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STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY AT THE OPENING OF THE
FOURTH SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

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My first duty at the opening of the 4th Session of the Economic Commission for Africa is to express the sincere welcome of the staff of ECA and myself to all the delegates who are assembled here today. A measure of the growing importance of the Commission is the increasing participation in our meetings not only by the members of the Commission but also by more and more observers and other interested parties. This growing interest is a source of great encouragement to the Secretariat and we also value the contribution which you have made and, I hope, you will continue to make in helping us to develop our programmes in as comprehensive a way as possible.

Once again our thanks go to His Imperial Majesty, to his Government and to the people of Ethiopia for their continued assistance, encouragement and interest in our work. This interest is exemplified not only by mere sentiment but finds concrete expression in the magnificent building which now houses the entire Secretariat of the Commission and also by other kinds of assistance which have enabled the Secretariat to develop and expand in the short span of the Commission's life. I would like to take this opportunity humbly to express once more the deep sympathy of the staff of the Secretariat and myself to His Imperial Majesty, the Royal Family and the people of Ethiopia in their present bereavement.

In 1960 dramatic changes took place in the political structure of the African continent and it is my hope that these changes will be accelerated, and that within our life time this Commission's membership will embrace every single African

country. For until every country is represented as a full member, the work of the Commission cannot be complete, nor can its contribution to African economic and social development be comprehensively integrated. In 1961 the new African countries were perhaps more preoccupied with problems of internal consolidation and re-organisation immediately following independence. I hope that in the immediate future the efforts in the economic and social fields will be more outward-going and that problems which cut across frontiers will be tackled in a concerted manner.

Although efforts of individual governments to develop their economies are very important, it seems to me that concerted action must underlie attempts by the African countries to solve their many pressing problems, whether we are thinking in terms of industrialization, intra-African trade or African social development. With regard to all these problems, sub-regional and even regional cooperation and co-ordination seems to be one of the recipes of success. Co-ordination and co-operation, in many cases, may be the only way of overcoming the narrowness of the domestic market and also of avoiding the situation in which several African countries will be producing the same narrow range of products either manufactured or primary, for the same limited overseas markets. It is evident that the lack of co-operation and co-ordination in, say, marketing our primary commodities has led to difficulties in their disposal and it is now up to us to avoid the same kind of problem at a time when every African country is embarking on ambitious plans of economic diversification and particularly of industrialization. I am hopeful that we will always have at the back of our minds this crucial problem of concerted action.

It is obvious that in the foreseeable future the major problems facing

African countries will be that of economic and social development at a pace rapid enough to bring economic progress into step with the dramatic changes that are taking place on the political plane. For unless the economic and social well-being of peoples of Africa emerges as a direct result of political advancement, the main objective of independence would not have been achieved. In view of this, emphasis was laid in the Work Programme for 1962-63, as in the previous year, on economic programming and development techniques and all its attendant requisites. My report on the work of the Commission since the last session together with the work programme for the coming year deals in some detail with what we have been able to do so far and what we hope to do in the future. It is therefore not necessary for me to go into them in detail in this statement. In the same way, since at the proper time I will introduce each item of the agenda, the various items need not be treated at this juncture. However, I would like to mention in passing a few of the more important topics dealt with in these documents. One of these is the working party on economic and social development which brought together in Addis Ababa development planning experts from most of the African countries and also observers and consultants. Their deliberations were most instructive and I hope that their report will enable the Commission to take constructive decisions in this most important area of our activity.

In dealing with economic and social development, it may be appropriate to recall that during its last session the General Assembly of the United Nations unanimously adopted a resolution designating the current decade as the United Nations Development Decade. This is evidence, if any evidence is necessary, that all members of the United Nations, both developed and less developed, are

preoccupied with the raising of living standards all over the world as a means of reducing world tensions. It is my hope that we in Africa will take advantage of this present mood towards the problem of development and make the best use of the available opportunities.

The other question which I think will need careful consideration by the Commission at this session is the decision of the United Nations to decentralize the economic and social activities of the Organization and to strengthen the regional economic commissions. At the last session it was not possible for the Commission to express itself on this question; but I hope that we will find the time to discuss it fully at this session. Decentralization would mean that United Nations programmes in Africa in the economic and social fields will be more closely scrutinized and developed within an African context and that the United Nations assistance to Africa will be more integrated within an African perspective. As you are aware, the implementation of this decision will mean added responsibilities for the Commission and will require increased staff and facilities. It is therefore extremely important for the Commission to determine in what way it will assume these responsibilities and to decide the scope of the increased activities that it would wish to undertake as a result of the United Nations programme of decentralization.

In this respect the proposed establishment of sub-regional offices of the Commission will, in a way, help the implementation of decentralization by breaking down some of the functions of the Secretariat into a sub-regional framework. I hope therefore that the Commission will be able to come to a decision on the

establishment of these offices. It is, of course, clear that owing to the staff position it may not be possible to establish all these offices immediately, but the Commission can, at least, give the Executive Secretary a mandate to begin the work of establishing these offices.

May I conclude by expressing the hope that our discussions at this session will carry the work of the Commission a stage further and that the Secretariat will be enabled to tackle some of the more urgent problems of African economic and social development concretely and in depth.