TAKING AFRICA INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Twenty-eighth session of the Commission and Nineteenth Meeting of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Economic Planning and Development

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Your Excellency, Ato Tamirat Layne, Prime Minister of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia,
Honourable Ministers,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and Plenipotentiaries,
Your Excellency, Mr Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary-General of the Organisation of African Unity,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to Africa Hall and to the Nineteenth meeting of UNECA's Conference of Ministers responsible for economic development and planning and the Twenty-eighth session of the Commission. For me, this occasion is endowed with special significance. I have participated before in the Council of Ministers from 1973 to 1976, representing my country, Algeria; but this is the first Conference of Ministers since my appointment to take over the stewardship of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Let me use this opportunity, therefore, to pledge my personal dedication to UNECA's mandate -- to working as a team with all my colleagues throughout our continent and elsewhere, spearhead Africa's economic and social transformation and to accelerate the pace of its development. This, indeed, is the subject matter with which we will be preoccupied at this Conference, as we ponder the theme, "Taking Africa into the Twenty-first Century: Implementation of the Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community; and Agenda 21".

Allow me on the outset to pay sincere tribute, on all our behalf, to the people and Government of Ethiopia who have hosted the Commission for the last thirty-five years with generosity and dedication. The presence here today of His Excellency, Ato Tamirat Layne, Prime Minister of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, is testimony of Ethiopia's continued commitment to the work of the Commission and to the furtherance of the ideal of forging closer cooperation among African States. I wish to convey, through
you, our deepest gratitude to His Excellency, Mr Meles Zenawi, the President of the Transitional Government, and to the people of Ethiopia.

May I also take the opportunity to pay tribute to Dr Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary-General of the Organisation of African Unity and Mr Babacar Ndiaye, President of the African Development Bank with whom I work closely in the framework of the Joint Secretariat which was set up to coordinate and harmonise the mandates and programmes of our three continental organisations in the pursuit of economic development and social progress through practical implementation of pan-African integration and other strategic objectives.
II. Setting Africa on the Path of Rapid Development: Important Lessons.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a short seven years before the dawn of a new century and a new millennium. With the Cold War ended, dynamic forces are already at work, shaping a new future for the world. All the signs indicate that competitive energies and creativity will be vented in the arena of global trade and finance, spurred by technological innovations in all sectors of production, distribution and marketing. After the failure of the centralised approach of economic management to sustain social welfare gains everywhere it was applied, a universal consensus has taken root in favour of a more flexible market-based approach. In future, economic growth will be driven largely by interactions between self-motivated and enterprising private agents, big and small, rural and urban, in all sectors of the economy.

Africa cannot afford to be left behind by this new consensus of world development. Throughout the length and breadth of this continent, one feels a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction with the circumstances under which people find themselves. Discontent is building up to explosive levels, especially in the teeming cities. We who are charged with the task of finding solutions to the multifarious problems of our continent and of our countries, therefore, must act with a seriousness of purpose and a sense of urgency, fully aware that the livelihood and hopes of hundreds of millions of our people depend on what we do or fail to do, on the decisions
that we take and fail to implement. Our responsibility is a heavy one. As we contemplate the Twenty-first Century, we must wake up to the reality that too much time has been wasted already trudging the wrong path to development. We must make haste to find the right course.

The quality of life in Africa has deteriorated for more than a decade -- because the economy has not been able to transform and grow at a rate fast enough to employ, house, feed, clothe, provide social services, and give a rising standard of living to the growing population. Let 1993 go down in history as the year that Africa resolved to put itself firmly on the path of sustainable development. Africa's Leaders and external partners must resolve to halt the region's economic and social decline and begin to implement bold strategies to overhaul the underlying structure and spur sustained growth. It is to this end that this year's meeting of the Conference of Ministers was convened under the theme, "Taking Africa into the Twenty-First Century".

Your Excellencies,

There are important lessons that we in Africa and our external partners-in-development should learn from the post-industrial societies' long history of economic and social transformation and, more recently and closer to our own conditions, from the phenomenal success of the newly-industrialised economies of Asia and Latin America.

The first lesson is that Africa can overcome the inertia of under-development and step out of the poverty trap -- just as the oldest industrialised nations emerged from the pre-industrial age, feudalism and widespread poverty; in the same way as Japan, Germany, Italy and France rose from the ruins of World War II, or South Korea from the ruins of the Korean War; and, more recently, in the same way as China and countries of South-East Asia launched themselves on the course of rapid economic transformation and growth. Africa, too, can
achieve food security and sufficiency — as India has done in less than three decades.

Ironically, the second lesson is that we must adapt whatever we learn from others to African circumstances. When objectives and targets have been set, the transition to those objectives must be managed with tenacity. For economic reforms to succeed, they should not be applied precipitously, creating more losers than gainers and undermining the indispensable national consensus. Neither should mere lip-service be paid to the process of reform while, in fact, entrenching the status quo. Economic reforms cannot be sustained merely by the promise of long-term benefits. If reforms are to win the people's support, they must yield some tangible near-term pay-offs. This simply means that it is not easy to manage economic transition to a more sustainable order.

From the experience of the Asian economies that have sustained rapid transformation and growth, we should learn the superiority of pragmatism over dogmatism when managing complex transitions such as the transformation of socio-economic structures. We all know that the real world does not exactly conform to elegant theories. This is especially true of Africa's reality. Theoretical precepts are an invaluable guide to the locus of the social welfare optimum; but it has to be borne in mind that they relate to ideal and simplified conditions. A pragmatic approach to socio-economic restructuring reconciles theoretical objectives to real-life conditions which need to be changed. But pragmatism is not a licence to flout common-sense economic principles. This only fans the flames of hyper-inflation, undermines national currencies, destroys external credibility, incites the emergence of parallel markets, smuggling, influence-peddling and rent-seeking activities, all of which undermine economic efficiency and competitiveness within the world economy.

From the experience of the leading Asian economies, a pragmatic approach to reforms in areas such as the role of the
State, industrial policy, competitiveness, and the valuation of national currencies, rather than pure *laisser faire* where the chips are left to fall where they may, can allow an equitable social structure to be preserved, in spite of rapid transformation. In turn, this galvanises the national consensus behind economic reforms and assures their implementation by farmers, artisans, workers and enterprises in a climate relatively free of class conflicts.

Above all, the experience of economies that have achieved rapid transformation points to the indispensability of highly capable leadership, strongly committed and firmly grounded at home, not implicated in the flight of countries' precious financial capital, and possessing a clear vision of the direction in which the economy should evolve. Linked to this is an environment of political stability and economic predictability which, by reducing the risk factor, facilitates long-term investment decisions. In some of the fast-transforming economies, such stability has been provided by long-serving political leaders. But even where there have been frequent leadership changes, well-motivated and competent bureaucracies in strategic departments always set a clear direction of economic development and served as anchors of stability and continuity.

The question of which should come first -- political democracy and empowerment, or economic liberalisation and transformation -- has not been settled conclusively. However, the comparative experiences of "economic" and "political" reformers indicate persuasively that the people's well-being is more likely to be improved when political liberalisation lags behind economic restructuring -- that it is successful economic transformation which prepares the ground for a deep-rooted democracy. This suggests that multi-partism and structural adjustment programmes, the two transitions that African countries are struggling to manage simultaneously, will propel the continent towards economic transformation, growth, sustainable development and genuine democracy only if in each country a broad political consensus can be forged on
social and economic priorities and the ways and means of attaining them. All leaders of public opinion have to work together to preclude strife, instability and uncertainty. Broad consensus would no doubt include tenets such as respect for human rights; accountability and good governance; pulling together in national interests; promoting social well-being; constructive popular participation; fair play and mutual respect among members of the political class.

Faced with daunting socio-economic difficulties, it is tempting for countries to seek unilateral solutions to economic problems and to implement policies without considering their effect on other countries. Opportunities for cooperation are ignored from which the region as a whole would have reaped larger benefits and from which each country would be better off -- if only all would agree on equitable modalities to share benefits and costs of cooperation. We have important lessons to learn from the stage-by-stage construction of the European Community, culminating in the Single Market on January 1st, this year. The next daunting stages will be introduction of a single currency by the year 2000 and expanding the membership eventually to cover all European countries. There are lessons also from progress being made in setting up the North American Free Trade Area covering the United States of America, Canada, and Mexico. We should note that all this is taking place even as the Uruguay round of negotiations aims to radically liberalise world trade, the effect of which will be to intensify global economic competition. The only conclusion that can be deduced is that borderless regional economic spaces criss-crossed by hyper-efficient physical and financial infrastructures will be the basis of future global competitiveness. In this light, implementation of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community assumes real urgency.

It may be true that, in terms of agricultural and industrial development, Africa lags behind the other regions of the world. This, however, can be turned to advantage -- by launching the continent onto a path of socio-economic
transformation, sustained robust growth and development that is environmentally sustainable, along the lines set out in Agenda 21. Africa is in a position to avoid the horrendous environmental price which has been paid by regions that developed their agriculture, natural resources and industry with little regard to nature's carrying capacity. In Africa, we are also keenly aware of the vicious cycle between poverty and environmental degradation. To this end, a steady reduction in the incidence of poverty will be an important objective in Africa's development strategy.

II. Africa's Economy in 1992 and Prospects for 1993

Your Excellencies,

This year's Economic Report on Africa only serves to accentuate the urgency and seriousness with which we and our international partners must address the structural elements of Africa's under-development, and how to set the continent on the path of robust economic growth and sustainable development.

Like its recent predecessors, the report before us paints an unmitigated grim picture: weak economic growth in some countries, stagnation and contraction in others; declining exports and shrinking share of world trade; declining social welfare and deepening poverty in all subregions; unemployment and rampant frustration among the youth; inadequate medical facilities to combat spreading diseases some of which are making a come-back; drought, hunger and starvation -- this time in Eastern and Southern Africa; massive displacements of populations from areas of violent conflict; and total collapse of central authority, law and order in some countries.

By UNECA's preliminary estimates, Africa's economic output grew by only 1.5 percent in 1992, following a mere 2.3 percent in 1991 and 3.1 percent in 1990, against a population growth rate of about 3 percent. Thus average personal and family incomes as measured by per capita GDP have declined since 1980
almost without a break. The hard truth is that the structural adjustment programmes which a majority of our countries have applied since the mid-1980s are taking quite long to turn our economies around and put them on the track of self-sustaining growth that is less vulnerable to the climatic ups and downs.

The meagreness and fragility of the benefits that so far have come from economic reforms have vindicated ECA's basic critique in its "African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes (AAF-SAP)" -- that these reforms do not go far enough in correcting the structural causes at the root of Africa's under-development and economic malfunction. "Getting the prices right", eliminating policies that grossly distort market signals, and curbing public deficits are important for restoring domestic and external equilibrium and setting countries on an economically sustainable path. However, a comprehensive and cost-effective programme to develop human capabilities in terms of productive and entrepreneurial skills, science and technology is equally vital to attaining and maintaining a competitive position in the world economy of the Twenty-first Century.

In this year's Economic Report on Africa, a disturbing explanatory factor for poor economic performance in some countries where attempts have been made to introduce democracy is civil disturbances, strikes, scuffles, looting, even administrative paralysis occasioned by the emergence of rival political authorities vying for power in poorly-defined constitutional circumstances. This unfortunate development was first cited in last year's Economic Report. In a number of countries, quite frankly, the march to democracy has badly stalled. But the picture has not been uniformly grim: A number of countries held multi-party democratic elections whose outcomes were generally accepted by the contesting parties. The onus is on those countries to make democracy work in attacking Africa's socio-economic problems.

Weighing all the factors which contribute to Africa's poor economic performance, even under the most favourable
conditions, the best that can be expected in 1993 is a growth rate of at most 3 percent -- or just about the rate of population growth. There are signs that some of these conditions will materialise. Normal rains have resumed in Eastern and Southern Africa. The group of leading industrialised economies are expected to perform better than last year, though perhaps not strong enough to boost primary commodity prices. And, hopefully, African countries' economic reforms will begin to bear fruit. A big boost would be provided by the restoration of peace and security in all of Africa's strife-torn countries, followed by generous international cooperation for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

III. Taking Africa into the Twenty-first Century.

Your Excellencies,

Our countries and our continent will not break out of the poverty trap if rates of gross economic output are not accelerated well above the rate of population growth. If the trend of economic stagnation and decline persists, the incidence of poverty will increase.

Meanwhile, our continent is experiencing an urban explosion unprecedented in world history. Some African cities are faced with population growth at annual rates estimated to be as high as 10 percent -- without adequate resources to expand their infrastructures to cope with the influx; without vibrant urban economies to provide enough jobs; and lacking problem-solving civic leadership and competent management. The pressures of rural-to-urban migration will not be eased without implementing measures to boost the rural economy. But the process of urbanisation in Africa cannot be stopped altogether. Rural agriculture alone will not absorb all the population growth. The limited supply of arable land, the need for conservation, and labour productivity gains all will inevitably limit agricultural employment. The surplus labour will need to be employed in industrial and service sectors --
and these tend to be concentrated in towns and cities. A sound economic development strategy, however, can encourage the dispersal of urban settlements of manageable size, in a balanced relationship to their countryside.

Indeed, the multi-faceted and intertwined nature of Africa's socio-economic problems dictates that Africa's development in preparation for the Twenty-first Century should proceed in several directions all at the same time if significant headway is to be made. This is the principal conclusion of the UNECA report, Strategic Objectives for Africa's Development in the 1990s. It singles out three formidable challenges that Africa must face squarely in the remaining years of this decade: integrating Africa into the increasingly competitive, rapidly transforming global economy; engineering and sustaining robust expansion of the economy under conditions of environmental sustainability; and containing and transcending the HIV/AIDS pandemic. To cope with these challenges, ten strategic objectives are identified for African States, continental institutions, and the African people at large:

- A negotiated continental framework for regional security, stability and peace as a foundation for cooperation, integration and development in Africa;

- Establishment of the African Economic Community through prompt implementation of the stages set out in the Abuja Treaty;

- A comprehensive programme for building human capacities, including entrepreneurial skills, coupled with the indigenisation of science and technology and their application to agriculture, industry and other walks of life;

- Re-defining the role of the State in Africa with a view to strengthening its capacity to implement
political and economic reforms and safeguard good governance;

- Sustainable development of the continent's agricultural potential to achieve food security and sufficiency by the middle of the next decade;

- Sustainable development of the industrial base based on increasing the value added to Africa's natural resources and generating employment;

- Upgrading the continental transport, communications, and energy infrastructures — which is a sine qua non for the creation of a single African market;

- Effective participation in all ongoing global processes that are charting the future course of world development and the future international division of labour;

- A new pragmatic approach to Africa's external cooperation with countries in the developing world as well as with industrially-advanced countries, based on tangible and balanced mutual benefits; and

- Mobilisation of the required capital resources to launch Africa onto the path of sustainable development.

In fact, the Strategic Objectives paper does not promote a new plan of action as such. Rather, the purpose of this paper is four-fold:

1) To sensitise African and international Leaders and public to the continent's precarious position in the competitive world of the next century if the downward trend is not reversed;
2) To identify the principal reasons why the plethora of previous programmes of action for Africa's development failed to fully accomplish their objectives;

3) To synthesise into a revitalised common strategic agenda the core objectives which run through all the action programmes; and

4) To galvanise a renewed global coalition to launch a concerted assault on the structural causes at the root of Africa's under-development and put the continent firmly on the path of rapid economic transformation, robust growth and sustainable development.

The reports which will be presented by the secretariat focus on the key objectives in Africa's strategic agenda. The paper, "Proposals for the implementation of the African Economic Community", outlines a multi-institutional strategy for the first stage of the Abuja Treaty -- setting up and consolidating subregional communities, with the Joint Secretariat of the OAU, UNECA and ADB playing a coordinating role. The challenge of the transition to sustainable development in Africa is addressed in the paper, African strategies for the implementation of Agenda 21 : A proposal, which takes as its point of departure the African common position on environment and development at last year's Earth Summit.

A concerted assault on the structural causes of Africa's under-development will require considerable domestic and external capital resources. The secretariat has made an indicative assessment based on the growth target in the United Nations Agenda for the Development of Africa 1990-2000 (UN-NADAF). The findings are presented in the report, Strategies for financial resource mobilisation for Africa's development in the 1990s. The ECA study confirms that the rate of gross domestic investment needs to be boosted substantially to about 35 percent of GDP between this year and 2005. The dominant share of this investment will be mobilised from gross domestic
saving in Africa. This will require considerable belt-tightening on the part of African society as a whole to sustain a gross domestic saving rate of 25-35 percent of gross national income. It will also require appropriate fiscal and public administration reforms; policies that reward saving, investment and entrepreneurship; elimination of economic distortions; overhaul of the financial sector regulatory framework to speed up the growth of intermediary institutions; and a conducive political climate.

Still, external resources will continue to play a make-or-break complementary role, considering Africa's limited trade development potential in the medium-term. Between 1993 and 2005, the cumulative gross external financial requirements of ECA's 51 member States are indicatively estimated, in constant 1990 dollars, at US$950 billion. Of this, however, $490 billion is required to service obligations on inherited and future external debt, leaving $460 billion for capital investment. In the spirit of the UN-NADAF compact between Africa and international partners, these crucial external resource requirements can be mobilised through a variety of means: bold initiatives to reduce external debt; a substantial increase, in real terms, in official development assistance, especially non-debt-creating transfers; new private credit to finance economically-deserving projects; and resumed influx of foreign direct investment with its attendant technology, managerial know-how, and world export markets.

Other aspects of Africa's strategic agenda are also addressed in papers that have been prepared for this Conference. Human and institutional capacity building issues are covered by a number of reports on: implementation of a regional framework for human resources development and utilisation; the proposed African foundation for research and development; establishment of an African fund for youth; the role of African women in the 1990s; establishment of the federation of African women entrepreneurs, and an African bank for women; rationalisation and harmonisation of ECA-sponsored institutions; and a strategic agenda for development.
management in the 1990s. In the vital agricultural sector, a paper is presented on appraisal, monitoring and evaluation of the impact of biotechnology to highlight the potential of applied science and technology in increasing food security and sufficiency in Africa. In the area of industrial and infrastructural development, a report will be presented on harmonisation and implementation of the Second Industrial Development Decade for Africa (IDDA II) and the Second United Nations Transport and Communications Decade for Africa (UNTACDA II).

This meeting of the Conference of Ministers will also be appraised of issues related to Africa's effective participation in ongoing global processes. A report will be presented on implications of the Uruguay round of negotiations on Africa's trade. These talks have been stalled for two years by disagreements between the major trading powers, and there is understandable concern about the ultimate outcome. You will also review Africa's preparations for three United Nations international conferences due in the near future -- on population and development in 1994 in Cairo; the world social summit in 1995; and the fourth world conference on women in 1995 in Beijing.

IV. Developing Africa in the 1990s: The role of UNECA.

Your Excellencies,

The task of creating the proper conditions and providing leadership for accelerated development belongs primarily to the governments of our countries individually and collectively. On their part, Africa's external partners have a complementary role that is quite crucial -- to maintain a stable conducive global environment and provide essential external resources in support of Africa's restructuring process.

As one of Africa's three premier institutions, UNECA is ready to make its contribution in the years ahead. In
partnership with the OAU and ADB within the framework of their Joint Secretariat, UNECA will work for the establishment of the African Economic Community.

As the branch of the United Nations whose mandate it is to promote social and economic transformation and development in Africa, the Economic Commission for Africa has an important role to play in the formulation and realisation of the strategic agenda for Africa's development. This regional commission's 51 member States have yet to set up adequate technical machinery in all areas of social, economic, and environmental management. Their rehabilitation, transformation, and development still depend critically on assistance from external partners. The Commission has a vital role to play in building and strengthening human and institutional capacities of its member States. Africa's socio-economic problems have worsened even as the attention of its traditional partners-in-development is being drawn to other regions of the world in need of assistance for reconstruction in the wake of the Cold War. UNECA has to speak out ever louder on behalf of this region to ensure that African concerns continue to be on the global agenda.

The Commission will continue to be instrumental in forging strong partnerships between Africa and its external well-wishers. On one hand, it will fulfil this role by coordinating African countries; assisting them to design policies for the transformation of their socio-economic structures; working with them to establish their priorities; advising them on their external and domestic resource needs and on the most effective mobilisation strategies; etc. On the other hand, UNECA will continue to strengthen its relations with other branches of the United Nations family, including the Bretton Woods institutions, as well as other leading world institutions such as the European Community (EC) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in Africa.

The role that UNECA is gearing itself to play -- that of providing team leadership and exercising responsibility for
coordination and cooperation among United Nations agencies executing development programmes in Africa -- is at the heart of the Commission's primordial mandate. Recently, this role has received fresh endorsement by the Secretary-General, Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in the context of proposals to strengthen the regional commissions as the regional arms of a single, integrated United Nations programme. The decentralisation of functions and resources in specific areas aimed at greater programme complementarity and a more rational distribution of responsibilities is one of the corner-stones of the on-going reform and reorganisation of the UN system to increase its effectiveness and efficiency in fulfilling, in the post-Cold War era, the mandate of its Charter.

In this light, UNECA accepts the challenge to strengthen its organisational structure, its expert resource base, and its network of MULPOCs to live up to its more demanding role within the restructured United Nations Organisation as team-leader and coordinator of UN activities in Africa. The development of this continent is one of the UN's main priorities in the 1990s. Some countries are emerging from the throes of natural and human-made disasters. Many others are struggling courageously on with sweeping economic structural reforms while introducing democracy. The democratic, non-racial post-apartheid South Africa will need assistance from the United Nations family to stimulate economic growth and to surmount problems bequeathed by so-called "separate development". UN-NADAF commits African States and the coalition of external partners to work together to accelerate the region's development and achieve an average growth rate of 6 percent over the duration of the programme.

By providing team leadership and coordination on the basis of cooperation among equals working towards a common objective, the Commission intends to contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of UN programmes in Africa. To this end, the Inter-Agency Task Force, the only forum which brings together UN agencies active in Africa, with OAU and ADB as observers, to discuss Africa's development priorities,
allocation of resources, and coordination of activities, should be strengthened.

UNECA intends to further streamline and strengthen itself to upgrade its efficiency and effectiveness in serving its member States. It also intends to vastly improve the quality of its channels of communication and cooperation with African organisations, UN agencies, and international institutions. To this end, organisational restructuring is under way aimed at clustering divisions, sections and units whose activities are closely related, to enhance synergy among related programmes and reinforce the multi-disciplinary approach to problem-solving that is one of the sources of the Commission's comparative advantage. The 1992-97 medium-term plan and the revised programme of work for the 1994-95 biennium are themselves structured so as to cluster related areas of programme priority around major themes.

At a time when it is shouldering heavier responsibilities and an increased work load, the Commission continues to face a precarious financial situation due to a lack of growth in its regular budget allocation and a sharp decline in extra-budgetary resources. We are seriously exploring all possible sources of funding for our work. To this end, we intend to reinforce bilateral relations with all important world organisations and all United Nations member States with an interest in Africa's sustainable development. Let me use this opportunity to appeal to UNECA member States and to Africa's external partners to rally in support of the United Nations Trust Fund for African Development (UNTFAD) with generous financial contributions at its ninth pledging conference which will coincide with this Conference of Ministers.

Your Excellencies,

In deliberating on the proposals before you, it is worth bearing in mind that, ultimately, it is the people themselves -- farmers, fishermen, artisans, industrial workers, civil servants, managers and entrepreneurs -- who will accelerate
the continent's development by dint of their hard work, creativity, thrift, enterprise and prudence. What we can do is to create a conducive climate; implement sensible economic policies; and provide strong leadership that is at once far-sighted, committed, understanding, and a good example to follow. The pace of development, however, is determined by the people's system of values and their endowed capacities. If we wish to take Africa into the Twenty-first Century as an economically-integrated continent, firmly on the path of poverty-alleviating robust growth and sustainable development, we have to strengthen human and institutional capacities as a priority throughout Africa.

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once more, I warmly welcome you to our host city, Addis Ababa; and I wish you very fruitful deliberations.

I thank you for your kind attention.