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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Executive Committee  
Eighteenth meeting

Khartoum, 1-4 May 1978

The twenty-first anniversary of the Commission  
(Agenda item 10)

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa was established under the provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 671 A (XXV) of 29 April 1958 in implementation of General Assembly resolution 1155 (XII) of 26 November 1957. The first session of the Commission, which was convened by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 20 of the terms of reference of the Commission, was held at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 29 December 1958 to 6 January 1959.
2. That first session constituted a historic event of prime importance for the African continent. Since that time, only the tenth anniversary, which was celebrated in conjunction with the meetings of the ninth session, which took place at Addis Ababa from 3 to 14 February 1969 has been marked as a milestone in the life of the Commission.
3. The Commission will celebrate its twenty-first anniversary in 1979. Member States will no doubt wish to take advantage of the coming of age of the Commission not only to undertake an agonizing appraisal of the performance of the African region in socio-economic development and integration but also to commit themselves totally to the task of accelerating the socio-economic development and integration of the continent. Accordingly, the central theme of the celebrations of the twenty-first anniversary of the Commission should be economic interdependence and collective self-reliance in Africa.
4. The celebrations held around this central theme would have a four-fold objective, namely:
  - (a) To identify the main elements of possible alternative patterns of development and life styles for the African region in the light of a critical review of existing patterns of development and their consequences for the African economy;
  - (b) To create a sound basis for promoting and sustaining collective action in priority areas of development where such action is crucial;
  - (c) To intensify efforts to secure the political will of the countries of the African region and the means necessary to translate into practical action programmes and projects designed to achieve more harmonious and integrated development of the economies of the African countries;

(d) To ensure that member States of the Commission provide the strongest possible material, moral and political support to the Commission in order to enable it play a most positive and dynamic role in fostering the economic interdependence and integration of Africa.

5. Accordingly, it is not intended that the twenty-first anniversary should be celebrated by a single event. Rather, it should be marked by a series of events spread over the entire year and taking place in different parts of the continent. The following activities are suggested:

(a) From 8-13 January 1979, a conference on alternative patterns of development and life styles for the African region will be held in Algiers. This conference which is being sponsored by ECA and UNEP will not only mark the beginning of the twenty-first anniversary celebrations but also provide essential inputs for subsequent activities by identifying the main elements of possible alternative patterns of African development. Because of its importance, it is hoped that this conference will be attended at the highest possible political and technical levels (i.e., by Ministers responsible for planning and development, parliamentarians interested in development problems and issues, professional economic planners and officials responsible for executing development programmes and projects and also by representatives of the private sector). This conference will be the first attempt ever undertaken to search for an African solution to the problems of socio-economic development to replace the present approaches which are merely imitations of patterns of development evolved elsewhere.

(b) This conference on alternative patterns of development will be followed by the fourteenth session of the Commission (fifth meeting of the Conference of Ministers) to be held in Rabat, Morocco. The report of the Algiers Conference will be submitted to the Conference of Ministers which will be expected to take far-reaching decisions on the proposals that emerge from Algiers. The Conference of Ministers will be preceded by the seventh meeting of the Technical Committee of Experts and the twentieth meeting of the Executive Committee. It is hoped that a technological and scientific exhibition can be organized in Rabat in conjunction with these meetings. Such an exhibition would emphasize Africa's contributions and the challenges which it faces.

(c) Immediately after the fifth meeting of the Conference of Ministers and the fourteenth session of the Commission, a second pledging conference of voluntary contributions by African Governments in support of the ECA Work Programme will take place, also in Rabat. This is in accordance with a decision taken at the Lagos Pledging Conference in April 1977. It is hoped that this second pledging conference will be more successful than the first. If the 1980s are to be regarded as Africa's Decade for Economic Interdependence and Collective Self-Reliance (as it is hoped that the Conference of Ministers will so declare), it is most important that all member States should make substantial voluntary contributions in support of the approved ECA programme of work and priorities.

(d) At its thirty-second session the General Assembly proclaimed a Transport and Communications Decade in Africa during the years 1978-1988. It is hoped to undertake two activities in 1979 in recognition of this Decade. First, a conference of African Ministers of Transport and Communications will be held to consider programmes and projects proposal for implementation during the Decade, particularly the first five-years. This conference might be followed by a Donors' Conference to be convened by the Secretary-General later in the year for the purpose of mobilizing resources for the implementation of approved programmes and projects for the Decade.

(e) In the field of industrialization, two major activities are envisaged in connexion with the celebrations. The first is the Regional Symposium On Industrialization which was approved at the fourth Conference of the African Ministers of Industry held last year in Kaduna, Nigeria. This will be followed by the fifth Conference of the African Ministers of Industry, which, at the kind invitation of the Government of Uganda, will be held in Kampala in August 1979 in order to prepare for the third General Conference of UNIDO to be held in New Delhi in 1980.

(f) Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2062(LXII) of 12 May 1977, on preparatory work for the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, 1980, a regional conference will be held at Lusaka, Zambia, some time in 1979. This will provide an excellent opportunity to give detailed consideration to the role of women in implementing the decisions reached at the fourteenth session of the Commission and will also ensure the active participation of women in the celebrations of the twenty-first anniversary of ECA.

6. This list of activities which will constitute the twenty-first anniversary celebrations is indicative rather than exhaustive. A more comprehensive list will be submitted to the Executive Committee at its nineteenth meeting to be held in Arusha in the United Republic of Tanzania in October 1978. Meanwhile, the secretariat would be grateful for members of the committee indicating other activities they consider worthy of inclusion. It would also like member Governments to consider hosting some of the activities (viz., the transport and communications meetings and the Regional Symposium on Industrialization) mentioned in the preceding paragraph for which no venue has as yet been decided upon.

7. In addition to programme activities, a number of activities of an informational character are planned. Throughout the year a publicity campaign (by radio, press and television) directed towards awakening African opinion to the need for and advantages of promoting African economic interdependence and collective self-reliance shall be undertaken and sustained in all member States. As far as the ECA itself is concerned, a documentary film on its activities during the past 20 years is now being prepared by the United Nations Office of Public Information and will be available for viewing in Rabat. The secretariat also intends to bring out a number of publications, including a commemorative edition of the Economic and Social Bulletin for Africa, to mark the anniversary. It is also hoped that a commemorative stamp will be issued.