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UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

REPORT
OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL PREPARATORY
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
Freetown (Sierra Leone) 24 March-4 April 1981
On
PROGRESS REPORT ON THE AFRICAN INSTITUTE FOR
HIGHER TECHNICAL TRAINING AND RESEARCH
Nairobi (Agenda Item 23)

A representative of the secretariat presented a progress report on the African Institute for Higher Technical Training and Research, located in Nairobi (document E/CN.14/792). He outlined the various activities by stages which had been undertaken in order to establish the Institute and the attempts which were being made to get it off the ground. He stressed that so far only eight member States had subscribed to the Constitution of the Institute and of this number only two had paid their contributions to the 1980-1981 budget of the Institute. He also drew attention to the important role the Institute was expected to play in the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action, the Industrial Development Decade for Africa and programme area IV of the Vienna Programme of Action on Science and Technology for Development. He informed the Committee that between November 1980 and February 1981 field missions were sent to 23 African States to explain to ministries, senior officials and ministers the nature of the Institute, its objectives and how it would assist African countries, to achieve ultimate technological self-reliance.

The representative of the secretariat then referred to the difficulties which plagued the Institute namely the ineffectiveness of its Executive Committee, whose members did not attend meetings; the lack of interest of the member States in joining the Institute; the delay on the part of members of the Institute in paying their contributions so that the Institute could not recruit its core staff or undertake any operational activities; the delay in concluding the Institute's Headquarters Agreement; and meagre response from qualified and experienced French-speaking African engineers and technical personnel to serve the Institute. In view of the foregoing, the Committee was invited to consider whether the Institute should be closed, and if not, to propose specific measures that would make the Institute operational as soon as possible. Such measures could include the secondment by member States at their own expense of qualified nationals to work at the Institute for six months or so during the formative years of the Institute.

In the discussion that followed several delegates underscored the importance of the Institute and the vital role it could play in Africa's bid for technological self-reliance, spoke in favour of the retention of the Institute and stressed the need for member States to provide it with the political and material support necessary to make the Institute operational. One delegate expressed disappointment about the lack of commitment and support shown by member States towards the Institute. One delegate stated that there were already many institutions in Africa dealing with training in science and technology and what was required was the co-ordination and harmonization of their programmes. Another delegate stressed the need to give careful thought before new institutions were created so as to ensure that such institutions obtained the full support of member States. He also called for a study to be made on ways and means which ensure that members of institutions paid their contributions regularly. A number of delegates felt that if more information on the Institute were sent to appropriate government ministries and universities, of member States, more support for the Institute from the member States might be forthcoming.

Delegates asked specific questions regarding: the objectives of the Institute and how it was to function; what preparatory work relating to the establishment of the Institute had been done before the Institute was actually created; what was the relationship between the African Regional Centre for Technology in Dakar and the African Regional Centre for Engineering Design and Manufacturing in Ibadan; whether the cost of seconding nationals by member States to work in the Institute would be defrayed from the contributions due from such members with respect to the Institute; what was the possibility of members of the Institute paying their contribution in their local currencies; and why non-Africans were being selected for employment at the Institute. The delegates of Kenya and Nigeria reassured the Committee that their Governments would continue to support the Institute as they had been doing in the past and called on all member States to support the Institute. The delegates of Zambia and Algeria indicated that their Governments were seriously considering becoming members of the Institute and would soon sign its Constitution.

In rounding up the discussions, the Executive Secretary drew attention to the objectives and functions of the Institute which were clearly set out in its Constitution. He described the relationship that existed between the Institute and the African Regional Centre for Technology and the African Regional Centre for Engineering Design and Manufacturing, and assured the Committee that there was no duplication in the activities of all the three institutions; indeed their activities were complementary. He also described the preparatory work which had been carried out between 1978 and 1979 before the Institute was established. As regards the secondment of nationals to serve on short-term basis at the Institute, the Executive Secretary stated that the details of this could be pursued so also the possibility of members of the Institute paying their contributions to the budget of the Institute partly in their local currencies. In this regard it was necessary to bear in mind that the staff of the Institute would have to be paid in foreign exchange as well as local currency. Finally, the Executive Secretary stressed the need for greater dissemination of information about the Institute within the member States and asked that if the Committee decided in favour of retaining the Institute then it should consider what positive steps could be taken to make the Institute operational and serve its objectives.

In conclusion the Committee agreed that the Institute should be retained and urged member States that had subscribed to the Constitution of the Institute to pay up their contributions promptly and those that had not yet signed the Constitution to seriously consider doing so and to support the Institute.