

Statement by Mr. Abdoulie Janneh to the 15th Ordinary Session of the African Union Executive Council

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by Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA

28 June 2009, Sirte, Libya

Mr. Chairman
Your Excellency, Dr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission
Honourable Ministers
Commissioners of the AU Commission
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is gratifying to have yet another opportunity to address this distinguished Executive Council and we are honoured to be here in Sirte, Libya for which we thank the Brother Leader and Guide, the Government and people of Libya for their welcome and gracious hospitality. Let start this short intervention by congratulating you, Dr. Ali Abdelsalam Triki, Chairperson of the Council, on your election as President of the UN General Assembly and assure you of our full support in carrying out your heavy responsibilities. I take this opportunity to thank my good friend and brother, Dr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission for his kind invitation to join you here today which yet again reflects the strong ties and close collaboration between the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union Commission.

We are meeting at a crucial time for Africa, which must remain alert and mindful of global developments that are impacting on its economic and social development. This Council through its deliberations has a critical role to play in ensuring that Africa speaks with a clear and common voice on global matters especially the global economic and financial crisis and negotiations on a post-Kyoto treaty on climate change. Africa's is often represented in global processes to address these issues by our diplomatic representatives in major negotiating centres who take their cue from decisions taken by our Heads of State and Government on the advice of this Council so your deliberations are very important for the continent.

It is in this context that I wish to focus my remarks this morning on three major issues that will no doubt engage your attention. These are the economic and financial crisis, climate change and the theme of the forthcoming summit which is "Investing in Agriculture for Economic Growth and Food Security". The first two require that Africa should have a clear appreciation of the issues at stake and identify its interests so that we can continue to speak with one voice in global forums convened on these matters, for if care is not taken they can undo recent gains in peace and security and economic development. Already, growth rates in Africa are expected to fall to an average of 2% this year compared to a rate of nearly 6% in the preceding half-decade. Moreover, there is clear evidence that economic instability and political instability often go hand in hand and increasing economic hardship and the scramble for increasingly scarce resources may undermine hard won peace and security gains. Indeed, as things stand, the economic and financial crisis has already become a development crisis which, if care is not taken will be further compounded by climate change.

Your colleagues finance and planning Ministers deliberated on the global crisis at the 2nd Joint AU/ECA Meeting which took place in Cairo, Egypt earlier this month. Let me take this opportunity to thank again the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt for their exemplary generosity and support in the hosting the meeting. On that occasion, they reviewed the impact of the crisis and also explored options available to Africa for responding to the crisis including through "*Enhancing the Effectiveness of Fiscal Policy for Domestic Resource Mobilization*". Access to development finance is falling sharply through reduced export earnings, official development assistance and remittances and will negatively impact on our ability to fund the provision of key services and slow-down the achievement of key development goals especially the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is therefore essential that we continue to explore domestic policy options for bridging the development finance gap.

The collective approach that Africa has taken so far to respond to the crisis following the landmark meeting of Ministers of Finance and Governors of Central Banks in Tunis in November last year under the aegis of the AU Commission, the African Development Bank and the ECA has already begun to yield some results. The Committee of Ten Ministers and Governors set up by the Tunis meeting prepared Africa's submission to the G20 Summit which took place in London last April and it is gratifying to report that many of the proposals made by Africa, through the leadership of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, were contained in the G20 communiqué including the allocation of new SDRs, gold sales, support for counter-cyclical spending, review of the debt sustainability framework and the provision of more capital for the multilateral development banks, including the African Development Bank. African Member States also fully participated in the just concluded UN High Level Conference on the financial crisis in New York last week.

This is however just the beginning and a clear message must emanate from this Council to urge that the G20 commitments made are actualized and that the promised resources reach their intended beneficiaries. Africa also needs to ensure that its concerns are taken on board in on-going international discussions on reform of the international financial system and architecture. Key in this regard is the issue of giving Africa greater voice and representation in international financial processes and bodies. However, we should continue to demonstrate that our collective voice reached on a consensual basis is worth listening to by being coherent, consistent and well-reasoned. I believe that the Ministerial Statement adopted by the Finance Ministers in Cairo met these requirements and should underpin Africa's participation at the forthcoming G8 meeting in Italy as well as the next G20 meeting in New York. Its spirit will also serve Africa well in on-going trade negotiations concerning the Economic Partnership Agreements with the European Union and the Doha trade talks of the WTO, whose Aid for Trade agenda should be utilized to the fullest.

Climate change is another area in which Africa needs to speak with a clear, consistent and common voice and I am pleased to report that the AU Commission and ECA have been working together with colleagues in the AfDB to support member States in the forthcoming negotiations on a post-Kyoto framework on climate change. In addition to meetings of environmental experts and negotiators, your colleagues Environmental Ministers met last month with their Finance counterparts in Kigali, under the leadership and patronage of President Paul Kagame, to discuss Africa's development financing needs for responding to the challenge of climate change and I hope we will be able to share with you and the Heads of State the conclusions of this meeting.

There are several areas of importance in the climate change negotiations such as mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer, and finance. However, because Africa does not contribute much to the environmental damage causing climate change its key concern is related to adaptation and how to finance the cost of this activity. While estimates and figures vary, it is clear that the cost of adaptation is high and the flow of resources to Africa under existing mechanisms to finance climate are low.

Africa must use the opportunity of the negotiations in Copenhagen in December this year to redress shortcomings in existing arrangements and obtain funding that is additional, adequate, predictable and readily accessible including through a credible carbon marketing system. This gathering will be pleased to know that a lot of work has gone into preparing an African Common Position for Copenhagen which will be presented to the Summit for approval. However, there is still much that needs to be done between now and December and I am pleased to report that under the auspices of the African Climate Policy Centre based in ECA, we and our partners host a special session of the African Partnership Forum in September to provide an opportunity to garner and mobilize support for the African common position in the climate change negotiations.

I now turn to the theme of the Summit. There can be no doubt that Africa has made substantial progress in agricultural production which is the mainstay of our economies and the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme of NEPAD has been instrumental in placing agriculture on the national and regional policy agenda. However, as last year's food crisis revealed there are major structural challenges in African agriculture that need to be addressed if this continent is to achieve its potential as a major agricultural producer. These shortcomings include prevalence of subsistence farming, low utilization of abundant land and water resources and a high degree of fragmentation of agricultural trade across fifty-three boundaries and consequent low level of intra-Africa trade in agriculture.

It is imperative that Africa should take a regional approach and use its diversity of resource endowments to develop regionally integrated strategic agricultural commodity value chains. In other words, since the different regions of this continent are suited to producing different types of agricultural commodities, this should be used as a basis for creating a larger market and adding value across different activities across the continent. Public-private partnerships should be used to promote cross-border investment in these activities and the creation of African joint ventures across the agricultural value chain. The important issue is the theme of the 2009 Economic Report on Africa produced jointly by the AU Commission and ECA and which I commend for your attention.

In order to put agricultural activities on a firmer footing, it would be essential to address the key issue of land policy which has strong political undertones and can undermine progress being made in agricultural development. There is still much debate about whether recent foreign acquisitions of large tracts of land in Africa for agricultural production are land grabs or foreign direct investment in agriculture. Whatever the case, there is need for our countries to have a proper framework in which to be able to address land policy issues which is why the AUC/ECA/AfDB have collaborated to develop a Land Policy Initiative to be submitted to the Heads of State and Government for approval. The LPI is not a model of land policy for the continent but rather a tool that our member States can use to develop their own land policy initiatives. It will similarly be useful to Regional Economic Communities with regard to transboundary natural resource management and harmonization of land laws where needed.

Before I conclude, permit me to reassure you of the continued strong commitment of the United Nations system to support the work of the African Union Commission across the board. We continue to work with the AU Commission and with the collaboration and support of other bilateral and multilateral partners to promote the key objective of peace and security in Africa including through joint peacekeeping operations and support to the well-structured peace and security architecture of the Union. We are all encouraged by the progress being made to realize our aspirations for a peaceful, secure and democratic Africa which is a sine qua non for social and economic progress.

It is also the spirit that underpins the collaboration between ECA and the African Union Commission which continues to wax stronger. In addition to our 2nd Joint Meeting of Ministers of Finance, which I referred to earlier, we have also collaborated in a meaningful manner across key service lines like knowledge generation and management, consensus building and technical cooperation. I have already mentioned the Economic Report on Africa and the AfDB has joined us in the production of the Assessing Regional Integration in Africa report, the African Statistical Yearbook as well as the MDG Progress Report to be submitted to the Assembly. We also jointly launched the Coalition for Dialogue on Africa (CoDA) in Addis Ababa in March 2009. Its work is guided by an independent high-level Advisory Board, headed by former President Festus Mogae of Botswana with a number of other eminent and distinguished Africans and non-Africans amongst its members. Let me assure this Council that the ECA as well as other UN agencies who are adequately represented here remain committed to continue and upscale their activities in support of the AU Commission, its organs and NEPAD programme as well as the Regional Economic Communities.

A key consideration in all these activities including the consensus building around the financial crisis and climate change negotiations is the desire to ensure that Africa's recent progress is not derailed. Key in this regard is the promotion of regional integration which is a common thread tying all these issues together. The people of this continent will be well served if we are able to speak with a stronger, unified voice backed by a diversified, integrated and well-functioning economy that is underpinned by successful transboundary activities and projects.

This Executive Council has a key role to play in ensuring that we build the Africa of our collective aspirations and I wish you successful deliberations as you undertake the challenging but exciting task of preparing the ground for our Heads of State and Government on all the issues to be placed before the Summit.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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