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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

**BACK-TO-OFFICE REPORT
ON
SIXTH MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF AFRICAN
MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT
HELD AT
UNEP, NAIROBI
27 FEBRUARY - 1 MARCH 1991**

by

Regional Advisor on Environment and Development

1. The sixth meeting of the Bureau of the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) was held in Nairobi, Kenya from 27 February to 1 March 1991. I represented ECA at the meeting on 28 February and 1 March as I was unable to travel to Nairobi in time for the discussion held on 27 February 1991.
2. The meeting was opened and chaired by Hon. Dr. Njorge Mungai, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Kenya and President of AMCEN. The meeting was also addressed by Dr. Mostafa Tolba, Executive Director of UNEP. Summaries of their statements are presented in the attached Report of the meeting (AMCEN 4/BUR 6/4). The agenda for the meeting and the list of the participants are also attached to the report as Annex 1 and 2 respectively.
3. Agenda No. 3 and 4 on Presentation of the Executive Director's Report and Consideration of the Report of the Executive Director respectively were dealt with on 27 February 1991. The major issue that was discussed pertained to the decision taken by the Executive Director to have the AMCEN Secretariat relocated at ECA. I learnt later that most members of the Bureau were very reluctant about the relocation because (i) they had not been consulted in advance and (ii) because ECA and OAU had in the past given little support to the AMCEN programme. However, after the Executive director had provided adequate reasons for the relocation, the meeting accepted the plan but suggested that (i) the plan be implemented with great caution. (ii) the relocation be monitored regularly to ensure that it does not become counter productive. (iii) the matter be referred to the full AMCEN Ministerial Conference in May 1991 for further consideration.
4. I made a statement on Thursday, 28 February 1991 on the relocation of the AMCEN Secretariat to ECA. I briefed the meeting on the activities of the various ECA programmes (environment, food and agriculture, energy, science and technology, water, industry and natural resources), and the tangible benefits that could accrue to the AMCEN programme if its activities were fully integrated and harmonized with those of ECA. I also stressed ECA's total commitment to strengthening the capacities of member States to transform and sustain their ailing economies. Since one of AMCEN's priorities is to ensure that AMCEN Programme is made an integral element in national development plans, this would fit in well with ECA's mandates.

5. Although many African Governments have established ministries or agencies of environment, however, many of these institutions are poorly funded and have limited mandates. It is, therefore, necessary to ensure that environmental concerns are made part of and constitute the backbone to the planning process of all development programmes. I urged that environmental protection should not be an afterthought and that environmental goods such as gene pools soils and water must be valued in monetary terms. That ECA was addressing this issue in the various substantive programmes as well as in the newly created multidisciplinary regional advisory group (ECA-MRAG).

6. I, therefore, urged the meeting to ensure that the AMCEN programme is fully integrated with the Environment programme of ECA and that their activities are harmonized and co-ordinated with other programmes at ECA.

7. The response to my contribution was surprisingly very negative if not hostile; that ECA had planned to "swallow the AMCEN programme" remarked one Minister. Moreover, ECA and OAU had in the past not assisted UNEP in running the AMCEN Secretariat. I was further asked to tell the Bureau whether the issue of harmonization and integration of the AMCEN/ECA programmes was a new ECA conditionality for the relocation of the AMCEN Secretariat. I responded in the negative. After a lengthy and heated discussion, the Bureau decided that AMCEN Secretariat at ECA would be an independent body to serve the AMCEN programme.

8. It was quite clear that members of the Bureau had over the years been informed about the inability of ECA and OAU to assist in running the AMCEN Secretariat. They, therefore, found it difficult to accept the explanation provided by the Executive Director on the relocation of the Secretariat at ECA. It was also quite obvious that the newly appointed UNEP director for AMCEN preferred to build his own empire when the programme is relocated rather than attempting to integrate and harmonize the AMCEN programme activities with those of ECA and OAU. Although I did not participate in the meeting held on Wednesday 27/2/91, I had the impression that he had misled the Bureau participants and it was now rather difficult to change the situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ECA

9. I suggest that ECA should plan to attend the AMCEN Ministerial Meeting to be held in May to ensure that appropriate information is presented to the Ministers, and that the relocation of the Secretariat is carried out as planned. It will, however, be necessary to confer with the AMCEN Director when the programme is moved to Addis Ababa on modalities of co-operation, harmonization and possible integration.

10. It is also strongly suggested that an ECA paper on the transfer of the AMCEN project to ECA should be prepared for the forthcoming AMCEN Ministerial Conference in May. Such a paper should outline as clearly as possible the benefits that would accrue to the project if the ECA-Environment Unit was fully integrated with the AMCEN project. The paper should also provide detailed information on the activities of the substantive divisions of ECA and OAU and the links between the AMCEN project and these programmes. It will also be necessary to obtain concrete information, by way of interviews, from the various programme officers at ECA and OAU on how to achieve harmonization of their 1992/93 programmes with those of AMCEN.

11. Finally it is important at this stage, for ECA to begin to contemplate on the thrust of future programme activities of AMCEN. When the AMCEN Programme was formulated in 1985, the publication of the Brundtland Report had not been made. However, the African Governments had already established ministries or agencies of environment. Regrettably, many of these institutions have been beset by various problems including limitation of finances and mandates. For the last two decades the ministries of Environment have been ineffective in dealing with all environmental problems in their respective countries. Environment in Africa has been dealt with in isolation to the extent that the parent ministry of environment has no control over environmental issues being carried in other related ministries such as health, agriculture, natural resources and industry. A problem of industrial pollution is dealt with by the Ministry of industry while pollution emanating from agricultural pesticides would be dealt with by the ministry of agriculture. Environment must now be integrated fully in decision-making process. It is suggested that the Ministry of Environment or its department should be mandated with authority to determine whether or not environmental concerns have been taken in account in the developmental process. Environment must constitute the backbone to planning process of all development programmes. Environmental protection should not be an afterthought. As pointed out earlier, environmental goods such as genetic pools, soils, water and air must be valued in monetary terms and exploited on a sustainable basis. The Brundtland report says, "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable - to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs".