

AFRICA UNITE Symposium, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Honour Rebel Robert “Bob” Nesta Marley 60th Birthday Celebration

**Statement by Ms. Josephine Ouedrago,
Deputy Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa
2nd February 2005**

The Chairman, Mr. Danny Glover,
Representative of Government of Ethiopia,
Your Excellency Commissioner Maxwell, Representative of the Chairperson of African Union Commission,
Your Excellency, Representative of Family of His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie 1,
Representatives from the Bob Marley and Rita Marley Foundations,
Representatives of Diaspora community,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Executive Secretary of Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), H.E. K.Y. Amoako, I wish to take this opportunity to welcome you all to this important gathering. This gathering serves as a reminder to the African people of the struggle they went through to liberate themselves from “mental slavery” and the colonial yoke.

It may be recalled that since the last century, Africa leaders both in the Diaspora and in the Continent, began to view the continent as a whole instead as fragmented pieces. These views of the continent were slowly incorporated into the nationalist struggle and received their clearest articulation during the struggle for independence.

The theme “Africa Unite” popularizes a clarion call of the first nationalists in the eighteenth century through the historic Pan African Congresses, to the early 1960s political leaders, for Africa to ignore their political boundaries and unite for common interest and realities.

It is, therefore an honour for ECA to be a partner in this occasion of the 60th birthday of Bob Nesta Marley, which coincides with the Black History Month.

The Economic Commission for Africa, ECA established in 1958, greatly cherish our increasing contributions to Africa’s development and our close links with the African Union, our member States and Africans in Diaspora. Our support for this symposium stems from our commitment to implement the outcome of the Forum we organised on regional integration, as well as our contribution to strengthen the call for a united and clear African voice.

Three years ago in 2002, ECA brought together at its third African Development Forum (ADF 3) on “Defining Priorities for Regional Integration”, an array of stakeholders, including representatives of African governments, regional development institutions, as well as business leaders and members of civil society to deliberate on Africa’s progress through economic integration.

A Consensus issued at the end of the Forum, stated that African unity is a challenge facing citizens of all African countries, governments, the private sector, civil society and diaspora. The statement acknowledged that powerful obstacles, which included gender inequality, restricted movement of people, HIV/AIDS pandemic, inadequate infrastructure and limited private sector capacity, stood in the way of Africa’s integration.

The statement highlighted that the African people, including governments and citizens, must work in partnership and own the process of regional integration, as epitomised in the legendary Bob Marley’s song, “Africa Unite”. Bob Marley challenged us to ignite “the fire of African self determination with a promise to our ancestral home”.

ECA as a knowledge-based institution is open to all ideas, not simply economics. As you are aware, our mandate is to support the economic and social development of our 53 member States, foster regional integration, and promote international cooperation for Africa’s development.

We are working with the African Union, African Development Bank and other UN agencies on many initiatives to

address Africa's challenges. These include initiatives toward reversing capital flight, brain drain and friendly employment for Africans, both in Diaspora and in the continent.

The themes we have heard this morning have clearly underscored the observations of ECA in addressing Africa's challenges. As the song we are going to hear today goes, ECA alongside other African stakeholders will not "give-up the fight", until total emancipation from social and economic backwardness is achieved.

Focusing on socio-economic development in Africa, we hope that this symposium will help us generate the kind of intellectual input for the formulation of innovative strategies for the consideration of African governments.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention and I wish you fruitful deliberations.
