

Statement by Mr. Abdoulie Janneh at the Third Conference of African Ministers of Integration (COMAI III)

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

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

22-23 May 2008

Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellency, Mr. Guillaume Soro, Prime Minister of Côte d'Ivoire ;

Your Excellency, Mr. Laurent Dona Fologo, President of Economic and Social Council of Cote d'Ivoire ;

Your Excellency, Mr. Amadou Kone, Minister of African Integration, Cote d'Ivoire ;

Your Excellency, Dr. Maxwell Mkwezalamba, AU Commissioner for Economic Affairs;

Your Excellency, Mr. Babamga Tukur, Chairman of the NEPAD Business Group Africa ;

Your Excellencies, African Ministers responsible for Integration;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is a pleasure to be here again in Abidjan and to enjoy the fraternal and warm hospitality of the people of Cote d'Ivoire . I would therefore like to start by thanking you, Honourable Prime Minister, and through you President Laurent Gbagbo for accepting to host this important meeting. Cote d'Ivoire has an exemplary track record in promoting regional integration and it is fitting that this important meeting is taking place here under the patronage of a leader whose commitment to this ideal is not in doubt.

Mr. Prime Minister, we salute you for your tireless efforts in pushing forward the development agenda of this great nation as well as your commendable contribution to the on going efforts to safeguard the peace and security of the nation and sub-region. Your presence at this meeting also demonstrates your clear commitment to the vision of pan-Africanism. May your efforts lead to a crowning success so that Cote d'Ivoire could regain the economic motor of the sub-region. In this regard, let me salute His Excellency, Mr. Blaise Compaoré, President of Faso for his credible role in facilitating and accompanying your efforts in the attainment of peace and security.

I would also like to take this opportunity to salute the efforts of the African Union Commission to promote regional integration in Africa . The keen commitment of the Commission is manifest in the institutionalisation of this meeting and articulation of regional integration programmes. In this regard I would like to thank Dr. Maxwell Mkwezalamba, African Union Commissioner of Economic Affairs and his staff for their good work they are doing and for their willingness to work closely with ECA in promoting regional integration in Africa .

Mr. Chairman;

As we meet here today, there are serious reflections going on with regard to the African integration agenda. For instance, the Committee of 12 Heads of State, mandated by the last African Union Assembly, are meeting in Arusha to reflect on a framework for building the Union Government of Africa . Two weeks ago, related discussions took place at the extraordinary meeting of the AU Executive Council which examined the *Report on the Audit of the African Union* . Civil Society Organizations, trade unions, private sector bodies and other organizations are also engaged in deliberating on the future of Africa .

Many of our countries are pursuing policies, which are geared towards sustainable economic growth and poverty alleviation in line with the priorities of NEPAD. It is therefore encouraging that the overall economic performance of the continent remains strong, with the continent's economy growing at about 5.8 per cent in 2007 up from 5.7 per cent in 2006. Factors accounting for the growth include increased global demand for commodities, such as crude oil, metals and minerals; improved macroeconomic management; increased private capital flows; as well as better governance in many parts of the continent. Current indicators show that growth in Africa is expected to remain high over the next two years.

Despite their improving economic circumstances, African countries continue to face formidable economic challenges, including the management of current high oil and food prices. Moreover, there is still no clear evidence that recent growth has effectively reduced poverty or created decent jobs for our rapidly growing labour force. We therefore need to fully harness regional resources as well as scale up public and private sector investments in order to maintain and sustain this positive trend in growth as well as achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Mr. Chairman;

The need for the continent to deepen integration is stronger than ever as national efforts alone are not sufficient for maintaining the positive growth trend in Africa . In light of this, effective transboundary strategies and policies are required in order for the continent to collectively overcome its multi-faceted obstacles, which cut across national boundaries. It is indeed heartening that Africans mostly agree on the need to deepen the political and economic integration of the continent and what is required now is for us to move quickly to finalize consensus on what the future architecture should be. The theme of today's meeting, *How to Successfully Integrate Africa* , is therefore germane, timely and appropriate. We should continue to examine all available options and collectively propose the best framework for strengthening and deepening African integration.

Mr. Chairman;

There is no doubting that Africa is making considerable progress in its efforts to integrate. Efforts are being made to harmonize policies while improvements have been made in the areas of trade, macroeconomic policies, infrastructure, and ICTs. Several RECs have also taken steps to improve their institutions to accelerate the process of sub-regional integration and most of them have adopted policies that would take them to a deeper phase of integration by becoming free trade areas, common markets, customs unions or monetary unions. Several of our regional groupings have also taken steps to improve their financial standing and to create financial structures to support the regional integration process. Progress is also being made with regard to the development of policies to manage common water resources and to develop regional infrastructure such as roads, telecommunications links and power pools.

However, there are key challenges remaining particularly in regards to the low level of intra-African trade and the slow progress in monetary integration as well as continued limitations on the free movement of people. African countries would also need to commit to effective structural diversification of their production and exports to take advantage of global trade and production processes. Moreover, deeper integration in Africa cannot be achieved with the current quality of infrastructure which must be improved including enabling better links between different modes of transport. I am glad that these issues feature on the agenda of this meeting.

I would therefore urge this important meeting to focus on removing key constraints to regional integration and to identify readily implementable measures to accelerate the process. In this regard, I would like to identify issues such as:

- The maintenance of policy dialogue on all aspects and elements of African integration, of which this meeting is a very good example.
- The establishment of a clear roadmap for achieving full integration at all levels. The roadmap should have timelines for achieving specific minimum levels of integration and clear benchmarks established for each member State and monitored periodically;
- The mainstreaming of regional integration into the development strategies of member States;
- The strengthening of the financial and human capacities of regional economic communities, to improve their effectiveness in the implementation of agreed regional activities;
- The acceleration of physical integration of the continent by the strengthening and improving of infrastructure on the continent;
- The removal of physical and non-physical barriers within and between African countries with an aim of improving intra-African trade; and
- The active involvement of the private sector and the civil society organizations in regional integration programmes. It is through the participation of these two groups that regional integration would be felt at the national level.

ECA continues to align its work programme with the broad vision and objectives of the African Union . The pursuit of continental integration requires the support solid analytical research. That is why we collaborate with the African Union Commission to produce a regular report on – *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa* (ARIA). The forthcoming edition of ARIA is on “ *Macroeconomic Convergence and Monetary and Financial Integration.* ” We will shortly discuss the African Union Commission, in association with African Development Bank, that the next edition of ARIA be devoted to the promotion of infrastructure to enhance intra-African trade. ECA would also partner with the African Union Commission to establish an observatory on regional integration in Africa sometime next year. The main objective for establishing the Observatory/Portal is to provide regular information, facts and figures, on Africa's regional integration agendas across RECs and member States . The Observatory would also facilitate the dissemination of activities and publications of AU Commission, ADB, ECA and partners in the field of regional integration.

ECA's sub-regional offices continues to be strengthened as an integral part of our strategy for promoting regional integration in the continent and they have developed multiyear programmes of work with their respective regional economic communities. It is hoped by this means that the full range of our knowledge, advisory services and capacity building activities will be used to support the work of the RECs that are the building blocks of the continent's integration.

This meeting has a very important agenda before it and its outcome will have far-reaching implications for achieving the desired goal of a more integrated Africa . I therefore wish you every success in your deliberations and thank you for your kind attention.

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