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STATEMENT BY MR. ADEBAYO ADEDEJI, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA, AT THE MEETING OF PLENIPOTENTIARIES
ON THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR TRANSFER, ADAPTATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF
TECHNOLOGY, KADUNA, NIGERIA, 10 - 15 NOVEMBER 1977

Distinguished Plenipotentiaries,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this important meeting of African Plenipotentiaries which has been specially convened to take a decisive step towards the establishment of an African Regional Centre for Technology as one means of strengthening the technological capability of this region. I wish to thank your respective Governments for having responded to my invitation to attend this meeting, which comes just over a month after we considered the establishment of the Centre at an intergovernmental meeting of African experts in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania. I am also happy to see representatives of OAU and of United Nations bodies and specialized agencies which are co-operating fully with ECA in promoting this important project.

The meeting owes its origin to resolution 87 (IV) of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, adopted in Nairobi in May 1976. That Conference requested the Organization of African Unity and the Economic Commission for Africa, in collaboration with UNCTAD, UNIDO, UNESCO and WIPO, to convene a meeting of plenipotentiaries in 1977, preceded by appropriate preparatory work, to establish an African Centre for the Development and Transfer of Technology as a means for strengthening the technological capability of the African region.

Subsequently ECA undertook consultations with OAU and the various United Nations agencies specified in the resolution

regarding the nature of the preparatory activities, and the consultations led to the adoption of the following programme of activities:

1. Consultation and agreement on the terms of reference of an exploratory mission to consult with Governments on the proposed centre;
2. Organization of an interagency mission to 17 African countries between April and June 1977, and the preparation of the mission report. The mission was organized in two teams, one led by Dr. Lartey of Ghana and the other by Professor Ouahes of Algeria. The over-all leader of the entire mission was, however, Dr. Lartey. In addition to ECA the following organizations participated at their own expense in the mission: FAO, ILO, UNIDO, UNCTAD, UNESCO and WIPO;
3. Consideration of the mission report by an interagency meeting in September 1977;
4. Organization of an Intergovernmental Meeting of African Experts to make final recommendations on the Centre on the basis of the report of the mission and the report of the interagency meeting.

I am glad to report that all these activities have been carried out satisfactorily, and the various reports arising therefrom were circulated among member States to keep the Governments well informed on progress in the implementation of the project. May I take this opportunity to thank most sincerely those countries which were visited by the mission for their assistance and support to the members of the mission.

Before I comment on the substantive business of this meeting, I should like to reiterate my deeply felt gratitude to the United Nations Development Programme, which has provided substantial financial support for the preparatory stage of this project.

My thanks also go to FAO, UNESCO, UNCTAD, ILO, UNIDO and WIPO - all of which participated in the interagency mission and collaborated with ECA in the follow-up activities which I mentioned earlier. I hope that this spirit of co-operation will continue to flourish in the future when the final phase in the process of establishing the African Centre for Technology gets under way.

The objective laid down by UNCTAD in resolution 87 (IV) is that this meeting of plenipotentiaries will establish an African centre for the development, transfer and adaptation of technology. Your task during this six-day meeting is therefore to make a definite and unequivocal decision on its establishment by approving the constitution recommended by the Intergovernmental Meeting of Experts and by signing the constitution on behalf of your respective Governments as their accredited plenipotentiaries.

Distinguished Plenipotentiaries,

It may perhaps be useful at this stage to consider briefly why we are concerned about technology. Technology is a crucial element in the development process, be it in the field of exploration of natural resources or in the establishment of modern physical infrastructure, or in the improvement of living conditions. The industrialized countries know this only too well, and for them technology has for almost two centuries now assumed a central role in their development strategies and in their capabilities to compete commercially or militarily - and, indeed, in their very survival as nations. In Africa one can go as far as to suggest that African countries have yet to awake fully to the one critical factor that has kept them behind in the development race since the industrial revolution took place in Europe. African Governments seemed to have failed to realize that industrial and agricultural revolution cannot take place unless preceded by a technological revolution, and that this cannot happen until science and technology have become an organic

and root-taking process. The time has therefore come when we should cease talking or thinking about science and technology merely in theoretical or philosophical terms. Rather we should be awakened to the urgency of engineering a technological revolution in Africa. I firmly believe that without such a revolution, all our efforts to achieve internally oriented self-sustaining growth with an increasing measure of national and collective self-reliance will come to naught. And our dependence on the industrialized countries for skills, technology and capital goods will deepen rather than diminish.

Very few African countries are today in a position to say what their natural resources are and what could be done with them. Fewer still ~~can undertake the conversion of more than a~~ modest amount and variety of such natural resources into semi-finished and finished products. And yet this is the heart of industrialization. The majority of African countries cannot produce simple spare parts and components for most of the capital goods that we import. When we speak of industrial development, we veer between conventional import-substitution industries - which have done little but drain our foreign exchange resources while creating a host of other problems - or the assembly or packaging of imported manufactured products. We behave as if there is no major disjunction between the type of skills needed for bolting and welding parts together and the type of skills essential for the manufacture of the parts.

Admittedly, many Governments have set up ministries of science and technology or science research councils, and have established other relevant infrastructure. A lot of research work, mainly in agriculture, has been and is still being undertaken within our countries, and it appears as though we have set ourselves on the path to technological development. But to what extent have these actions helped us to reach our goal? And what has been our goal?

Certainly, some of the research results emanating from Africa have contributed to the world stock of knowledge, but without the ability to utilize this knowledge to produce goods, to set up industries, to exploit our resources and expand our economies, Africa's effort will be directed towards the wrong goals. In fact it amounts to a misuse of our meagre resources not to emphasize the technology of production which will have a positive effect on our development.

Unfortunately, many development plans make no provision for the acquisition of the various technologies necessary for the attainment of the stated objectives. This is no doubt one of the contributing factors to the under-implementation of many of Africa's development plans. It is wrongly assumed that technology will take care of itself. We now know that it does not. And in the absence of autonomous bodies to provide the technologies required, it is incumbent upon Governments to plan to make these technologies available in good time for the prompt implementation of development plans. For a start, such technologies will have to be imported, since most of the technologies available today have been developed in the industrialized countries. However, we must avoid the temptation of thinking that our salvation lies solely in our being able to transfer these technologies to our own situation. The technologies we import were developed in response to specific tasks to operate within physical and social environments different from our own. There is therefore a possibility of incompatibility, and a need on our part to adapt them to our own environment. As I said in my address to the Intergovernmental Meeting of Experts, technology is time-bound, resource-constrained, location-specific and directed and managed within a production matrix.

It is my view that, in trying to bring about an equitable transfer of technology to developing countries, far too much attention has been concentrated on the suppliers of technology.

Within the United Nations system serious attempts are under way to revise the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, and to establish an International Code of Conduct on the Transfer of Technology. These important negotiations taking place at the global level deserve your full support and understanding, for they will have a considerable impact on the market for technology in the future.

However, it seems that the debate on the transfer of technology has not laid sufficient stress on the recipient, nor on what it is that is to be transferred. It is perhaps assumed that, if the market conditions are right, the technology will flow from source to where it is needed. Unfortunately this is unlikely to happen, for several reasons. First, the developing countries lack the capability to shop from the technology supermarket. Secondly, they have a limited capacity for articulating their technological needs. Thirdly, they are generally handicapped in the selection of the technologies best suited to their needs. And fourthly, they are less familiar with the negotiations to ensure the acquisition of technologies on the most favourable terms.

These are indeed major obstacles. Each country will therefore have to devote particular attention to building up expertise in a vast array of technical, economic and legal specialities and creating institutions to handle these rather important aspects of technological development. Beyond this, countries will have to reorientate their education and training programmes and their research activities if they are to meet the challenges which are inevitable when they resolve to emancipate themselves from the technological dependence in which they find themselves today. We urgently need to provide education for innovation, while at the same time we must build a continuing process of innovation into education. Our ultimate objective is the mastery of that

corpus of knowledge in such a way that we are able not only to use it with the minimum of help, and to redesign and adapt it, but also to conceive, design and produce new technology which meets our specific requirements and is suitable to our environment.

Distinguished Plenipotentiaries,

The report of the interagency mission lays great stress on the necessity for an explicit national policy in the field of technology. Such a policy will not only take care of the situation I have been relating above, but will also provide clear guidance in investment, research and development and the utilization of its results; technological manpower and training; industrialization; etc., etc. It will also embrace issues such as the selection, transfer and adaptation of technology, and more importantly the development of technology locally. The development of national capabilities to carry out this important role is at the very basis of national endeavours to attain a greater measure of technological self-reliance, as recommended in UNCTAD resolution 87 (IV). The report also recommends the setting up of national centres for technology, and provides guidance on the kinds of issue such centres should concern themselves with.

At the continental level, the proposed Regional Centre will be an important instrument in enabling us get down to the real issues of technology development and transfer in Africa, and through this Regional Centre, African countries should be able to share the experience they have had in this important field of technology. I cannot overemphasize the fact that the primary task of the proposed Regional Centre is to increase as rapidly as possible Africa's technological capability. I have no doubt that this Centre will more than justify itself within a very short time from its establishment. Through collaboration with national institutions and other institutions within and outside

Africa and within and outside the United Nations system, this Regional Centre is bound to make a considerable contribution to technological development in Africa; save member States some, if not all, of substantial foreign exchange lost through lack of effective controls over imported technology; and, above all, facilitate Africa's technological revolution - an objective to which ECA is totally committed.

I therefore hope, Distinguished Plenipotentiaries, that you will not only sign the agreement setting up the African Centre for Technology, but also ensure that your countries ratify the agreement without any delay so that I can convene the first meeting of the Governing Council of the Centre during the first quarter of 1978. We cannot afford any delay.

I thank you for your attention.