

## Regional Economic Communities Urged to Deepen Their Mutual Cooperation to Move the African Integration Agenda Forward

Sharm-el-Sheikh - 27 June 2008 (ECA) - "Africa is the continent that is most in need of integration," said Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). Mr Janneh was addressing the meeting of the Coordination Committee of the African Union, ECA, African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), held yesterday on the margins of the African Union Summit in Sharm-El-Sheikh, Egypt.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC), and Chair of the Committee, reaffirmed his strong commitments towards an intensified AU cooperation with ECA, AfDB and the RECs. Urging participants to advance the continental integration agenda, Mr Ping said: "We cannot afford to fail. Failing would mean failing our populations and leading them deeper into poverty." He called for the strengthening of continental integration. He reminded participants that the overarching objective of integration is the establishment of an African Economic Community where there would be free movement of persons, goods, services and capital, as well as monetary union. He also underscored the need to develop transport, energy and ICT infrastructure and to harmonise the legal and regulatory frameworks.

Mr. Ping also invited the RECs that are more advanced in their integration processes to share their best practices and inspire the ones still lagging behind. "Collaboration amongst regions is crucial if we want to make progress," said Mr. Ping

The RECs represented at the meeting, the Sahelo-Saharan Community of States (CEN-SAD), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Inter-Governmental authority for Development (IGAD), the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS), and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), presented their ongoing integration programmes and activities. They called on the AUC, ECA and AfDB to assist them to address the challenges they face in their sub-regions.

Addressing the meeting, Mr. Abdoulie Janneh indicated that integration is one of the "key strategies towards Africa's Development" and the raison d'être of the Economic Commission for Africa. He suggested that in order to move the integration process forward, Africans need to deepen the debate on integration and strengthen the institutions that drive the integration agenda, namely the AU and the RECs. He added that transboundary issues such as HIV and AIDs, water management, peace and security, among others, should not be neglected.

He called for increased efforts to mobilize African resources to finance the continental integration agenda. Mr Janneh added: "We need a common framework on how Africa wants to finance its integration." Addressing the RECs, he noted that they should gear their programmes and activities towards the integration of Africa because "RECs are the building blocks of integration."

The coordination committee was holding its first meeting since the signing last January of the Protocol on Relations between the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

The Committee on Coordination, established by the protocol, provides broad guidelines to the RECs on issues pertaining to continental integration and aims at coordinating and harmonizing the macro-economic and other policies of the RECs in the priority sectors such as agriculture, industry, transport, communication, energy, environment, trade, customs, monetary and financial matters. The Committee meets twice a year.

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