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African Union Commissioner attends Rencontres Campus France and briefs on strides made in various AU continental strategies on education

Paris, France: 9 November 2016: Within the framework of AU Agenda 2063 Aspiration 6: “*An Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of its women and youth*”, H.E. Dr. Martial De-Paul Ikounga, AU Commissioner in charge of Human Resources, Science and Technology, took part in the Rencontres Campus France, French operator in charge of the promotion of higher education and student mobility in France from 7 to 9 November 2016, in Paris, France.

For this year’s edition of Rencontres Campus France, Africa, which is seen as a major continent with a key role to play in the evolution of higher education worldwide was put at the forefront. More than 40 representatives of African institutions of higher education have been invited to meet with French institutions. Within this framework, the HRST Commissioner has been invited as the guest of honor.

The Rencontres Campus France takes place every year and focuses on either Higher education or research. The Rencontres Campus France 2016 aims to achieve the following: develop university exchanges between France and the countries attending the event; and promote French higher education and help the creation of bilateral and multilateral agreements. As the major instrument of student mobility, Campus France should help in increasing the number of foreign students in France in the coming years while preserving the quality of their stay.

The event was inaugurated by The French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, who in his opening remarks and key statement welcomed the presence of H.E. Dr. Martial De-Paul Ikounga with whom he opened the event.

In his address, Mr. Ayrault talked of the new orientation of French–Africa relation ties, which will be discussed during the upcoming Françafrique summit in Bamako, Mali. He also talked of the need for academics to redefine French-Africa relation ties. He further said a word on Francophonie and the use of French language, and concluded by addressing the issue on the improvement of visa issuance to African students and researchers within the framework of student mobility. He ended his remarks by saying that France should invest in African talents and African youth in general.

On his part H.E. Dr. Martial De-Paul Ikounga, made three presentations.

The first one focused on the Panafrican University (PAU), which is a flagship continental initiative aimed at strengthening higher education in Africa. In this presentation, he pointed out the fact that France was not involved in the process to establish the Pan African University. Through open discussion with the various stakeholders, including

Commissioner HRST, the French showed interest in contributing to the progress of PAU by either supporting the Rectorate or institutes, together with operational thematic partners such as Germany or Japan.

His second presentation dealt with “*The Action of French universities in Francophonie and especially in Africa*”. During his presentation, Commissioner Ikounga acknowledged the great support of Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie to African universities, but also pointed out that the dynamism of English-speaking African universities was gradually attracting French universities. He further laid emphasis on the current challenges of African universities and presented some solutions to strengthen partnership among French speaking universities.

His last presentation focused on EU-AUC partnership, where he first presented the AU cooperation policy framework focusing on the various AU continental strategies including:

- The TVET continental strategy;
- STISA 2024 and;
- CESA 16-25.

With regards to the TVET strategy, he explained the paradigm shift that took place, as TVET used to be considered for those who were not intelligent enough to succeed in general education. Nowadays, this conception is outdated. He also mentioned TVET in higher education just like in Germany and listed examples of occupations such as lawyers, teachers and physicians, which are actually skilled and vocational occupations and could therefore be considered as TVET of another kind. He further underscored that emphasis should be laid on building the professional capacities of youth. This will help in solving the issue of unemployment and will lead to the emergence of more job creators and less job seekers.

Later on, he presented the Research Grant, the Kwame Nkrumah Awards, the Mwalimu Nyerere Scholarship, which are all supported by the European Union. He concluded this presentation by talking of the Addis Ababa Convention which deals with inter alia mobility issues. In this part of his presentation, he emphasized that he keeps working with AU Member States so that they ratify the Addis-Ababa Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States.

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