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Rabat, 12 December 2015 (ECA): ECA's Deputy Executive Secretary for Knowledge Delivery Giovanie Biha visited Morocco on 8-11 December 2015 for the first time since her appointment in April 2015.

Biha met several ECA partners to better understand their needs and examine how relations could be strengthened further. Her interlocutors included Habib Ben Yahia, Secretary General of the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) and Mamoun Bouhdoud, Minister Delegate to the Minister of Industry, Trade, Investment and Digital economy, in Charge of Small Enterprises and Informal Sector Integration. She was the guest of Mohamed Abbou, Minister Delegate to the Minister of Industry, Trade, Investment and the Digital economy, in Charge of Foreign Trade. Biha also met the High Commissioner for Planning Ahmed Lahlimi Alami, the Chairman of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council Nizar Baraka, the Director General of the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies (IRES) Tawfiq Mouline and high officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation.

Discussion topics included both the Moroccan and the Sub-regional economic context and various issues these countries are faced with.

The Economic Commission for Africa was one of the first international organizations to open offices in Morocco (its sub-regional office has been working since 1963). This meeting was an opportunity for the DES' interlocutors to express their satisfaction at their good relations with the ECA and their willingness to strengthen them up further.

"I would like to thank the ECA for the daily support they gave us by inviting the five countries' senior officials to various opportunities to think together", said Mr Benyahia, who expressed his wish to see UMA (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia) benefit from ECA's continued

support on the Boosting Intra African Trade (BIAT) program, in stepping up exchanges between UMA and other African regional economic communities and in answering the needs that will appear following the launch of the Maghreb Investment and Foreign Trade Bank (BMICE). “*What you are doing in Africa is important*”, he said, expressing the hope that progress made on Africa’s Continental Free Trade Zone (CFTA) will help speed up African integration.

For his part, Ahmed Lahlimi stressed the importance of the High Commission for Planning’s collaboration with the ECA, as African countries, including Morocco, are facing similar issues. He also expressed his willingness to make HCP officials available for African countries, to share their experience and help advance approaches to statistics, poverty and inequality at the economic, territorial or gender level. “*We are ready, both as an institution and as individuals, to bring the support that will be deemed useful*”, he said.

For his part, the Chairman of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council Nizar Baraka expressed his organization’s willingness to support increased exchanges between African Economic and Social Councils. He also mentioned a number of opportunities for shared competitiveness; as Morocco has successfully managed to integrate into European value chains (textile, agro-foods, etc.) and could, in turn act as a bridge for African countries do the same.

Biha and her interlocutors considered several actions including the organization of a conference to help strengthen the dialogue between African statistical bodies, pursued ECA-HCP exchanges on country profiles, sharing Morocco’s experience in applying the ECA Social Development Index and in areas such as economy diversification, speeding up industrialization and employment – especially youth employment – to promote the development of solutions matching the individual needs of African countries.

The meetings also covered topics such as the African CFTA and its potential impact for the sub-region and cooperation between Maghreb countries in areas such as energy, food security and finance.

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