

## STATEMENT by Mrs Lalla Ben Barka at the 12th Summit of the IGAD Heads of State and Government

**12th Summit of the IGAD Heads of State and Government**  
**27th Ordinary Session of the IGAD Council of Ministers**

**STATEMENT by Mrs Lalla Ben Barka, Deputy Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa**

June 7th - 14th 2008, Addis Ababa , Ethiopia

Chairperson,

Honourable Ministers,

Your Excellencies, the Ambassadors

Distinguished Experts,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a great pleasure to be here at this very important meeting of IGAD, a Regional Economic Community covering a strategic part of Africa .

I would therefore like to start by thanking you on behalf of the Executive Secretary of ECA, Mr. Abdoulie Janneh , for extending an invitation to us.

Mr. Janneh deeply regrets his inability to be here in person, he has asked me to extend his best wishes to you all.

I would also like to take this opportunity to salute the efforts of IGAD in promoting regional integration in Africa .

The keen commitment of IGAD is manifested in the articulation of regional integration programmes.

In this regard I would like to thank Dr. Attalla Hamad Bashir, Executive Secretary and his staff for the good work they are doing and for their willingness to work closely with ECA in promoting regional integration in Africa .

Your Excellencies,

This meeting is being held at a time when African countries have made significant progress in political, economic and social arenas.

Growth levels are very encouraging and conflicts are reducing while good governance has become more widespread.

However, notwithstanding these significant achievements, Africa as a whole is at the brink of further marginalization due to the recent crises of high oil prices, high food prices, climatic change and civil conflicts and unrest in many of African countries.

In this regard the Horn of Africa faces many challenges especially with regard to continued wars and insecurity in addition to floods and droughts – issues that exacerbate poverty.

Your Excellencies,

ECA is at an important juncture in its historical evolution. This year marks ECA's 50 th Anniversary and we look back with a great deal of pride in what the Commission has been able to achieve in supporting Africa's development be it in fighting colonialism and building regional and sub-regional institutions or in promoting agricultural development, good governance, gender equality and regional integration.

Currently, our work rests on two pillars: “ *Promoting regional integration in support of the AU vision and priorities*” and “*Meeting Africa 's special needs and the emerging global challenges*” . Our Business Plan for the period 2007 – 2009 focuses on five areas:

1. Regional Integration, Infrastructure and Trade,
2. Meeting the Millennium Development Goals and addressing gender and social development challenges,
3. Promoting good governance and popular participation,
4. ICT and S&T for Development, and
5. Strengthening Statistics and Statistical Capacity in Africa .

Your Excellencies,

I am pleased to inform you that in ECA's efforts to ensure operational effectiveness of our work, the ECA Subregional offices (SROs) have become the “privileged” partners of RECs, their first port of call and the immediate interface between ECA Headquarters and RECs.

In addition to being the operational nodes of the repositioned ECA, the SROs are now effectively the channel for the provision of required support from all ECA programmes and have already established strong partnerships with RECs.

It is indeed, in this context that I am happy to report to you that ECA and IGAD Secretariat have developed a Multi-year Programme which is based on the priorities of IGAD and on areas where ECA's expertise and support would bear the most effective results, in particular capacity building and technical

assistance.

Hence the multi-year programme seeks to enhance the capacity of the Secretariat as it promotes regional integration. The specific areas include multilateral trade negotiations and trade services; increased competitiveness in industrial sector based on market oriented production and subregional value chain strategies; harmonization of subregional policies in tourism; support for initiatives in the transport and infrastructure; as well as food security and environment and ICT.

No need to mention that all activities are to be gender mainstreamed.

In addition SRO/EA has provided support to IGAD in the preparation of the development strategies for infrastructure/transport, industry and ICT. The thrust of the strategies is policy harmonization, standardization and other measures that would render the IGAD region integrated and competitive.

Your Excellencies,

Allow me to underscore the need to streamline regional integration within national perspectives as the overall framework for national and regional programmes and activities.

There are several examples of programmes that could have advanced regional integration had they not been planned and executed within limited national confines only.

These include the national telecommunication systems, the investment codes, tourism and others.

In the case of tourism, marketing the IGAD region as a single tourism destination could prove a better, more effective and more profitable approach than single country approaches that are currently being pursued.

Scaling up of regional integration calls for concerted efforts to actually harmonise policies, standards, and simplification of procedures. It calls for a major drive of sensitizing the population so that the integration process is owned by the people to effectively contribute to it, sustain and gain from it.

To single out one important aspect, regional infrastructure is vital and cannot be over emphasized because it is the base for regional integration and overall economic development. The regional transport infrastructure – the road networks, railways systems, ports, inland water transport infrastructures and air, are generally in some sort of disrepair. In some cases the infrastructure does not exist as in the case of missing road and railway links, commonly found on major regional transport corridors.

It is, therefore, very important to look beyond country borders and adopt a regional approach.

Let me also stress the importance of ICT in the drive to reducing poverty and in general development. Improved communications by proper applications of ICT's offers developing countries an unprecedented opportunity to reduce poverty at the fastest possible speed.

However, the telecommunications sector in the sub-region remains characterized by low service penetration and coverage; high levels of unmet demand and waiting lists; poor service quality; and high investment costs and tariffs compared to international average standards.

Regional measures should therefore be put in place so as to take advantage of the new windows of opportunity that have been opened up by the rapid advances in technology and the declining cost of acquiring new ICT tools to accelerate economic growth and development.

Your Excellencies

I conclude my remarks with the hope that your deliberations will advance the cause of regional integration so as to exploit the huge potentials that exist in the sub-region for all the people of IGAD to enjoy in peace and security.

I thank you