our necessary renewal.

The Conference will also consider a number of resolutions from subsidiary bodies and in doing so I again urge us to focus on the essential.

We also include a progress report on evaluation at ECA. I merely wish to comment that we are re-engineering our systems to be far more transparent and accountable. Programmes will be designed not to produce paper or meetings, but to produce results of value to Africa. I hasten to say that I do not minimize the numerous past accomplishments of ECA, but our management changes signal a significantly different

of doing business, one that should make for better use of
resources and for far more accountability to the Conference of
Ministers.

Special Events:

You will find in the agenda a number of special events. As
special events. I have been inspired by the President of
ECOSOC, Ambassador Khan of Pakistan, who has been working
hard to better tap the intellectual talents present at ECOSOC
meetings. For example he organized very useful high level panel
discussions as part of ECOSOC's meetings in Geneva last July. I,
too, want to see if together the Ministers and I can make the
best possible use of our time together.

We are arranging an opening address by an outstanding
international figure.

There will be a panel discussion in TEPCOW by leading
experts on the topic: Framework Agenda for Building and

Utilizing Critical Capacities in Africa. This is a very important topic and we will cover it in an innovative way.

There will be a panel at the Conference on Poverty and Public Expenditures by leading international figures.

I also wish to explore in an orderly way during the coming year other ways the utility and impact of the Minister's time and the Conference process can be maximized.

In all this, ECA hopes that solid substance and innovative features will add to the value of Conference meetings for your delegation.

VI. ASKING YOUR HELP

Because the Renewal of ECA is important to Africa, Because the Medium Term Programme will entail new services to Member States and a new way of doing business, Because discussion of the UN System-wide Special Initiative on Africa could provide sizeable potential resources for your countries,

and Because of special efforts to add significant substance and results from this Conference of Ministers meeting...I have a request for you.

In case your Ministerial member of the Conference is not yet planning to attend, I would ask you to draw upon my remarks to make a case to the Minister to attend. We have already taken a number of steps to enhance the level of participation and that may have helped a number of ministers to decide to attend. But more Ministers could and, permit me to say, should attend, if at all possible. This is a new era at ECA and having a true Ministerial Conference will expedite the renewal of ECA and its improved service to the Member States.

Personal Note: I am committed to ECA and its Renewal to Serve Africa better.

Thank you so very much for attending this briefing. Your personal interest in the Commission and its key meetings is of the greatest importance to us.

If you have questions on the up-coming Conference, I will try my best to answer them.

Again. Thank you. Excellencies. Colleagues.