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DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION**Press Release****African Union Commission hands over the Fouta Djallon Highlands Programme to the ECOWAS Commission**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia- October 25, 2018- An official ceremony to mark the formal handing over of the AUC's Fouta Djallon Highlands Programme to the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) took place yesterday.

The handover presided over by AUC's Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, H.E Amb. Josefa Sacko and ECOWAS Commissioner for Agriculture, Natural Resources and Water, H.E. Sekou Sangare, is in fulfillment of the African Union Executive Council Decision of January 2017. The transfer is based on the principle of subsidiarity as all the countries involved in the Fouta Djallon Highlands Programme are member states of ECOWAS.

H.E. Sacko expressed gratitude to ECOWAS for their readiness to take up the management of the Fouta Djallon Highlands Programme and that she was confident that with ECOWAS in charge of the programme, the socio-economic development of the sub-region, is assured.

She further reiterated that the AUC would remain supportive of the Fouta Djallon Highlands Programmes and will work with ECOWAS for its sustainable management.

Commissioner Sacko also invited ECOWAS for close collaboration and coordination on other flagship programmes of the African Union, including the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programmes (CAADP) and the Great Green Wall for the

Sahara and Sahel Initiative (GGWSSI) noting that, “These flagship programmes, will improve the livelihoods of our people.”

H.E. Sangare thanked the AU Commissioner for her personal commitment to the success of the Fouta Djallon Highland Programme. He gave a brief history of the Fouta Djallon Highlands Programme which dates back to the OAU Conference of Ministers in Monrovia, Liberia in 1979, when a declaration was taken to establish the Programme in order to combat desertification and land degradation. He expressed the commitment of the ECOWAS Commission to the preservation of the Fouta Djallon, not only because of its high biodiversity, but as the source of origin of many rivers in West Africa.

The major highlight of the official handing over ceremony was the signing and exchange of the *instrument of transfer*. The signing ceremony was witnessed by, H.E. Gaoussou Toure, the Ambassador of the Republic of Guinea in Addis Ababa, officials of the ECOWAS Permanent Representative to the AU and staff of the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture.

The Fouta Djallon Highlands (FDH) are a series of high plateaus concentrated in the central part of Guinea and extending into Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone. This area is the point of origin of a number of Transboundary Rivers in West Africa, notably the Gambia, Niger and Senegal rivers, as well as a number of small water courses. Due to their geographic and climatic diversity, the highlands and the surrounding foothills support a rich variety of ecosystems. The FDH natural resources continue to be under serious threat of degradation, resulting in accelerated reduction of vegetative cover; acceleration of soil erosion and reduction of soil fertility; loss of biodiversity; increase in water run-off, siltation and sedimentation of watercourses as well as drying up of springs.

The AU in collaboration with partners has been supporting countries riparian to the rivers flowing from the Fouta Djallon Highlands in a variety of sustainable natural resources management activities to improve the livelihoods of the local populations. Through the Integrated Natural Resources Management Project funded by the Global Environment and in collaboration with FAO and UNEP, member states of the Programme are implementing watershed management activities with direct social and economic benefits especially for women.

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