

**Regional Workshop on Mainstreaming Regional Integration at National Level, 5 February 2013, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Opening Remarks by Stephen Karingi, Director, Regional Integration, Infrastructure and Trade Division**

Mr. Chairman

Distinguished Representatives from Member States and Institutions

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of Mr. Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, I would like to welcome you all to Addis Ababa and to ECA. Let me start by thanking you Mr. Tadeous Chinfamba, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Regional Integration and International Cooperation of the Republic of Zimbabwe, for accepting to preside over this regional workshop.

We have gathered here today to reflect on one of the key aspects of Africa's continental integration in terms of efforts to mainstream regional integration at the national level, which is the theme of the 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on Trade, Regional Cooperation and Integration which begins tomorrow.

For many years, African leaders had stressed the importance of regional integration and, as part of that, adopted a wide array of protocols and decisions to foster it, in the firm belief that many small African countries, especially in the context of the increasingly competitive globalized world, needed integration, larger markets and economic scales to promote investment, competition and unleash the hugely untapped potential of the continent. The conviction is that, for most individual African countries, accelerated economic growth and development cannot be achieved over a reasonable period of time without first overcoming the limitations of demographic and economic size that characterize these economies. Of the 54 African countries, 39 (about 72%) have populations of 15 million people or less; while a third have populations of 3 million or less. Moreover, of the 46 least developed countries in the world, 32 are in Africa. The potential role of regional economic integration in overcoming the inherent disadvantages associated with small individual national markets provides one of the strongest justifications for regional integration schemes in Africa.

Currently the Africa region is confronted by an enormous challenge to develop faster and unleash its potential as the next global pole. There is an urgent need to eradicate poverty and to enhance and sustain human welfare and dignity. In this connection, it has become imperative to revamp Africa's integration process and speed up its tempo through bold and urgent steps. Even more developed countries have sought to integrate their economies. The European Union (EU) has long achieved its internal market integration and monetary union. The African countries, which need integration the most, have to accelerate the process towards the African Common Market and the African Economic Community in the spirit and letter of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community. The Treaty later reemphasized by the Constitutive Act of the African Union) was designed to create a common market, involving the free movement of goods, services, capital and people across the region. It was also designed to promote functional cooperation in a variety of areas vital to social and economic development (transport, energy, peace and security, agriculture, etc.), and indeed to promote harmonization of macroeconomic policies and monetary integration, leading eventually to the establishment of a *single market and a single economy*.

No doubt, there have been notable achievements in Africa's integration. Appreciable progress has been made in a number of areas. Just to cite a few critical ones. Thanks to several initiatives such as the NEPAD infrastructure action plans, SSATP, some advances have been made in trans-African highway interconnections. The telecommunications sector across Africa is picking up thanks to the global ICT revolution, which has had a positive impact on Africa, with the private sector playing a leading role. The concept of energy power pooling is gaining momentum inspired by the successful experience of the Southern Africa Power Pool pioneered by SADC. ECOWAS has established a similar power pooling supply and distribution scheme in West Africa, and has now successfully implemented the West African Gas. Trade liberalization schemes for creating free trade areas and customs union within each REC have been launched in all of the sub-regions, accompanied by elaborate trade facilitation programs. We have had some successes in the area of free movement of people through the application of protocols on the abolition of entry visas, the right of residence and the right of establishment.

Still, numerous challenges remain preoccupying. Intra-African trade, for example, remains weak and undiversified. Inadequate infrastructure continues to hobble Africa's capacity to trade: Infra-structural networks remain a huge challenge particularly in transport and energy. Deficiencies have had an impact on cost of doing business and on intra-African trade, which is barely 12%. Current estimates

of infrastructure needs suggest that a doubling of current infrastructure investment would be needed each year to sustain rapid growth.

The continent continues to face the problem of capacity and resource deficits to deliver on its comprehensive integration agenda. The Regional Economic Communities have to cope with challenging mandates entrusted to them in their treaties and protocols. But more importantly, we are also confronted with the challenge of limited implementation of treaties and protocols at the national level. Regional agreements need to be mainstreamed in national policies and budgets to accelerate progress at the sub-regional and regional levels. Yet, in some countries national mechanisms for coordination, implementation and follow-up of agreed integration objectives are weak, ineffective or lack resources to function effectively. A number of countries are yet to fully integrate agreed decisions into their national development plans and strategies.

Against this background, in the context of its approved 2012-2013 biennial work programme the UNECA is undertaking a national survey on the subject of mainstreaming regional integration, the findings of which are the subject of this regional workshop. A survey of this importance and magnitude required accurate data and information from the member States who are expected to implement and follow-up on regional integration programs and activities within the framework of Treaties, Protocols, Decisions and Plans adopted and agreed upon both at the level of the Regional Economic Communities and at the level of the African Union. In this context, ECA solicited information and data from all the African countries through a comprehensive questionnaire, designed to solicit the best possible data and information on this matter from member States. The questionnaire was followed by field visits. The report before you has analyzed the findings from the questionnaire and results from the consultative visits. The workshop will help share experiences on this important issue and deepen the findings from the survey.

Mr. Chairman, Let me conclude by emphasizing that we in ECA, in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the RECs, the African Development and our partners in development, will continue to do our level best to accompany your efforts in mainstreaming regional integration at the national level.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a fruitful and successful workshop.