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Creation of the African Regional
Organization for Standardization (ARSO)

(Report by the Executive Secretary)

The development of standardization in Africa is a subject in which the ECA secretariat is especially interested because, without standardization, no one country, no matter how large, can develop its own industry, trade relations, and the economy as a whole. African countries, or at least the majority of them, have lagged far behind the developed countries in this endeavour, and it is therefore absolutely necessary for them to develop national standardization. Africa is a continent where a large variety of standards coexist because of the influence of traditional links with the metric, imperial or other systems of standards for imported products. It is felt that, with the establishment of ARSO and its influence upon African countries, this variety will, step by step, be reasonably reduced for the benefit of African national economies.

The necessity to create a regional body to deal with problems of developing national standardization in Africa was first discussed within the ECA secretariat in the mid-1960s, but there was no adequate support for it because very few African countries had developed viable national standards institutions at that time. Then in 1970 UNIDO and ECA jointly organized a regional workshop for personnel engaged in standardization in Africa and that workshop recommended the creation of an advisory committee on standardization within the ECA secretariat. Even then, the meagre support for the idea of creating a new consultative body led to slow progress in this field.

In a new round of consultations among various African national standards institutions and the ECA secretariat, which started in late 1974 and continued in 1975, a proposal was put forward that an African regional standards body bringing together all standards organizations in Africa should be established as an independent intergovernmental organization.

These consultations were followed up by intense activities conducted by the ECA secretariat and the Ghana Standards Board, which eventually led to the convening in September 1975 of an intergovernmental exploratory meeting at Accra. At that

meeting 12 African countries decided to create the African Regional Standards Organization (ARSO), and an Interim Steering Committee was set up to follow up the decisions of the exploratory meeting.

In response to a request made at the Accra exploratory meeting, the ECA secretariat maintained close contacts with national standards institutions and the members of the Interim Steering Committee in the preparation of papers for its second meeting, which was held at Addis Ababa in March 1976.

In response to the request of the second meeting of the Interim Steering Committee, the ECA secretariat continued to play an active part in the process of preparing documents for the Founding Conference, the first General Assembly, and the first session of the Council of ARSO, all of which took place at Accra, Ghana, during the period 10-17 January 1977.

The Founding Conference of ARSO was attended by delegations from 19 African countries, 14 international organizations concerned with standardization and metrology, including five United Nations specialized agencies, and by four delegations from developed countries of Europe. The Conference adopted the Constitution of ARSO (see annex I) which had been signed by representatives of the following 17 African countries: Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, the Libyan Arab Republic, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, the United Republic of Cameroon, the United Republic of Tanzania, and the Upper Volta.

Nigeria was elected President of ARSO and the United Republic of Cameroon as Vice-President, both for a term of three years. The following six countries were also elected to serve on the Council of ARSO, Egypt, Ethiopia and Senegal for a term of three years each; and Liberia, Ghana and Kenya for a term of two years each.

The first General Assembly of ARSO adopted its rules of procedure (see annex II); and the principles and policies governing the operation of ARSO (see annex III); it also decided that the headquarters of ARSO should be at Accra, Ghana and adopted seven resolutions (see annexes IV-X), one of which was related to the administrative and financial matters of the Organization and the others requested various international and national organizations to assist ARSO to become operational as soon as possible and to collaborate with ARSO in its work.

Two of the above resolutions, which were addressed directly to the ECA secretariat requested it to assume the responsibilities of an interim secretariat for ARSO until the latter's own secretariat became operational.

The first session of the Council of ARSO adopted its rules of procedure (see annex XI), the rules governing the administrative and financial activities of ARSO (see annex XII) and recommendations related to the appointment of the Secretary-General, the work programme and the budget of the Organization.

It was agreed that the President of ARSO (at present Dr. Ademola Banjo, Chairman of the National Council for Standardization, Nigeria), in co-operation with the Ghana Standards Board and the ECA secretariat, should undertake the steps necessary for the signing of an official agreement with the Government of the host country and for the official registration of ARSO and opening of the necessary accounts in the name of ARSO.

so as to allow the participating countries to remit their dues after they had ratified the Constitution without delay.

It is significant to mention here that this very important Organization for economic development of the African region has been created at a time when the United Nations is trying to establish a new international economic order which envisages further development of international co-operation in all areas of economic, scientific and technological activity. The endeavour to combine efforts on a regional basis so as to define the nature and problems of developing standardization in Africa is a step in the right direction. It is hoped that this new regional organization will help African countries to develop a better exchange of ideas, services and goods and to develop an intra-African division of labour for the benefit of continent's peoples.