Press Releases

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AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT FORUM TO FOCUS ON GLOBALIZATION AND THE INFORMATION AGE

Africa's innovators converge on Addis Ababa to showcase how they are entering the global information age and using IT to 'leapfrog' some key development challenges

Addis Ababa, 20 October 1999 (ECA) - Some of the most vibrant and innovative applications of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for development will occupy centre stage as more than 600 experts from governments, the private sector, civil society, bilateral and multilateral organizations from both within and outside the continent converge on Addis Ababa later this week for the first African Development Forum (ADF).

The Forum is being convened from 24 - 28 October under the theme "The Challenge to Africa of Globalization and the Information Age". It marks the beginning of a process-oriented initiative led by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to position an African-driven development agenda that reflects a consensus among major partners and that leads to specific programmes for implementation at the country level. ADF is born out of the conviction that Africa cannot achieve sustainable development unless the policies, strategies and actions are designed, managed and owned by Africans themselves.

The issue of globalization and the information age has been chosen for the inaugural ADF because of the importance of defining African-owned and African-led strategies to engage with the global information economy. ECA has long advocated a development-serving information superhighway in the context of the African Information Society Initiative (AISI), which it is implementing along with a wide range of partners.

According to Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, leader of ECA's organizing team, the Forum will be unique because, for the first time, it will "demonstrate how much is being done in Africa, by Africans, in harnessing ICTs towards development. Much is already underway, and yet it is not well known, even within Africa itself.

"We see the ADF as an important forum for sharing of experiences and best practices. There is a lot happening globally, and at the same time a groundswell of activity that is going on in Africa. It's coming out of civil society, it's coming out of places you wouldn't expect," added Ms. Ben Soltane, Director of ECA's Development Information Services Division (DISD).

"AT ADF '99 you will hear about women entrepreneurs in Sudan organizing national workshops on electronic commerce, cybercafe entrepreneurs in some of the world's least developed countries like Togo and Gabon, schools in South Africa and Mozambique using computers for education, young people from Senegal and Ghana, Egypt and South Africa, talking about how their generation sees it. You will also see how high tech is being used to link to the rural areas, to the grassroots. You will hear about radio being used to link rural communities in Mali, about networks of women's community radio. The list goes on".

ADF '99 kicks off on Sunday evening with an opening plenary that will focus on the broad issues of the African development challenge. Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, will deliver a keynote address, followed by reflections from ECA Executive

Secretary K.Y. Amoako and Organization of African Unity (OAU) Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim, among others. A second plenary the following morning - featuring Ms. Louise Frechette, UN Deputy Secretary-General and Noah Samara, CEO of WorldSpace Corporation -- will address the development opportunities of the information age in Africa.

The Forum then moves into addressing four substantive themes:

- Strengthening Africa's information infrastructure - Africa and the information economy - Information and communication technologies for improved governance - Democratizing access to the information society

A discussion paper has been prepared by ECA consultants for each of the four themes, and these will be presented prior to each plenary discussion. The programme has been designed to enable open dialogue and full participation.

Expected concrete outcomes from the Forum include:

- Up-to-date National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plans - Enhanced synergy among the stakeholders who design and/or implement country work programmes; - Development of concrete follow-up action plans for the Post-Forum Summit Dialogue, NICI and regional levels, for ICT partners, and for ECA; - Preparation of the African position for major global decision-making forums, including the GK II conference (Malaysia, March 2000) and the ITU World conference on the Information Society.

END

For all the relevant documents on ADF '99, please visit the ADF Home Page at: http://www.un.org/depts/eca . A list of ADF documents, as well as the latest programme, will be sent to you in separate e-mail messages.

Press releases and summaries of key ADF goings-on will be sent to you daily during the Forum, and will also be available on the Web. They will be supported by video and audio excerpts of keynote addresses and other major moments.

French versions of all releases and summaries will be available on the Web.

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