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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

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Ministers

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REPORT OF THE  
AFRICAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

\* E/ECA/TPCW.7/1  
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1. An African Environmental Conference was organized by UNEP in response to a request by the African member States at the eleventh session of the UNEP Governing Council in May 1983 who adopted decision UNEP/GC.11/7 Part 8A on the matter. The African Governments requested the Executive Director of UNEP to convene the Conference, in co-operation with regional organizations and institutions, to discuss national environmental priorities and identify common problems worthy of a regional programme of action to deal with the most serious environmental problems in Africa.
2. To implement the UNEP decision 11/7, the UNEP Regional Office for Africa (UNEP/ROAF) which provided the secretariat services for the African Environmental Conference, consulted with both ECA and OAU on several occasions between 1983 and 1985. The UNEP/ROAF also organized six subregional environmental group (SREGs) meetings, culminating in the African Regional Expert meeting of all the SREGs in Lusaka, Zambia in April 1984. The preparatory activities for the African Environment Conference were reported to the UNEP Governing Council at its thirteenth session in May 1985 who adopted UNEP/GC.13/6 decision on the matter. UNEP then proceeded to prepare the report of the Executive Director for the Conference in consultations with ECA and OAU. The draft report was further discussed at a meeting of African experts and at a United Nations inter-agency meeting, both of which were held in Geneva in July 1985.
3. The African Environmental Conference was held at the Meridian Hotel, Cairo, Egypt, in two parts, namely, an Expert Group meeting from 12 to 15 December 1985 followed by the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment from 16 to 18 December 1985. This report on the Conference is presented in three sections, namely a background statement already given above, highlights of the deliberations, and finally the recommendations made for consideration by the ECA Conference of Ministers at its twelfth session in April 1986.

#### Highlights of the Conference

4. The African Environmental Conference dealt mainly with developing a Cairo Programme for African Co-operation and examining a machinery for putting the programme into action. The main purpose of the Conference was for African ministers and their experts responsible for environmental matters to discuss their national environmental priorities and identify common problems worthy of a regional programme of action to deal with the most urgent and serious environmental problems in Africa (see UNEP/GC decision 11/7/8A).

#### Cairo Programme for African Co-operation

5. The Programme of Action for African Co-operation on the Environment was based on a number of intra-African commitments for the protection of its environment such as: the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos (1980); the Regional Food Plan for Africa (1980); the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (1968); and more recently the ECA Special Memorandum on Africa's Economic and Social Crisis (1984) and the Regional Plan of Action to Combat the Impacts of Drought in Africa (1984).

6. In addition to the above intra-African regional commitments on the environment, the majority of African Governments are supporting, through national activities, the following international commitments on the environment, namely: the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (1977); the Mar del Plata Action Plan for the development and management of water resources (1977); the World Conservation Strategy (1980); the World Soils Policy (1982); the World Charter for Nature (1982); and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982).

7. All of these regional and international commitments aim at preventing the degradation of the natural environment, enhancing rehabilitation of the natural resources bases, attaining self-sufficiency in food and in energy production and correcting the imbalance between population growth and resources use in the continent.

8. Hence, the adopted Programme of Action for African Co-operation strives to integrate environmental concerns into ecologically sound development at the national level whilst promoting subregional and regional co-operation in the continent to solve common environmental problems. The Cairo Programme takes a multidisciplinary approach to the study of natural ecosystems on which development is dependent by concentrating on:

(a) Those ecosystems which are so fragile that uncontrolled development activities lead to ecological degradation; hence they are of priority environmental concern, namely: deserts and aridlands; forests and woodlands; rivers and lake basins; and the regional seas around Africa;

(b) The establishment strengthening of eight regional technical co-operation networks for: environmental monitoring; climatology; soils and fertilizers; water resources; energy; genetic resources; science and technology; education and training in Africa;

(c) The selection of regional pilot projects in 150 villages in Africa (three per country) and 30 stock-raising zones in aridlands for attaining self-sufficiency in food and energy at the grassroot level; and

(d) The implementation of about 29 priority subregional ongoing and new project activities of common environmental concern.

#### Machinery for action

9. The African Environmental Conference considered the following machinery for the implementation of the Cairo Programme for African Co-operation, the details of which are elaborated in resolution 1/1 found in the Report of the Conference (UNEE/AEC.1/2) available as appendix I to this paper:

(a) The institutionalizing of the conference as the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment to meet every two years; (see section I/B.2 of above resolution 1/1);

(b) The establishment of a joint permanent secretariat based at UNEP, Nairobi, between UNEP, ECA and OAU to implement the Programme for African Co-operation (see section I/B.5 of resolution 1/1).

(c) The setting up of four intersessional committees to be chaired by four Vice-Presidents each dealing with either deserts and aridlands, forests and woodlands, rivers and lake basins, or the seas, to assist the Bureau in directing the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action (see section I/B.7 of resolution 1/1);

(d) The formation of an Inter-Agency Working Group to serve as a scientific and technical advisory body to the Conference bureau, and to seek to co-ordinate the relevant activities of international organizations to the African Programmes (see section I/B.5 of resolution 1/1);

(e) Setting up of each of the eight regional technical co-operation networks mentioned earlier at a designated national technical institution in a selected country, chosen according to geographical distribution, availability of infrastructural and back-up facilities, degree of commitment, potential capabilities for research and training, providing specialists, and its relevance to the specific area of concern. The networks will strengthen horizontal co-operation between national technical departments and scientific institutions for the collecting, processing, analysis, storing and dissemination of country basic data and information on the specific problem areas, for exchange between African countries in each network to solve environmental problems with trans-boundary effects (see section C of resolution 1/1);

(f) Financial arrangements for funding the Cairo Programme for African Co-operation using part of the UNDP country IPF, based on the United Nations scale of assessment for contributions to the regular budget, as voluntary contributions for the implementation of the Programme (see section I/F of resolution 1/1).

10. Finally, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, in the same resolution 1/1, section I/B.3:

"recommends to the conference of Ministers of the Economic Commission for Africa and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, that they should decide to entrust to the African Ministerial conference on the Environment the environmental functions of the Joint Intergovernmental Regional Committee on Human Settlements and Environment whose establishment was decided upon in the Lagos Plan of Action (following upon) General Assembly resolution 32/162 (of 19 December 1977) and resolutions 316 (XIII) of March 1977 and 403 (XVI) of April 1981 of the Economic Commission for Africa".

#### Recommendations for implementation

11. The ECA Conference of Ministers may wish to accept the recommendations of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment for the establishment of a joint permanent secretariat between the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Organization

of African Unity (OAU), which will implement the Cairo Programme for African Co-operation on Environment and Development as spelt out in the report of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (UNEP/AEC.1/2). The ECA Conference of Ministers may also wish to endorse the institutionalizing of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment to meet every two years, as well as the setting up of the four interessional committees, the eight regional networks for horizontal co-operation between member States in the key environmental areas selected, and the inter-agency working group, as additional machineries to implement the Cairo Programme for African Co-operation.

12. In order to continue to maintain the UNEP regional presence in the work programme of ECA which is mandated within the United Nations system to deal with the economic and social issues of development, it is suggested that the Joint Permanent Secretariat be located at ECA, notwithstanding the initial offer of UNEP to host the secretariat. Since UNEP's role as the lead agency for the global environmental programme is catalytic whilst ECA is an executing organ already dealing with environment and development problems in the African region, the latter can be strengthened, coupled with the co-operation of OAU, to execute the Cairo Programme for African Co-operation.

13. The existing Joint Intergovernmental Regional Committee on Human Settlements and the Environment (Joint Committee in short) can continue to meet as the technical working group of African experts to the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment. The technical meeting of African experts should preferably be held a few days earlier at the same location before the Ministerial Conference, as was done for the Cairo meeting but with inputs from the environment work programmes of ECA, OAU and EMBITRE.

14. For the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment to take over the environmental functions of, and to work closely with the existing Joint Committee of the Commission in its new role as indicated in the last paragraph above, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment will have to have a legal status within the Commission as well as within UNEP itself. Hence, the ECA Conference of Ministers may wish to accept it as a subsidiary body of the Commission, with a similar status to other ministerial legislative bodies such as that of Social Development, Trade or Industry, each of which report directly to the ECA Conference of Ministers of Economic Planning and Development as the governing body of the Commission.

15. It is important for the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment to have a legal status within the United Nations system as a subsidiary body of the Commission and of UNEP itself, in order that the ECA secretariat can produce outputs in the implementation of the environment in Africa biennial work programme as approved by the General Assembly, by reporting to it as an intergovernmental body. This is the most important role being played now by the existing Joint Committee as a subsidiary body of the Commission and for ECA to justify the resources provided and to be accountable to the General Assembly for implementing the approved environment in Africa work programme, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment has to be able to effectively undertake the full responsibilities of the Joint Committee as a subsidiary body of the Commission.

16. By its resolution 408 (XVI) of April 1981, the ECA Conference of Ministers decided to deal jointly with environmental and with human settlements problems, since it was a convenient practice at the national level to deal jointly with these problems within the same ministerial portfolio. Hence, the mandate of the then existing Intergovernmental Regional Committee on Human Settlements was extended to include environmental matters with the establishment of a Joint Intergovernmental Regional Committee on Human Settlements and Environment in July 1981. This Joint Committee meets every 18 months and plans to hold its fourth meeting in January 1987. In suggesting that the Joint Committee serves as the technical working group of African experts for the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, the ECA Conference of Ministers may also wish to stress that human settlements policies, programmes and priorities should be incorporated into the terms of reference of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment with a suggested name change to African Ministerial Conference on the Environment and Human Settlements.