MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
1. We, African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, meeting in Ouagadougou, 14-15 May 2006, under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), reaffirm the centrality of employment for poverty reduction and development.

2. We take note of the commitments made at the 2004 Extraordinary Summit of the African Union (AU) Heads of State and Government on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa as contained in the Ouagadougou Declaration and Plan of Action.

3. We recall the Ministerial Statement of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development held in Abuja in 2005 underlining the need “to develop strategies for generating decent and productive work for men and women as well as youth in Africa, and to explicitly address employment generation issues in national poverty reduction strategies.”

4. We take note of the first AU Biennial Report on the Ouagadougou Outcome (2006), reviewing progress made in fulfilling the recommendations of the 2004 Ouagadougou Plan of Action, and are concerned that: implementation so far has not been comprehensive; employment has not been adequately embedded in national development strategies; and sub-regional and national coordination has not been strong enough as a consequence of human, fiscal and institutional capacity constraints. Overall, we recognize the need to further refine and accelerate implementation strategies at all levels.

5. We also take note of the outcomes of the March 2006 African Plenary on National Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Implementation of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as well as the April 2006 Declaration on Financing Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa of the Fourth Ordinary Session of the AU Labour and Social Affairs Commission, both in Cairo, Egypt.

6. Acknowledging the diversity in economic, social and political conditions in Africa, we stress the need to design country-specific policies and programmes that are consistent with national priorities, with particular attention to the special needs of in-conflict and post-conflict economies and least developed countries (LDCs).


8. While pleased with the strong overall growth performance on the continent, we recognize that more efforts are required to ensure that a majority of Africans will benefit from improved macroeconomic conditions. We note in particular the need to harness economic growth to generate more decent jobs for our people, reduce the number of working poor, maximize the potential of our labour force, and eliminate the barriers to the entry of women and youth into the labour market.

9. Based on the above considerations, we hereby recommend as follows:
Mainstreaming employment in national development strategies and policies

10. It is our firm belief that the way forward in creating decent jobs in Africa lies in mainstreaming employment in the development agenda. We therefore commit to explicitly incorporate employment objectives in national development strategies and policies.

11. Given the importance of poverty reduction strategies (PRSs) as the framework for national budget allocation and official development assistance, we acknowledge the necessity of aligning the various processes towards realizing economic and social objectives in our countries, especially the MDGs. We also note the need to integrate the goal of decent employment into the design, implementation and monitoring of the second generation PRSs.

12. To increase employment generation, we commit to further embedding employment criteria in investment promotion policies.

13. In support of the above, we commit to increase our efforts towards domestic resource mobilization, and call upon our development partners to honour their aid commitments to African countries. We also urge our development partners to fully implement and expand the 2005 G8 Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative.

14. Recognizing the critical role of government and the public sector on employment creation, we commit to improve the quality of public finance management, alongside the development of accurate statistical and information systems to monitor impact of policies.

Addressing the special needs of post-conflict countries

15. Acknowledging the particularly fragile situation of African countries emerging from conflict, we request ECA, in close collaboration with AU and ADB, to set up a Technical Capacity Building Forum and a funding initiative with relevant stakeholders to support employment generation and reestablish economic development management systems. In this regard, we call upon all partners to provide a special “window of opportunities” that would enable post-conflict societies to access resources needed for critical recovery and reconstruction activities.

16. Recognizing the urgent situation of post conflict countries, we recommend that the Forum consults closely with the recently established United Nations Peacebuilding Commission. We also request that the Forum presents its findings and recommendations at the next Commission/Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, or, if need be, in an extraordinary session that would take place within the next six months.

Unleashing the potential of the private sector

17. In recognition of the increased role and responsibility of the private sector in employment generation, and the central role of the State in creating a conducive environment, we commit to take measures to improve the operations of the private sector: infrastructure improvement, elimination of unnecessary and costly regulations, provision of affordable credit,
greater investment in research and development. Where appropriate, we will explore public-private partnerships, especially in the areas of health, education and skills development.

18. To stimulate structural transformation and diversification, we shall: adopt growth oriented macro- and micro-economic policies; identify and promote labour-absorbing sectors; enhance labour mobility in tandem with reallocation of investments; exploit ICTs as a productivity enhancing tool; and pursue an integrated rural development approach involving both the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors.

Harnessing regional integration and globalisation

19. We recognise that strengthening regional integration can stimulate employment creation. To this end, we commit to ratifying bilateral and regional protocols on free cross-border movements of people and goods. To accelerate this process, we strongly support the ongoing study by ECA and AU on the rationalization of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and commit to strengthening their secretariats and programmes.

20. In addressing the global challenges and their impacts on employment, we take note of the AU Migration Policy Framework and Common African Position on International Migration. We welcome the efforts that have been undertaken with a view to establishing a common African position on international migration, including the high-level Experts’ Meeting on Migration and Development held in Algiers in April 2006. This common position will inform the high-level discussions that are due to be held at the United Nations in September 2006. We therefore commit to participate actively in the shaping of the UN Secretary General’s initiative on international migration and call on the International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other regional entities to assist Member States in this regard.

21. We also urge our development partners to level the playing field for African countries in trade relations, including removing constraints imposed by Trade-Related Intellectual Properties (TRIPs) and Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMs).

Targeting disadvantaged segments of society

22. To increase employment opportunities, particularly for women, youth, people with disabilities, internally displaced persons, refugees and returnees, we recognise the need to embed their special needs in employment creation and development policies, including the provision of micro-credit, micro-insurance, safety net, promotion of informal sector development and training.

23. In addition to providing a safety-net, public works programmes can assist disadvantaged groups such as young men and women in rural areas in gaining access to the labour market. We therefore encourage the use of these programmes, especially for post-conflict countries, in such areas as urban sanitation, rural forestation and soil conservation, food security and agriculture, and road construction and maintenance as a means of employment creation.
Building human and institutional capacities

24. We recognise that education and training are key stepping stones towards the generation of decent employment. We encourage the adoption of an integrated human resource development programme, which also requires a regional approach in terms of: harmonising education policies; developing curricula; and establishing regional access to digital resources.

25. We acknowledge that weak institutional capacities and the lack of reliable statistics hinder countries from formulating sound and effective employment policies, and tracking progress in job creation. We also acknowledge that accountability depends on the availability of accurate and timely data, and that this problem is directly linked to the lack of human and financial resources. Accordingly, we commit to increasing resources to strengthen capacities to formulate, implement and monitor employment policies. In this regard, we invite our development partners to join us in these efforts. Accordingly, we strongly commit to the strengthening of national statistical offices and legislative reforms that ensure their ability to generate timely, reliable and gender disaggregated statistics. Together with regular censuses, we also recommend Member States to undertake other innovative and cost-effective statistical surveys to elicit a better understanding of the labour market and the impact of government expenditure and policies.

26. We also resolve to commit resources to support African institutions involved in capacity building activities, such as the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP). In addition, we welcome ongoing capacity building support from our development partners.

Strengthening cooperation for job creation

27. We welcome the focus of the next High-Level Segment Meeting of ECOSOC to be held in Geneva, 3-5 July 2006, on “Creating an environment at the national and international levels conducive to generating full and productive employment and decent work for all and its impact on sustainable development”, and we commit to a strong African partnership and support to the forthcoming discussion and international partnership.

28. We are especially pleased to see ECA’s commitment to partnering with the African Union and NEPAD, African Development Bank, International Labour Organization (ILO), the RECs and other key stakeholders in promoting employment generation strategies in Africa. In particular, we recommend that ECA, in collaboration with ILO and African regional institutions, establish a regional employment forum of technical experts and policy facilitators to assist Member States in developing capacity and facilitate learning and sharing of country-specific experiences. In this regard, we also call on ECA to take leadership in the development and coordination of statistical activities on the continent, such as the Reference Regional Strategic Framework (RRSF), in collaboration with AU, ADB and the RECs.

29. We recognize ECA’s key role in promoting economic and social development on the continent, but we also acknowledge that increased resources will be needed for the fulfilment of ECA’s mission. We therefore urge Member States to support ECA’s efforts by generously contributing to the United Nations Trust Fund for Africa.
Repositioning ECA to meet Africa’s challenges

30. We welcome the initiative of the Executive Secretary of ECA and commend his vision and the boldness of the proposals he has advanced for repositioning ECA to improve the delivery of its services to Member States in response to the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

31. In this regard, we encourage the Executive Secretary to pursue the proposal to refocus ECA’s work around two pillars of: promoting regional integration; and meeting Africa’s special needs and the global challenges faced by the continent, as well as strengthening statistics and addressing gender equality issues and women’s empowerment. We also support the proposal to strengthen ECA’s Sub-Regional Offices. We trust that such reform will enable ECA, working with its partners, to better assist African countries to meet their economic and social development challenges, including that of employment generation. Furthermore, we strongly encourage ECA to pay attention to the special needs of conflict and post-conflict countries. In that regard, ECA should make peace, security and post-conflict recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation one of its major areas of work.

32. We welcome the recent revitalization of the Joint AU/ADB/ECA secretariat by the leaders of the three institutions and encourage further strengthening of cooperation among them. We strongly recommend rationalization of programmes and activities of the regional institutions in order to enhance synergies and avoid unnecessary and costly duplication.

33. In conclusion, we thank ECA for successfully convening the thirty-ninth session of the Commission/Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. We are grateful to Burkina Faso for excellent leadership during our deliberations. We wish also to thank His Excellency, Mr. Blaise Compaoré, and the people of Burkina Faso for their generosity and warm hospitality accorded us during our stay in Ouagadougou.