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AFRICAN UNION COMMISSIONER URGES CONTINENT TO REMAIN FOCUSED ON SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH TO FOSTER INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRATION



Ezulwini, Swaziland 13 July 2014- Lack of adequate physical infrastructure is one of the major bottlenecks standing in the way of integration to enable common and broad based development in Africa.

An African Union conference, the Seventh Conference of African Ministers in Charge of Integration, being held in Ezulwini, Swaziland to discuss infrastructure and integration in Africa has been

informed that that despite robust GDP gains by many countries in recent years, Africa's staggering infrastructure inefficiencies have been choking integration efforts, stunting growth and sapping national resources, public and private.

The experts meeting heard of some of the progress realized to date, at regional level, in terms of the infrastructure and integration agenda. The East African Community launched and consolidated its customs union and launched a common market in January 2005 and June 2010, respectively. The Economic Community of West African States has put in place an operational and functioning self-financing system, in the form of its community levy.



More progress has been realized through greater promotion of trade related infrastructure such as customs single windows (one stop border posts), and the utilization of computerized customs networks across member states. Free movement is also promoted by some of the regional economic

communities (RECs), with regional passports and other travel and insurance documents in place. Some RECs are also working towards the harmonization of investment policies and are monitoring compliance with monetary convergence programmes. Further, efforts to bring a degree of order, simplification and coherence to Africa's integration arrangement and address overlap have culminated in the EAC-COMESA-SADC tripartite arrangement.

Yet despite the noble progress, African infrastructure development and integration remains largely inadequate and fragmented. The road access rate in Africa is only 34%, compared with 50% in other parts of the developing world and transport costs are 100% higher. Only 30% of Africa's population has access to electricity, compared to 70-90% in other parts of the developing world. Water resources are underused with only 5% of agriculture under irrigation. The internet penetration rate is a mere 6% (2012), compared to an average of 40% elsewhere in the developing world. Deficient infrastructure in today's Africa has been found to sap growth by as much as 2% a year.

African Union Commissioner of Economic Affairs Dr Anthony Maruping urged more rapid, sustainable and inclusive growth and for Africa to diversify its economy and move away from exporting commodities. In his address to the experts' meeting today, he cautioned Africa to be "cautious about distracting flattery", e.g. the fact that Africa has had 6 out of the 10 fastest growing economies, while there are 54 member states of the AU. "Let's keep focused, growth in Africa is still driven by commodities," he added.

However, Dr Maruping highlighted that the continent is not starting from scratch as it seeks to implement infrastructure development programmes in line with its Agenda 2063. "We have today continental frameworks, such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), the strategy for the Accelerated Industrial Development of Africa (AIDA) and the current efforts by the African Union to set up a continental free trade area (CFTA)." The PIDA programme is going through its priority Action Plan to bridge the infrastructure gap of Africa by putting in place an integrated African Continent where infrastructure and its services enable the free movement of goods and passengers by providing efficient, safe, secure, reliable and seamless network options and reducing costs to support environmentally and economically sustainable regional development.

Swaziland's Minister of Economic Planning and Development, Honourable Prince Hlangusemphi Dlamini said, as part of its infrastructure development, the country has just completed the construction of an international airport, a convention center and five star hotel, "for mixing not only with the rest of Africa, but to expand Africa's international market".

Over the next three days, the experts will examine the status of integration report as well as the follow up report on the implementation of recommendations from the 6th conference of African ministers in charge of integration (COMA VI), for the consideration of ministers, who will meet from 17th to 18th July. The key outcomes of the meeting will be: concrete recommendations on the theme of the conference: the way forward regarding the African Regional Integration Fund; adoption of the Regional Integration Index as Africa's M&E framework of Assessing the progress in the integration Agenda; and a

Ministerial Declaration highlighting among others, the strategies and actions to speed up infrastructure development to support regional integration

Contact for confirmation or other media inquiries:

Mrs. Wynne Musabayana, Directorate of Information and Communication, African Union Commission, e-mail: MusabayanaW@africa-union.org

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