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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Statement

by

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Mr. Chairman

Dr. Jean Ping, Chairperson African Union Commission

AU Commissioners

Honourable Ministers

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

I always appreciate the opportunity to address this distinguished gathering, which plays a vital role in shaping the political, economic and social development of our continent. I thank the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for his continued dynamic leadership of the Commission and the clarity of his vision in optimizing the institutional landscape of the continent to support its development efforts. This strategic leadership has been visibly supported by the Commissioners and entire staff of the Commission in their engagement with the United Nations system and I salute them in this regard.

Permit me before going into the substance of my comments to extend heartfelt sympathy to the entire Government and People of Ethiopia on the recent crash of an Ethiopian Airlines aircraft in Beirut. This is a very distressing and painful incident, which took the lives of the very same crew members that took me to Beirut from where I have just returned. This dreadful incident gives additional poignancy to the sadness and anguish that we in the United Nations feel about the recent earthquake in Haiti where there was tremendous loss of life amongst which were several of our colleagues serving in that country. We join the entire world in mourning the loss of lives in these two tragic events.

This year is particularly significant because it marks the start of a new decade and new beginnings are always an opportunity for renewal and rededication to our development aspirations. Perhaps more noteworthy is the fact that this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of independence for a

large number of African countries. Africa was encouraged by the trailblazing example of countries like Sudan and Ghana but with a critical mass of countries achieving independence in 1960 that year could arguably be described as the turning point in the struggle for decolonization. As we celebrate this anniversary, we must inevitably reflect on how well we have done over this period in the various areas in which we have been collectively engaged since then.

If such a reflection exercise is taken as a snapshot of the last decade, it will be quite evident that Africa has made considerable progress since the beginning of the new millennium. This was the period in which the African Union was established and NEPAD adopted. Prior to the outbreak of the global economic and financial crisis, Africa had consistently achieved annual growth rates of 6%. It was making steady progress in peace and security issues and had, in addition, taken the lead in defining its own governance agenda by promoting more democratic and accountable political structures in the continent, including through the creation of the unique African Peer Review Mechanism. Moreover, our continent has made considerable progress in a number of social development areas, with some remarkable gains in gender equality, primary school enrolment, reductions in HIV prevalence rates and progress in the treatment of infectious and preventable diseases. These are no mean achievements.

Last year, 2009 however marked a departure from this trend as socio-economic developments in Africa were overshadowed by the global economic and financial crisis and the prior food and fuel crisis. Export and government earnings dropped significantly as did remittances and other financial flows. Continental GDP dropped from 4.9 per cent in 2008 to 1.6% in 2009 which is below the population growth rate and implies a fall in per capita income. Similarly, governance conditions seemed to give fresh cause for concern with a rash of unconstitutional changes of governments that have blotted the political landscape in the recent past and which

should be firmly resisted. Maternal mortality and violence against women and children remain unacceptably high and our societies continue to face challenges in providing adequately for marginalized and vulnerable groups as well as for refugees and internally displaced persons.

I would posit however that despite this departure from the trend there is no cause for pessimism. Indeed, the forecast in the forthcoming Economic Report for Africa, jointly published by the ECA and African Union Commission, shows that Africa's GDP is expected to grow at a rate of 4.3 per cent in 2010. However, we need to ensure that our development policies go beyond improving macroeconomic management and balances, which are important and necessary but insufficient. What is needed are structures that promote production, employment and trade to transform our small and fragmented economies into strong, diversified and resilient entities that can generate employment for their teeming populations.

The adoption by the ILO and UN Economic and Social Council of the Global Jobs Pact aimed at stimulating economic recovery, generating jobs and providing protection to working people and their families is a step in the right direction. The 3rd Joint AU/ECA Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development taking place in Lilongwe, Malawi in March 2010 will take this matter further under the theme "*Promoting high-level sustainable growth to reduce unemployment in Africa*". I must stress however that all these efforts must be underpinned by a renewed sense of urgency in promoting Africa's regional integration agenda. Regional integration is imperative if Africa is to realize its potential to become a dynamic economic force.

Faster and deeper integration will not only reflect the pan-African ideal of continental unity but will also enable Africa to engage more meaningfully in global political and economic processes, which are a central concern of this Executive Council. A common African voice has been used to great

effect in recent international forums such as the G20 meetings as well as the recently concluded Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. The Conference, which was attended by nearly 130 leaders, raised the climate change challenge to the highest political level. The “Copenhagen Accord” was its main outcome and commitments contained there include limiting global warming to below 2°C, recording emission reduction targets and providing short and long-term finance for developing countries. The Accord represents an important first step to establishing a legally-binding agreement for a post 2012 international climate change regime.

I firmly believe that Africa got a relatively good deal out of the Copenhagen meeting because it went in there as one delegation on the able leadership of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. If the commitments made are delivered upon, a substantial part of our climate financing needs can be met, which is why I wish to reiterate the UN Secretary-General’s call for African countries to sign up to the Accord reached in Copenhagen by the stipulated deadline of 31 January 2010, which would then need to be followed-up by preparatory meetings for upcoming meetings in Bonn and Mexico.

Regional integration is also imperative to enable more economies of scale in the productive activities that must underpin greater competitiveness and growth in the continent. In today's global knowledge economy and information-driven society, economic success is increasingly based on the effective utilization of intangible assets such as knowledge, skills and innovative potential as key resources for competitive advantage. Information and Communications Technologies or ICTs can improve performance of businesses and the efficiency of markets, while empowering citizens and communities and increasing their access to knowledge. I therefore salute African Leaders for their choice of theme: *Information and Communication Technologies in Africa: Challenges and Prospects for Development.*

ICTs provide several opportunities for our countries. For instance, as mobile phone usage expands it will facilitate health, commerce, trading, and financial services such as m-banking and m-payments. Africans can now use their mobile phones to make person to person payments, transfer money, purchase pre-paid electricity. ICT devices also provide a wealth of information that have enhanced the education and knowledge stream for children, leading to their further understanding of Africa's development challenges, human rights issues and the science and technology underpinning ICTs. Furthermore, the use of geo-spatial technology for management and exploration of natural resources and disaster awareness and preparedness as well as in climate change adaptation will contribute to improving socio-economic conditions in Africa.

Whilst Africa has chalked some milestones in embracing and adapting to the Information Society and the use of ICTs, there is still some way to go. For instance, Africa needs to be integrated much faster into the knowledge economy that has come about as a result of the ICT revolution. Therefore some critical foundation blocs need urgently to be put in place, namely by way of infrastructure, regional backbones and connectivity. Internet growth and speed is still limited in Africa where we have only one fixed broadband subscriber for every 1,000 inhabitants. Europe in comparison has 200 subscribers per 1,000 people.

I am nevertheless happy to report that through the African Information Society Initiative aimed at boosting the deployment of ICTs in society and economy, and with the support of ECA and its partners, particularly the Government of Finland, up to forty African countries have made good progress in adopting ICT strategies especially through National Information and Communication Infrastructure Plans (NICIs). Tremendous efforts are also underway to launch e-health, e-government and e-commerce applications in related sectors. Through initiatives such as e-CEMAC and e-

SADC, ICTs are being used in support of regional integration to promote harmonization of national policies and regulatory frameworks. The United Nations system accordingly looks forward to working closely with its partners especially the African Union Commission in monitoring the Summit outcomes on ICT.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate the abiding faith of the United Nations in the prospects for Africa long-term progress. This is why we continue to place appropriate emphasis on the functioning of the Regional Coordination Mechanism of UN agencies working in support of the African Union and its NEPAD Programme which met in Addis Ababa in November 2009. At that meeting, the RCM recommended a comprehensive review of the UN Ten Year Capacity Building Programme for the African Union. In addition to on-going cooperation across several sectors, the findings of the review will no doubt assist the UN in up-scaling its support to the African Union.

Under the leadership of the Secretary General, His Excellency, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, the United Nations system remains firmly committed to supporting African Union objectives in peace and security, development and human rights as well as for a more rapid integration of the continent. This is why in December last year we worked closely with the African Union Commission to jointly organize a dialogue with our development partners to mobilise support of the realisation of the AU Strategic Plan. I am confident that the deliberations of this august gathering will take us closer to achieving these noble objectives.

I wish you successful deliberations and thank you for your kind attention.