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DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA AND ECA Highlights on some of the challenges

Statement

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ECA and Africa

I want to first say what an honour it is for me, as the newly appointed UNECA Executive Secretary, en poste since 1 November 2005, to make my first address to this esteemed body. Let me in these brief remarks focus on outlining Africa's key challenges and the support that ECA provides to the continent in addressing and meeting these challenges and in that way respond to some of the issues raised during the recent GA discussions on "Development in Africa".

Since its establishment, and in line with its mandate, the Commission has focused on several core analytical and research activities in which it has unique technical capacity and a comparative advantage. In that regard, ECA has, in the recent past, focused in providing significant support in the key areas of economic and policy analysis; gender; agriculture and sustainable Development; promoting good governance; trade and regional integration; and harnessing the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) for development. This analytical and research work has enabled the Commission to facilitate consensus building in these areas, advocacy on Africa's challenges and peer learning on innovative approaches. A recent example in the area of peer learning has been the establishment of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) Learning Group, which provides a forum for policy makers and experts to share experience on poverty reduction issues. We recently convened a major ministerial meeting in Cairo in March 2006 to deliberate on the formulation of second generation poverty reduction strategies and how to align them with the MDGs.

The Current Regional Development Agenda and Priorities

Last year's global review of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals highlighted the fact that, with a few exceptions, given current trends, Africa as a continent will not meet most of the MDG targets within the set timeframes. In this regard, African leaders and governments, working collectively under the auspices of the African Union, have agreed to scale up their efforts within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to achieve the goals and their other political and socio-economic priorities. The recent response from the international community to the situation in Africa and pledges of support to meet the NEPAD priorities has been most encouraging.

This noteworthy response was reflected prominently in the consensus reached in the Outcome document of the 2005 World Summit on the imperative to address the special needs of Africa. In light of this and also in response to the overall UN Reform process that is being undertaken following the 2005 World Summit it was clear to me soon after assuming the position of Executive Secretary that ECA should now do the maximum to build on these developments and step up efforts to assist member States within the context of meeting the MDG needs of the continent and achieving the regional development priorities.

ECA's Response

In order to respond proactively to these realities and in response to advice from member States, I established a Task Force in March 2006 and instructed it to investigate how ECA should now reposition itself. The Task Force is led by Mr. Anil Sood, former Vice President in the World Bank, and who has recently helped in carrying out similar

reform processes in the African Development Bank and UNDP. The rest of its membership is composed of a mix of external members and ECA staff members. The Task Force was charged with assessing the current and emerging economic and social challenges confronting Africa and to make recommendations on what internal changes ECA must make in order to play a much more effective role in addressing these challenges. Its work has so far been informed by consultations with ECA staff and with representatives of member States in Addis Ababa. It has also consulted with key African institutions, mainly the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as well as members of the UN family and other key development partners, both bilateral and multilateral. The Task Force has already made its first set of key recommendations, which I would now like to briefly highlight. In summary, it is proposed that, in line with its mandate and the African Union's agenda, ECA should now focus on achieving results in two related areas, namely: **(i) Promoting regional integration; and (ii) meeting Africa's special needs and challenges.**

Let me briefly expand on what is envisaged in both areas. Under the first pillar—**promoting regional integration**-- ECA will aim to fully support the African Union in its bid to accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent, promote and defend African common positions, and establish the necessary conditions to enable the continent to play its rightful role in the global economy. This will include support for building regional infrastructure. In addition, ECA will place a stronger focus on the specific needs of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) through a region-specific, multi-year partnership strategy agreed with each REC with clearly articulated results and milestones; and the establishment of more empowered Sub-Regional Offices (SROs) with increased access to the skills and resources needed to deliver the agreed results, a response to the General Assembly resolution of 18 December 2005. This resolution was based on the recommendation of the recent OIOS report on the programme and administrative management of the Sub Regional Offices (SROs) of the ECA, which called on the Secretary-General to present to the sixty-first session of the General Assembly a comprehensive plan of action to strengthen the SROs.

As regards the second pillar—**meeting Africa's special needs and challenges**-- ECA's activities will focus primarily on attaining the main objectives of NEPAD. Here, while maintaining its analytical and knowledge-sharing capacity across the full range of development themes and sectors, forging stronger partnerships and more dynamic networks with core stakeholders, ECA must now focus its "operations" on a more limited set of sectors and themes where its competence and contribution are widely acknowledged. These are (a) Social development, with special focus on the MDGs (b) Food Security and sustainable development (c) Emerging global issues, including trade, and economic development (d) Harnessing information and communication technology, innovation and knowledge systems, science and technology, and (e) Improving governance and development management to enhance national capacity and capability and to support the APRM process.

A strong partnership between Africa's major regional institutions is critical to moving this agenda forward. In this regard, ECA is committed to active participation in the work of the joint African Union-African Development Bank-ECA secretariat, which was revitalised earlier this year under the leadership of the AU Commission.

ECA's leading role in fostering coherence of UN's work in Africa

ECA will continue to play a leading role in pushing for a coherent UN voice in Africa. The Commission was instrumental in the creation of a framework to bring coordinated UN system support to the implementation of the NEPAD programme and entrusted with leading the process. Now, at the request of the UN Secretary General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr. Alpha Konaré, this will be expanded to include responsibility for coordinating the UN system's support to the AU.

Furthermore, advancing the African development agenda requires that ECA build and strengthen external partnerships. ECA will therefore work very closely with the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) to present and advocate African interests and African views to the broader international community. We will also strengthen collaboration with Africa's multilateral development partners such as the OECD/DAC, with whom we have developed an institutional mechanism for the mutual accountability for development effectiveness between Africa and its Partners.

Positive Reaction from member States and key partners

These proposals for repositioning ECA have just been endorsed by the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development that ended today in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The relevant resolution is attached. They have also been discussed with and approved by the leaders of the African Union Commission and

the African Development Bank and their respective senior management.

We are now deepening the consultation process, and in that regard, I will soon be travelling to New York to speak with you and also seek guidance from UN Headquarters on how to speedily advance with this proposed agenda to reposition ECA.

To end these brief remarks, let me say a few words on the financing of ECA activities. The resources being provided through the core budget of the UN represent, to my mind the minimum, required for the Commission to remain credible. I intend to use these resources as seed capital and supplement them by voluntary contribution from partners to enable ECA to accompany member States in Africa in meeting their enormous development challenges. I am confident that the members of the GA will support me in this approach.

Thank you for your attention.
