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Economic Commission for Africa
Commission économique pour l'Afrique

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FIRST SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON
REGIONAL COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION

STATEMENT

BY

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
27 April 1999

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Delegates,
Representatives of the Regional Economic Communities,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me real pleasure for me to welcome you all, on behalf of Dr. K.Y. Amoako, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA, to Addis Ababa and to the First Session of the Committee on Regional Cooperation and Integration.

Let me, once more, avail myself of this auspicious opportunity to express the Commission's appreciation to the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for the facilities granted to this meeting and for the warm welcome extended to all participants.

Mr. Chairman,
You will certainly recall that, when the Ministers met in Addis Ababa during the Twenty-second Meeting of the ECA Conference of Ministers/Thirty-first Session of the Commission, they endorsed a wide range of reform measures, including the re-structuring of the ECA Secretariat and the re-focussing of its work around six strategic directions namely:

- (i) economic and social policy;
- (ii) food security and sustainable development;
- (iii) development information;
- (iv) development management;
- (v) gender as a cross-cutting factor; and
- (vi) regional economic integration.

Key to these reforms and resulting from them was the decision to review the Commission's intergovernmental machinery towards its effective rationalization into fewer meetings.

In doing this, the need to harmonize and coordinate activities of the Commission with those of the African Economic Community was duly taken into account. Consultations with partners took place to this end. It is in this context that the Committee on Regional Cooperation and Integration was established at the expert level with the dual objective of providing guidance to the work of the Commission and a forum for in-depth discussions of issues key to the progress of regional economic integration in Africa and recommendations to the African Economic Community ECOSOC.

I need not to stress the long lasting commitment of ECA to economic integration as evidenced by the instrumental role it played in the establishment of many African economic groupings and its continued support to these organizations. That commitment was strongly re-affirmed in 1996 when regional economic cooperation and integration was selected as one of the areas of focus of the Commission's programme. Our close collaboration with the Organization of African Unity and the African Development Bank towards the attainment of the objectives of the African Economic Community guarantees the efficient use of the resources of our three institutions based on synergies existing between them.

Mr. Chairman

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

I wish now to turn to the agenda of this meeting which, as you have noticed, will be conducted in two inter-related segments. First, the Committee will hold its first session

during which reports will be presented and discussed on issues of relevance to economic integration in Africa. Then, a forum on challenges facing the economic integration process on our continent will take place. The forum will lay emphasis on the financing of regional integration programmes.

The Committee will consider one report and studies prepared by ECA on issues essential to the progress of economic integration in Africa. Submissions by the Secretariat will be illustrated or supplemented by concrete analysis of experiences on the ground by the Regional Economic Communities which will report on issues of direct relevance to the specificities of their respective sub-regions or in which their experience can be a source of inspiration for the other groupings. That is why the topics to be covered by the Communities are so varied. I am convinced that a lot will be learnt from these presentations. In this same vein, the Committee will discuss:

- (i) ways and means of furthering trade liberalization and conditions of its sustainability in the context of African regional groupings and in the light of the emerging world trade system under the auspices of the WTO;
- (ii) an analytical framework for the assessment of costs and benefits of economic integration and their distribution among countries at different levels of development and implications therefore and linkages with the financing of the integration process;
- (iii) the importance of transport infrastructures in furthering regional integration;
- (iv) energy interconnections and trade in energy; and
- (v) policy convergence in regional integration and post-conflict strategies for the relaunching of regional economic integration.

Concerning the forum, it is intended to facilitate a dialogue between all the actors namely, member States, the economic groupings, the financing institutions and technical support institutions on how their collective efforts could help overcome some of the major obstacles to economic integration in Africa. For this session, we selected the financing of economic integration programmes and projects as the central theme. We all know that the

lack of adequate funding has been one the main reasons if not the reason why African economic groupings have not been able to make significant progress. While the establishment of self-financing mechanisms is being seen as the panacea in this respect, one may need to explore new avenues, including the role the private sector may play in funding some of the programmes initiated by the economic groupings. It is ECA's hope that the participants will come up with actionable recommendations.

Mr. Chairman

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

In any undertaking, the first step proves to be the most difficult one. This first meeting of the Committee on Regional Cooperation and Integration is the first opportunity for us to share views on the Commission's activities in this area under its new strategic orientation and inform the African Economic Community ECOSOC on issues the latter may not always have time to discuss in-depth. Your deliberations are, therefore, of utmost importance for us all and I have no doubt that you will reach most inspiring conclusions not only for activities of ECA in the field of economic cooperation and integration but also for the progress of regional economic integration at all levels of the Regional Economic Communities and eventually the African Economic Community.

I wish this meeting every success and thank you for your kind attention.