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AFRICAN UNION CELEBRATES THE AFRICA ENVIRONMENT DAY

“Lake Chad is not only Chadian, it is also African” President Deby

N’Djamena, Chad 03 March 2012- The main celebration of Africa Environment Day was marked in N’Djamena, Chad on 03 March 2012. This was the 10th year of celebration since 2002 when the day was adopted by the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government.

The theme of the 2012 Africa Environment Day is: *Lake Chad: our shared heritage, our common future*, which highlights the plight of Lake Chad that has drastically shrunk over the years, thereby threatening the environment and livelihoods dependent on it.

The commemoration ceremony was officially inaugurated by Mr Idriss Deby Itno, President of the Republic of Chad and graced by the presence of Dr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC); Mrs. Rhoda Peace Tumusiime, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, AUC; Mr. Goukouni Weddeye, former President of Chad; Rt. Hon. Emmanuel Naginga, Prime Minister of Chad; representatives of partner organizations including the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Economic Commission of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Lake Chad Basin Commission, among others.

Addressing participants at the commemoration ceremony, President Deby said that Lake Chad as a northern frontier, symbolizes resistance against the advancement of the desert in Africa and that it also constitutes a padlock to protect African river and forest basins. “Lake Chad is not only Chadian it is also African, in fact it is even a world heritage that deserves being declared as a heritage of humanity”, he added.

“I invite every African, each one according to their means and competences and each of our partners and all youth and women to make their contribution in the struggle for the protection of the environment in general and the salvaging of lake Chad in particular”, he said. *(the complete speech of the president is available on www.au.int)*

AU Commission Chairperson Mr. Ping underscored that the realisation of the Lake Chad basin project requires financial and technical support as well as political will. “The AU Commission will spare no effort to sensitize development partners on the urgent imperative to save Lake Chad, taking advantage of international forums such as the sixth World Water Forum on 12-15 March 2012 in Marseilles, France; and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (RIO+20) 20-22 June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil”, he said. *(the complete speech of the Chairperson is available on www.au.int)*.

Mr. M. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP in his speech read for him by Mr. Serge Bounda, representative of UNEP to the African Union, saluted the AU leadership for placing high on their agenda issues of environment, climate change and sustainable development. He also expressed the hope that if they continue to speak with one voice around a common position at conferences like RIO+20, issues of interest to Africa such as Lake Chad, will receive due global attention.

The commemoration of the African Environment Day in Chad was marked by a week-long programme of activities especially by youth and women. Activities included public debates, media publications, tree planting and cultural shows, all of which culminated in Saturday's inaugural ceremony. Following the ceremony, delegates visited Lake Chad to witness for themselves the plight of the lake and its ecological and socio-economic impact.

The Africa Environment Day emanated from the decision of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Council of Ministers in the Seventy-Sixth Ordinary Session, which took place in Durban, South Africa in July 2002. The Ministers adopted decision CM/Dec.685 (LXXVI) calling on the members states to commemorate March 03 every year as Africa Environment Day.