

# **Ninth Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union**

## **Statement**

**By Abdoulie Janneh**

**UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa**

Banjul, The Gambia

28 June 2006

Mr. Chairman,  
Your Excellency, Alpha Oumar Konare, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,  
Honorable Ministers,  
Distinguished Commissioners of the African Union,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my singular pleasure to be addressing the Executive Council of the African Union today in the land of my birth. Therefore, as a returning "son of the soil", I want to first of all extend a very warm welcome to Banjul to all visiting delegations. It is a great honour to host the Summit of the African Union and I am proud that the people of the Gambia have been accorded this tribute this year.

Mr. Chairman,  
Honorable Ministers

In my first statement to you in Khartoum in January, I emphasized the importance of forging a closer partnership and up-scaling collaboration between the African Union Commission and the Economic Commission for Africa. I noted then that a renewed and stronger partnership between these two organizations, and a third major regional institution, the African Development Bank, was critical to our collective efforts to address the immense challenges faced by the continent.

I am now pleased to report progress on several fronts in this regard. Over the past six months, I have benefited immensely from the collaboration, support and guidance of President Alpha Konare with whom I have held several consultations on how best we can optimize the AU-ECA institutional partnership. In February, we also widened our bilateral discussions to include our senior AUC and ECA staff as well as Mr. Donald Kaberuka, President of the ADB and senior staff of the Bank, for a very productive meeting at the AU headquarters. We ended that tripartite discussion with a firm agreement to revitalize the joint AU-ADB-ECA secretariat under the leadership of the AU Commission as well as to strengthen the harmonization and rationalization of our meetings and our programme activities in several key areas.

Mr. Chairman,

The High Level Plenary on Poverty Reduction Strategies and the MDGs held in Cairo in March, which was jointly organized by the African Union Commission, the ECA and the Government of Egypt, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), was one early fruit of our renewed commitment to deepening our collaboration. In particular, it helped to advance the regional development agenda in an important policy area.

There was also high level participation from the AUC in ECA's Annual Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, which was held in Ouagadougou, in May, under the theme 'Meeting the challenge of employment in Africa ', back-to-back with the Annual Meeting of the African Development Bank. The Conference aimed principally to advance the implementation of the plan of action adopted at the AU Extraordinary Summit of African Heads of State and Government on Employment and Poverty Reduction in September 2004.

Fruitful collaboration is also ongoing in several other areas. For example, and immediately related to the theme of this Summit, the ECA continues to work with the AU and ADB on a range of issues that seek to deepen regional integration and promote infrastructure development on the continent.

Meanwhile, with regards to international trade, the ECA in collaboration with the AU has been providing technical support to the African Group on the on-going WTO negotiations. While there has been some progress in the Doha Round talks, let me use this opportunity to bring to your attention several outstanding concerns. In particular, these include the issues of genuine market access for African products, the elimination of subsidies in developed countries, the need for progress on the cotton issue and the overall need for the adoption of a credible development package.

ECA is also working with the AU Commission, the NEPAD Secretariat and other regional partners, in key fields such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the promotion of gender equity, the fight against HIV/AIDS, the NEPAD/OECD mutual review on development effectiveness, as well as the international financing for development agenda an issue on which we had meaningful meeting in Abuja in May co-sponsored by the Federal Government of Nigeria, the ADB and ECA.

Honourable Ministers,

Circumstances related to the current global development agenda, and within the United Nations, dictate that we now build on these activities and do even more to harness all available resources to address Africa's development priorities.

Given the challenges before us, we are going to need continued and ever deeper partnership over the long term, in order to bring about the positive changes that are needed in the lives of Africa's people. The Outcome document of the 2005 World Summit was encouraging in that regard, as it reflected a clear global consensus on the imperative to address the special needs of Africa.

The current UN Reform process initiated by the Secretary General also calls for several changes to the way the UN system operates which could be most beneficial to Africa.

In light of this, it has been clear to me since assuming the office of Executive Secretary that ECA must do all it can to help Africa exploit this current window of opportunity.

Following discussions with various stakeholders and partners, I therefore established a Task Force in March and instructed it to assess how ECA should now reposition itself to better respond to Africa's priorities. Based on extensive consultations with ECA staff, key African institutions mainly the AUC, the African Development Bank, and the regional economic communities, as well as members of the United Nations family and other development partners, the Task Force has now provided me with useful recommendations which I intend to act on.

Our proposals for repositioning ECA were endorsed in Ouagadougou in a resolution issued by the ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, the Commission's highest legislative body. They have also been discussed with, and supported by, the leaders of the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank. Additionally, an overview was presented to the General Assembly Informals last month; and I am pleased to inform you that I was also able to brief your Addis Ababa based Ambassadors two weeks ago in some detail on our plans. Last week, I was also able to brief their colleagues, the African Group of Ambassadors accredited to the United Nations in New York, as well. Allow me now to briefly mention just a few highlights to you.

Mr. Chairman,  
Honourable Ministers

The Task Force's consultations and assessment found that, contrary to what has been said in some quarters, the mandate of the ECA, the only United Nation's organization solely dedicated to Africa remains highly relevant.

However, it proposed a sharpening of the focus of the mission of the Commission in light of new circumstances within the international arena and the United Nations a changed regional landscape. In summary, it recommended that 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.

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. 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. To implement these strategies, we will seek to foster more empowered ECA Sub-Regional Offices (SROs) with increased access to

the skills and resources needed to deliver the agreed results, as called for by the General Assembly resolution of 18 December 2005.

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, ECA will concentrate its "operations" on several key sectors and themes where it has a comparative advantage. These include: social development, with special focus on the MDGs; food security and sustainable development; trade; ICTs; as well as governance, with a strong emphasis on supporting the APRM process. Naturally, on all these matters under the second pillar, we will also be working in close collaboration with the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA)

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Above all, the aims of this new ECA are evidently closely aligned with the theme of this Summit and on which I would like to make a few remarks to conclude my statement.

Mr. Chairman,

As you will recall, the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community, which came into force in May 1994, stipulated that Africa's regional economic communities would serve as building blocks towards the creation of the continental Community.

However, although the African Union currently has eight formal RECs, the reality on the ground is that Africa has at least fourteen inter-governmental integration organizations, each of which has its own identity, its own treaties and its own protocols. They also have their own governance structures and membership, many of which overlap. In totality, today's integration architecture appears far more complex than what the founding signatories to the Abuja Treaty might have anticipated.

Therefore, while the rationale for Africa's integration is already clear and compelling, a well coordinated and harmonized approach to establishing Africa's common market is now urgently needed.

To help find a lasting solution to this outstanding issue, the African Union Commission and ECA collaborated to produce the second edition of ARIA (ARIA II), which takes a closer look at Africa's overlapping Regional Economic Communities and sub regional integration organizations, and the attendant challenge of multiple membership. The study, which will be launched soon, provides bold and realistic recommendations for rationalization to inform a decisive political decision on the matter.

Ultimately, the objective of this ARIA II exercise is to make an informed contribution to strengthening the institutional arrangements for building a strong African Economic Community. We hope that you find our analysis useful.

Honorable Ministers,

In conclusion, I want to reiterate that we are here to serve you. Our primary mission now is to provide the necessary enhanced support to member States that is essential to speedily advancing the regional integration process and meeting Africa's special needs and challenges.

We therefore look forward to your full backing as we seek to successfully reposition our institution and deepen our partnership with the African Union Commission and other key regional players.

I thank you for your attention.

---