

OPENING SPEECH

BY

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**AT THE THIRTY FIRST SESSION OF
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA
AND TWENTY-SECOND MEETING OF THE
CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE
FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
AND PLANNING**

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Mr. Chairman,

Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,

Excellency the Executive Secretary of the ECA,

Distinguished Delegates.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to Addis Ababa for this very important Conference of African Ministers responsible for Economic Development and Planning.

This is your Twenty-second Meeting; but this Meeting which I have the honour of opening today is different in more ways than one from your previous conferences. This is not simply because your Conference is taking place for the first

time in this ultra-modern United Nations Conference Centre, which in itself is very significant. It is not either because your Meeting is being convened with a new Executive Secretary at the helm of the Economic Commission for Africa, which is also significant and a source of great hope indeed.

What makes this Conference of the highest policy organ of the ECA so different from previous ones is that this Meeting is taking place at a time when the ECA is in the process of change ----- change which is in fact overdue and which we all have been looking forward to with great expectation.

We have all seen in recent years how ECA was beginning to lose momentum and how it was limping along almost on the brink of being overtaken by irrelevance.

We should indeed pay tribute to Dr. Amoako, the new Executive Secretary of the ECA, for the wisdom he has shown in quickly grasping the serious challenge that the ECA was facing, and for the determination with which he has started to grapple with the tasks that lay ahead in renewing and reinvigorating the Commission.

Mr. Chairman.

Honourable Ministers.

The Economic Commission for Africa is a very vital institution for Africa. No other existing institution can substitute the ECA and there is none in the horizon yet which can fit the bill. The Commission's role in assisting the creation of African institutions, in articulating plans and strategies, in advocating common African policies and positions and in

providing technical and expert advice is critically important for Africa, and this will continue to remain the case for the foreseeable future.

There were indeed times when the ECA under very difficult circumstances did the best it could to help formulate common African policies and positions with excellence, and met its responsibilities in advocating those positions with great distinction. One is reminded, among others, of ECA's African Alternative Framework To Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980's which even though was not accepted in to to by ECA's partners, did have a major impact subsequently on policy formulation at the international level, most particularly with respect to the human dimension of structural reforms and Adjustments.

It is therefore crucial, as we lament the decline of the ECA in recent years, as indeed we should, not to lose sight of the fact that the Commission did have its good days and its period of excellence. This is what the new process of renewal needs to recreate and build upon.

This is precisely why I said at the beginning that this Conference is different from your previous ones, and it should be treated accordingly. With no hyperbole intended it is indeed a historic Meeting which gives you the opportunity to map out the future of the ECA with the view to making it an effective institution in the service of Africa ---- a Continent despite some gleamers of hope here and there in 1995 still remains in the doldrums economically, finds itself more or less marginalized internationally and continues to face economic and social hardships with no parallel in any part of the globe.

The blueprint before you which is prepared by the Executive Secretary for the renewal of the ECA, it appears to me, requires your maximum attention, for the future of the ECA depends upon how this process of renewal is undertaken, and successfully implemented.

The goal of making the ECA an effective institution with the capacity to advocate a well-formulated and well-considered African perspective and African position on a variety of vital issues impinging on and affecting Africa deserves to be given all the support we can. Africa cannot live and think in isolation from the rest of the world. But there should and must be an African perspective that needs to be brought to bear on issues in international negotiations that affect Africa directly or indirectly. This is one of the very vital tasks that the ECA is

called upon to fulfil and I am extremely pleased that this is one of the important principles that govern the renewal under way to revitalize the Commission.

Mr. Chairman,

Honourable Ministers.

The path that we have to traverse before we get to the point of ensuring our economic survival and regain our dignity is so strewn with so many difficulties that there is a continuing need for us not only to take seriously the commitments that we have entered into to bring about economic integration among our countries, but also to work out common positions on vital issues facing us and defend those jointly with all the necessary determination and seriousness of purpose. For this we need a renewed and

revitalized ECA which is now under way and to which, I am confident, you will give all your attention in the course of your deliberation at this Conference.

Let us not forget for a moment that we Africans at present provide a vivid definition for the saying "United they stand, divided they fall".

I wish you all success in this endeavor and an enjoyable brief stay in Addis Ababa.

I Thank You