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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Executive Committee
Nineteenth Meeting

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ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION IN THE FIELD OF NATURAL RESOURCES
(agenda item 6)

1. The operative part of ECA Conference of Ministers resolution 297(XIII) reads as follows :

- "1. Calls on African countries which have not yet signed and ratified the agreements on the Regional Centre for Training in Aerial Surveys, the Regional Centre for Services in Surveying and Mapping and the East African Mineral Resources Development Centre to give full political and material support to these institutions;
2. Invites member States to give assistance to the Commission secretariat in collecting statistical data for the country-by-country cartographic inventory project;
3. Calls upon the Executive Secretary to submit reports to all meetings of the Executive Committee on the support and assistance being received from African States on the projects mentioned in paragraphs 1 and 2 of the present resolution.

2. The following developments have taken place since the Conference of Ministers meeting in Kinshasa in March 1977.

A. Regional Centre for Training in Aerial Survey - Ile Ife

3. The four original signatories to the agreement relating to the Centre are still the only States giving financial support and even then some of them are in arrears. At the request of the Governing Council, the Chairman of the Working Party as well as the Director of the Centre visited a number of ECOWAS countries in order to solicit their effective participation in the running of the Centre. In this connexion it should be pointed out that since its inception in 1972 the Centre has graduated 93 photogrammetric technicians from 17 African countries and 23 photogrammetric operators from nine countries. The current intake comes from 11 African States. At the instance of the Governing Council, the Centre has prepared a five-year development plan embracing its physical and curriculum development. The workability of this plan will depend on increased participation on the part of a greater number of member States.

4. The Centre has enjoyed bilateral technical assistance from some developed countries. Donor countries are naturally not happy with the apparent lack of support of the Centre by African member States and in one case this unhappiness has not only been openly expressed, but it has also taken the form of questioning whether it should continue to

support the Centre. It can also not be assumed that the few member States at present carrying the main burden of support for the Centre will continue to do so indefinitely.

B. Regional Centre for Services in Surveying and Mapping - Nairobi

5. At the time of the Kinshasa Meeting five countries from the East African subregion signed the agreement. Since then only two of them have supported the Centre financially. Two others have been attending meetings of the Governing Council, at each of which they have promised that their Governments would consider financing the Centre. One of the Governments attended only the inaugural meeting of the Governing Council. There have been no more signatories to the agreement.

6. The Centre has been in touch with a number of potential bilateral donors. Most of them have stated that they would like to see at least one more participating country paying in its dues before they would consider the Centre as truly regional and thus qualifying for financing. Funds which could have been available to the Centre have thus been tied up, although an agreement establishing a Regional Remote Sensing Training and User Assistance Facility at the Centre was signed with USAID and a Director for the Facility has already taken up his post at the Centre.

C. East African Mineral Resources Development Centre

7. To date four member States have signed the agreement, one above the minimum required by the constitution to enable the Centre to function. The Governing Council has therefore held its first meeting (12-14 September 1977) which was attended by representatives of 10 countries of the subregion, all of which expressed their support for the Centre.

8. A three-man team composed of the Rapporteur of the Bureau of the Governing Council (the Minister for Mines, Energy and Water Resources of Ethiopia), a representative of the Tanzanian Embassy in Addis Ababa and a representative of ECA, undertook a mission from 24 January to 12 February 1978 to five countries of the subregion which had not ratified the agreement for the establishment of the Centre, to urge them to do so. Unfortunately the mission did not produce the desired results.

9. The Director-General of the Centre has taken up his post. A Chief Technical Adviser to be financed by UNDP is being recruited.

D. Cartographic Inventory

10. All the member States that have so far been visited have co-operated fully in assisting with the collection of data for the project.

11. These three Centres have a vital role to play, particularly in view of the increasing importance of the region's natural resources for domestic development and for export and the need for improved national capabilities in following up data to be made available by earth resources satellites, and the importance of increasingly detailed information for negotiating agreements for natural resources exploration, extraction, processing or export as well as for long-range development planning. Moreover, the apparently reluctance to give support to these centres and particularly to the Centre at Ife in spite of its output of technical staff needed in a large number of member States leads bilateral agencies and donor Governments to question the justification for their making contributions to other essential regional centres now being designed.

12. Member States are naturally wary of proposals to establish regional centres which might not be wholly necessary or which might duplicate the work of other institutions. It is to avoid this that the secretariat has resorted to such protracted processes, including project review by groups of African experts, for the design and approval of such centres. It must be borne in mind that in developed and semi-developed countries a very large number of instructions are required to support modern processes of development and economic growth; and that, whilst in those countries most of such instructions are national, in Africa the large number of small countries and less developed economies makes multinational and regional arrangements unavoidable.

13. In respect of this form of essential infrastructure, reference is frequently made to costs. It is argued here that the direct and indirect benefits member States can reasonably expect to derive from their operations and the foreign exchange costs saved in the not so long run are likely to be many times greater than the expenditures involved in their establishment and maintenance.

14. This matter is now of such urgency that the Committee is invited to give it particular attention and to address a special message to the Conference of Ministers, since the outcome of this exercise is likely to affect the willingness of donor agencies and Governments to provide assistance to other equally important parts of the Region's infrastructure for accelerated development and economic growth.