

The 14th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union

Statement by Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA

29 January 2009, Addis Ababa , Ethiopia

Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellency, Mr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the AU Commission,

Honourable Ministers,

African Union Commissioners,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by extending my season's greetings to this Executive Council.

I pray that our continental organization will continue to grow from strength to strength and in this regard I salute my brother and friend, Mr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission for the renewed dynamism he has given to the African Union Commission as attested to by the successful arrangements made for this meeting.



Your meeting is taking place at a truly momentous time in African and global affairs. We are inspired and encouraged by the example of a peaceful and successful transition in Ghana and by the historic election of the first African-American President of the United States of America . These events clearly demonstrate the virtues of good governance to which this continent is firmly committed. A litmus test of this commitment is the African Peer Review Mechanism which continues to be managed in a credible manner.

In my last two statements to this Council, I pointed to the strong economic performance of Africa with average growth rates of above 5% which though commendable was not enough to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Against this background, our continent now faces pressing challenges relating to the global financial crisis, climate change and the maintenance of peace and security.

The current financial crisis is unprecedented in scale and scope and will impact on growth and trade as well as on investment, trade credits, remittances, and tourism. Moreover, several African countries have experienced volatility in their stock market and exchange rates since the onset of the crisis. Above all, we must be concerned about the impact of this crisis on the fight against poverty, which had already been negatively affected by recent historical peaks in food and energy prices. In this regard, it is essential to keep commitments to scale-up official development assistance to African countries so as to sustain growth in the continent and protect vulnerable groups.

However, we should not panic but use the current crisis as an opportunity to consolidate recent macroeconomic achievements and for putting measures in place to further diversify our economies. We need to increase agricultural production and diversify into manufacturing and services in order to provide jobs for our teeming number of unemployed youth. Diversification will also give our economies the resilience to deal with future economic shocks to which they are now vulnerable.

Diversification and domestic resource mobilization were key elements in the road-map for a coordinated and coherent African response to the global financial crisis drawn up by the Tunis Meeting of African Finance Ministers in November 2008. They also established a Committee of Ten Ministers of Finance and Central Bank Governors to continue to reflect on the issues involved and a report on the Committee's work so far will be rendered to the forthcoming Summit .

The economic and financial crisis also underscores the need for cooperation and collaboration amongst states at various levels of development. This applies in particular to African economies which are relatively small and fragmented. Africa's regional integration agenda should therefore be speeded up to give impetus to the NEPAD agenda on intra-Africa trade and also to infrastructure – the thematic issue to which the next Summit is dedicated.

Efficient and reliable transport and energy infrastructure has a critical role to play in socio-economic and physical integration. Yet, under 40% of Africa 's population has access to electricity, while several countries are experiencing severe power shortages that are contributing to a slowdown in economic activity. Africa 's transport networks remain similarly underdeveloped while the implementation of the Yamousoukrou Declaration liberalizing air transport in the continent can be

improved upon. These deficiencies impact negatively on the competitiveness of the African economy and need to be tackled through increased investment, better regulatory frameworks and investment priority setting.

Climate change must continue to engage our collective consciousness. Africa will bear most of the brunt of climate change and therefore needs to factor in mitigation, adaptation, financing and technology issues into its policy agenda. Action is needed at several levels but an immediate concern relates to global negotiations that will determine the future management of climate change. We have to engage actively in the negotiations processes in order to protect our interests which is why I urge this Council to take a keen interest in this matter and ensure active African participation in the United Nations Conference on Climate Change taking place in Copenhagen in December 2009. To support this process, the AU Commission, AfDB and Economic Commission for Africa are finalizing the Clim-Dev Africa programme, a crucial component of which is the African Climate Policy Centre which is poised to take-off.

Africa's ability to meet its challenges head-on depends on the consolidation of peace and security and the cessation of violent conflict and civil wars. It is consequently of great importance that the African Union has focused attention on this very critical sector and that it has placed emphasis on the actualization of its Peace and Security Architecture, Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development as well as human rights, justice and reconciliation.

The United Nations system stands ready as always to accompany Africa's efforts in all these areas. In this regard, the 9th Annual Meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism of United Nations agencies working in support of the AU and its NEPAD programme focused on articulating a coordinated multisectoral response to the challenge posed to Africa by the food crisis and on UN support to climate-related actions at the regional level. The functioning of the RCM has improved greatly in the recent past and the African Union Commission, the NEPAD Secretariat and Regional Economic Commissions are all actively engaged in this process.

Last November, the AU Commission, African Development Bank and ECA co-organized with other partners the 6 th African Development Forum, whose theme was “ *Action on Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Ending of Violence Against Women* ”. The Consensus Statement and Action Plan adopted at the end of the Forum provide a good basis for us to move from commitment to delivery. Our cooperation in organizing this event reflects the exemplary level of collaboration between your three pan-African institutions, which is thriving and remains deserving of your continued support.

The United Nations remains firmly committed to supporting the African Union in its noble efforts build a stable and renascent Africa. An Africa has been making steady progress but is now confronted with several challenges which are not of its own making. We should however draw on the confidence and self-belief embodied in the campaign slogan of President Barack Obama so that Africa can actualise its dreams and affirm that “Yes, we can”.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you successful deliberations.