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**UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM-WIDE SPECIAL INITIATIVE ON AFRICA:
BRIEFING STATEMENT**

**Delivered at the
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I would first like to register my highest esteem to His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Namibia, Dr. Sam Nujoma for his far reaching opening statement. His recognition and encouragement of the development role of civil society and grassroots organizations in this sub-region is a tribute to his wise leadership and commitment to poverty reduction in Namibia and to his broader vision for Africa.

I would also like to extend the message of best wishes from Mr. K.Y. Amoako, UN Under Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) for a successful outcome on your deliberations.

Finally, I want to thank Mr. Finjap Njinga, Director of the United Nations Information Center in Namibia, for inviting me to participate in this Regional Forum on Poverty Eradication in Southern Africa. Mr. Njinga has asked me to speak about the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, and in particular, the progress that has been achieved to date in implementing programs under his Initiative. In doing so, I would like to start with a brief background on the vision of the Initiative, the priority programs, and the implementation arrangements.

BACKGROUND

The launching of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa in March 1996 was preceded by a series of major international conferences organized by the UN. These included the World Conference on Education for all, the Children's Summit, the UN Conference on Environment and Development, the World Summit on Social Development, and the Fourth World Conference on Women. The outcomes of these conferences included two common messages. They all singled out the development challenges facing Africa as deserving special attention and also registered the commitment of the international community to assist African countries in their efforts to address these challenges.

The Special Initiative on Africa, or SIA as it has now come to be known, was launched against this background with the explicit objective of identifying and developing a set of concrete programs that would:

- give practical and coordinated expression to the commitments made to Africa a development in the context of these development conferences;
- maximize the support provided by the UN System to Africa; and
- give momentum to the positive trends that had started throughout the continent during the nineties both on the political and economic front.

You might ask, What is so special about the Special Initiative on Africa? **“What makes it different from earlier calls for action on Africa?” Two key factors are hallmarks of the SIA.**

First, The Initiative is not merely a call for action by the UN on Africa; rather, it is a call to support Africa-determined priorities and efforts and to galvanize international support for their successful implementation. To this end, the SIA is consistent with the development priorities identified by African leaders themselves. These priorities, as stated in the Cairo Plan of action on Relaunching Africa's Economic and Social development, were adopted by African Heads of State at the OAU Summit in 1995. As some of you may know, the priorities of the Cairo Agenda include governance, peace, food security, human resources development and capacity building, regional economic integration, and structural transformation. The SIA program clusters reflect fully these priorities.

Second, the Initiative is about bringing discipline to the fragmented actions in support on Africa by the UN, as well as, by Africa's bilateral and multilateral development partners. The Initiative is designed to bring coherence and achieve synergy based on concerted collaboration and on commonly agreed priorities in support of Africa's development.

SIA Programme Areas

The SIA includes 13 program clusters focusing on:

Fundamental issues of human resource development and poverty reduction:- including basic education for all, health service provision and sector reform, provision of access to safe water, and promotion of informal sector and employment generation opportunities;

Urgent survival issues:- including food security, drought management, as well as, equitable and sustainable water resource management;

Governance issues:- including peace building, conflict resolution, and civil society participation in development;

Structural reform issues:- focusing on internal resource mobilization, sustainable debt relief, trade access and opportunities, and south-south cooperation; and

Issues dealing with promotion of the use of information technology for Africa's development.

Implementation Arrangements

For each cluster, specific leadership roles are taken by agencies across the UN System. The Bretton Woods Institutions are full partners in the sharing of responsibilities under this arrangement.

For instance, UNDP and ECA are the lead agencies for the governance cluster, FAO for food security, UNESCO and World Bank for education. WHO and World Bank for Health, UNEP and World Bank for Water, UNCTAD for trade, ILO for employment generation. IMF and the World Bank for debt relief, and ECA for Information Technology.

Lead agencies have the responsibility to organize specific programs and implementation arrangements in their area of assignments. The UN Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), a committee composed of all Heads of UN sister agencies, established a Steering Committee to coordinate, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the SIA. These heads of agencies have agreed to hold themselves mutually accountable for achieving results under the SIA umbrella. A joint ECA/UNDP Secretariat is responsible for carrying out the day to day functions of the Steering Committee.

SIA education cluster namely, the focus on primary education and on sector-wide reforms. Following a series of consultations between the two lead agencies, UNESCO and the World Bank. Understanding has also been reached on implementation modalities at the country level. Specifically, there is agreement that the magnitude and nature of support provided to countries under the SIA education cluster will depend on the readiness of the countries to implement sector-wide reform and investment programs in the sector. I might add that, these operational modalities have also been accepted under the health and water cluster.

In Health, under the leadership of WHO, African ministers of health have endorsed the Initiative, and African Heads of State have also been fully briefed. There is widespread agreement on the content of the health system-wide reform needed in Africa. The focus will be on basic health services and on health system-wide reforms at the country level. There is also recognition for the need to support under the SIA sub-regional disease-focused health activities, for instance for disease such as HIV-AIDS, which have cross-boarder implications. In this regard, there is preliminary discussion on possible funding sources to help meet the resource requirement of each inter-country activities.

In water, an Informal Water Working Group was formed in April 1996 to guide implementation of the water objective under the SIA. This Working Group, co-chaired by UNEP and the World Bank has help define common operational goals for the SIA water component and also identified the initial countries of focus. In addition, the Zambezi River Basin has been selected as a candidate to demonstrate coordination of UN efforts and inter-agency cooperation within the context of trans-boundary river basin management and planning.

The following countries

In the area of governance, activities planned for 1997 include a series of consultations. In may 23-24, 1997, UNDP and ECA ~~are~~ co-hosting an NGO Consultation on Governance in Addis Ababa. This ~~is to be~~ followed by an African Governance Forum in July. ~~Countries under consideration to present governance programs at the Forum include~~ Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, Togo and Uganda. ~~Parallel events planned include an ECA-sponsored expert meeting on governance issues and an UNESCO-sponsored meeting on the use of Communications for Peace-building.~~

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In the area of Information Technology for Development, under the leadership of ECA, agreement has been reached to use the framework of the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) as the modality for implementing the objectives of the SIA in this area. The AISI was launched in 1996 based on a plan of action approved by ECA Conference of Ministers for elaboration and implementation of national information and communications infrastructure plans. At an inter-agency consultation that took place at the ECA in October, 1996, agreement was reached on the distribution of tasks and responsibilities among agencies. The immediate focus of this initiative is promoting Internet connectivity in Africa. The number of African countries with Internet connectivity has now reached thirty-five, a progress report on AISI was discussed at the ECA Conference of Planning Ministers last week.

Status of Implementation

Although one year is too short a time to evaluate impact, significant work has been done to translate the SIA into practical action. This is exemplified by the consensus that has emerged on how to deal with cross-cutting issues, the strengthening collaboration under the SIA framework among agencies working on specific clusters, and the increasing evidence of progress at the country level that we are witnessing particularly over the past half year. Let me highlight this with examples in three areas.

First, there has been considerable discussion among SIA partner agencies on a number of cross-cutting issues such as country eligibility, resource mobilization, and mainstreaming of gender and population. A consensus has emerged on how to deal with these issues under the SIA. The SIA will be implemented at the country level. While the type of assistance may vary according to country circumstance, all African countries are eligible for assistance under the SIA. The World Bank has been given the task of resource mobilization for the key sectors such as health, education, and water at the country-level based on sector-wide country programs. UNFPA has agreed to guide the gender and population-mainstreaming requirement under each of the SIA clusters.

Second, on **inter-agency collaboration**, there is notable progress in the following clusters:

In education, African Ministers of Education, acting within the Association for Development of Education in Africa (DEA), have endorsed the broad objectives of the

Third, at the country level, the participation of a number of African countries – Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Senegal – in official launch of the Initiative was perceived as an early demonstration of African endorsement of the Initiative. Institutional arrangements are being put in place for SIA program implementation in a number of countries. An increasing number of countries sector investment programs in the health and education sectors under preparation are being considered under the SIA framework. Countries where such programs are developed or are under preparation include Guinea, Ghana, Ethiopia, Mauritius, and Malawi for education, and Ghana, Mali, Mauritius,

Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Zambia for health.

Clearly, in the final analysis, the success of the SIA will be determined by the value-added that it can bring at the country level. Topic specific technical working meetings on the SIA, such as the one convened by the ECA Executive Secretary in March 1997, have proved instrumental in fostering discussions on approaches to achieve value-added under the SIA at the country level. The role of the UN Resident Coordinator and that of the UN Country Team is also essential in this regard.

Tanzania had one of the first UN Country Team Retreats on operationalizing the SIA at the country level. This Retreat, which took place in January 1997, involved representatives from government and donor agencies and thus facilitated in-country consultation on the SIA with a wide group of stakeholders. Another UN Country Retreat on the SIA took place in Ethiopia in March 1997. This Retreat considered a range of issues related to harmonization of UN country assistance programs and minimizing the transaction costs on government through harmonization of programing instruments and implementaion arrangements. At this Retreat, members of UN Country Team agreed to pursue common project implementation approaches. Specifically, the partner agencies agreed to undertake a joint project appraisal for the education sector investment program for Ethiopia involving UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank. Another successful UN Country Team Retreat took place in **Ghana** last month. We understand from our UNDP Secretariat colleagues in New York that similar retreats are planned to take place over the coming months in **Cape Verde, Congo, and Zimbabwe**.

Before closing, I want to touch briefly on the Role of ECA in the special Invitiative.

The ECA Executive Secretary and the UNDP Administrator serve as co-chairs of the ACC Steering Committee. As I mentioned earlier, this Committee supports and monitors the implementation of the SIA. A small team in the joint ECA/UNDP Secretariat for the SIA supports the work of the Steering Committee. The ECA branch of this Secretariat operates out of the Cabinet Office of the ECA Executive Secretary. The role of the Secretariat is to backstop the work of the Steering Committee, facilitate coordination among partner agencies by organizing workshops and technical meetings, promote the sharing of best-practices among partners through newsletters and publications, and undertake activities for sustained political support for the initiative.

In his capacity as co-hair of the Steering Committee, the ECA Executive Secretary convened as SIA Technical Working Meeting in March 1997 in preparation for the Geneva meeting of Heads agencies in Geneva last month. A number of technical issues, including the cross-cutting issues I mentioned earlier, were clarified at this meeting. As required, the joint ECA/UNDP Secretariat will convene similar technical meetings to advance implementation of SIA.

As one of the partner agencies under the Special Initiative, ECA is also the lead or co-lead agency for the SIA program clusters dealing with governance, information technology, south-south cooperation and promotion of the informal sector. I would like

to briefly highlight the activities under one of these clusters that may be of interest to this audience namely the sub-program on strengthening civil society partnerships in Africa's development.

The ECA is establishing an NGO Resource Center, with the support of the German Government to provide research and training support to civil society organizations on conflict prevention peace-building and democratic pluralism and to enhance dialogue between government and civil service organizations through sub-regional and regional seminars. The NGO Resource Center will also undertake a series of country studies on the status and development potential of civil society and grassroots organizations in these countries.

In closing Madam Chairperson, the ECA attaches great importance to the issue of poverty reduction in Africa and to forging partnerships with the NGO community in Africa in implementing the Commission's work program. The NGO Resource Center is one of the modalities through which we hope to achieve this. We hope that we will have an opportunity to work together with the vibrant group from the southern Africa region that is represented at this Forum.

Thank you for your kind attention.