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THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC)

HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

ON

**African Development, including the Implementation of the United Nations
New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF)**

Geneva

4 - 6 July 1995

STATEMENT

By

**the Executive Secretary of the
Economic Commission for Africa**

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

So
The issues in our discussions today are of great importance to the international community, *and*
~~at large~~ *even more important to Africa.* The United Nations system, being part of this community, has significantly contributed towards the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes addressed to some of these key issues in the development of Africa. I am delighted, therefore, to ~~be introducing~~ *address* the subject of the discussion in this High-Level Segment of ECOSOC, on behalf on the regional economic commissions.

in the light of ~~But first, allow me to indicate that~~ *only five years remain to the end of this century*
~~At first, allow me to indicate that~~ *only five years remain to the end of this century*
which has witnessed unprecedented human progress across the world -- in the breath-taking advances in science and technology; in the increasingly efficient production systems in all economic sectors; in breaking down physical barriers between nations through swifter transport and more versatile communications, thereby making the "global village" a reality; in vastly improving all indicators of social well-being : remarkable reductions in child mortality, increased life expectancy, increased literacy and school enrolment, etc. Reckoned from the very low starting points and its late start relative to all the other regions, some of the most impressive progress has been achieved in Africa. This is contrary to its common portrayal in the world media as a failed continent. It is true, nevertheless, that Africa remains the most disadvantaged and least economically developed continent, with the weakest institutions and the most deficient infrastructures. It is for this reason that African countries have steadily lost competitiveness within the increasingly integrated world economy.

that
Last year, our statistics at ECA indicate, African economic output expanded at a rate of 2.4 per cent. This rate of growth appears to have increased steadily since recording -0.3 per cent in 1992. Even then, per capita income shrank by some 0.6 per cent in 1994. For the first half of the 1990s, continental economic output has grown at an average rate of a mere 0.7 per cent, resulting in a cumulative reduction of per capita income by over 10 per cent. The goal of food security and self-sufficiency continues to elude many countries. Producers continue to use low-yield antiquated technologies which even imperil soil fertility; they remain at the mercy of the ups and downs of the weather, pests and diseases; they hardly have access to credit for crop and livestock financing, and rural markets are hopelessly

inefficient. Therefore, the economic and social situation in Africa at the mid-point of the 1990s remains unsatisfactory.

I wish to refer to the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General which has identified the several interrelated major constraints which continued to impede Africa's economic recovery and development, including the low level of human development, the high rate of population growth, the little success in the mobilization of domestic and external developmental resources and, last but not the least, the unsustainable external indebtedness. While the report acknowledges that the overall regional situation has shown little improvement in terms of economic growth and the living conditions of the majority of people, it emphasizes on several success stories, particularly with respect to the consolidation of political democracy, economic reforms and population and environment policies. It is gratifying that most of African countries have deepened their commitment to formulating and implementing fundamental socio-economic structural reforms, almost always at great and immediate social pain in expectation of future gain. Often the same countries implementing far-reaching economic reforms have also, at the same time, courageously embraced political reforms towards democracy, human rights, improved governance, transparency and accountability. Some have begun to decentralise responsibilities for local development closer to the grassroots to enhance popular participation. The most striking conclusion of the report is that, in spite of several structural handicaps, Africa can be considered to be entering in the transition phase, both politically and economically.

I also wish to stress that for Africa to move forward and successfully achieve its transition, African countries and the international community should seek ways and means of coping with, not only the already mentioned impediments, but also the new challenges brought about by the requirements of the emerging new international order. Africa's development agenda for the mid 1990s and beyond brings about in with implications for African governments and people as well as for the international community, in conformity with the principle of full partnership enunciated in most international programmes of action for Africa, including UN-NADAF.

With the determination of all parties involved, the continuing Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s and into the next century can be spearheaded. African countries can accelerate growth by revitalising and broadening their economies and social support structures; by democratising our political institutions and processes to preclude debilitating strife and conflicts; by increasing our competitiveness within the world economy;

by breaking down barriers between their countries and opening up our continental economic space to increased trade and factor flows; by protecting the environment and preserving our ecosystems; and by bringing the rate of population growth to a sustainable level through better family planning and health care, increased access to education and work opportunities especially for girls and women, and improved quality of life and human security for all. This responsibility -- ownership and self-reliance -- is the most enduring tenet from the "**Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa**" (LPA) adopted by our Leaders in 1980.

Africa's ownership of its development indicates that the vision of partnership at the international level should be built in tender with a social compact between African States and the people, in order to make the social settings more stable and productive. The foundation of Africa's ownership of its destiny, therefore, lies in the ability of African leaders to practice good governance and establish efficient and reliable institutions. Furthermore, for Africa to truly exercise ownership of its development agendas, there is great need for African governments to thrust in development from within and to develop strategies which reflect national and regional aspirations, place human development at the centre stage of the process and entrance for community participation and popular participation in decision making,.

While it is well acknowledged that the establishment of efficient social, economic and political management institutions is a long-term process, Africa needs to pursue efforts in nation-building and to integrate the sub-regional and regional dimensions in strategic development programmes, especially in working out regional complementarity in human development and capacity building and giving high priority food security. For Africa to fully assume ownership of and effectively implement its development strategies, African countries should also adopt pragmatic options for the mobilization of domestic resources and access to the enabling environment for attracting, to the most extent possible, foreign direct investment.

This Agenda cannot be implemented by Africans alone and assistance from Africa's external partners and friends remains indispensable. Indeed, Whatever sacrifices African countries and people will make, the region, at the instance of other regions in transition, will need a massive and efficient external support. Such a support should be, beyond a mere charity, responsive to African people real needs. The implications for the donor community is to acknowledge Africa's ownership of its development and to invest in building the

critical capacities and soci-economic infrastructures, necessary for internally sustaining the process. The external partners should redouble their support in line with their commitments. Specifically, the implications for the international community is to support Africa's adaptation to the realities of the new international order made of increased competition for resources and in trade. The single most important step towards that end is a substantial writing down of African countries external debt so as to enable them increase domestic savings and invest for development by their own. Official development assistance (ODA) to Africa should be defended against budget cuts.

The United Nations system has committed itself to address Africa's numerous development problems, on the basis of a programmatic and coordinated strategy embodied in the System-wide Plan of Action for African economic recovery and development. For the United Nations system to be instrumental in the successful implementation of Africa's development agenda for the mid-1990s and beyond, the implications are the translation of the Plan into operational collaborative programmes and activities. While it is well acknowledged that a great share of the system resources are allocated to programmes specifically meant for Africa, there is a need to further promote their adaptation to African national and national priorities. In this respect, the Secretary-General's New Initiative on African Development is an appropriate framework for further consolidating the collaborative strategy of the United Nations system in Africa.

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,

African countries want to win the struggle against poverty and to emulate more successful developing regions. While the economic and social situation of Africa remains precarious and there is as yet little to show for the reforms that have been implemented, the experience of the dynamic economies of South-East Asia and Latin America indicates that the steps that African countries have taken are in the right direction. They have reduced market distortions, promoted private sector development, and began to open up markets to competition. To achieve this, ongoing economic reforms must be coupled with a comprehensive programme of capacity building to develop human productive and entrepreneurial skills, to strengthen public institutions, and to modernise and extend economic infrastructures. Only then can Africa be assured of its place in the world economy

of the Twenty-first century. If Africa's economic and social development agenda is conscientiously implemented by African countries with the full support from their partner, the next crop of dynamic economies will emerge from Africa. This offers to all of us a challenge as well as a promise that we must grasp with both hands at this session of the High-Level Segment.

I thank you for your kind attention.