



**UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

Check Against Delivery

**STATEMENT TO THE 17TH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE
AFRICAN UNION EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

by

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Chairperson of the Executive Council

Chairperson of the African Union Commission

Honourable Ministers

Excellencies

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I extend my warmest greetings to members of this august Council whose deliberations continue to guide and inspire our collective endeavours.

To begin with, I wish to salute the Chairperson of the African Union, His Excellency President Obiang Mbasogo for continuing to ably guide and lead the affairs of our Union. I also wish to extend to him, the Government and People of Equatorial Guinea our sincere appreciation for the cordial hospitality that has been extended to us and for the arrangements made to ensure the success of this meeting.

I also take this opportunity to again record my personal appreciation and that of the United Nations system in Africa for the genuine, committed and capable leadership that Dr. Jean Ping, has provided at the helm of the African Union Commission. I thank him, the Commissioners and staff of the AUC for their dedication to the cause of African unity and progress.

Honourable Ministers

It is now common knowledge that Africa displayed relative resilience to the fall-out of the global economic and financial crisis. There is also much to cheer in the fact that Africa is increasingly recognized as a destination for foreign investment and as a global growth pole. Of course, Africa's good performance is relative in the sense that while growth rates fell quite sharply to 2.4% in 2009 it was not as bad as other regions. Its recovery rate of 4.7% in 2010 was also swifter. There is

however no reason to be too sanguine because this rate is far below the minimum growth rate estimated to achieve the MDGs.

Moreover, as I mentioned to you in January, there were several downside risks. These have been partially actualized as projections for Africa's economic performance in 2011 have been lowered to 3.7%. This is partly due to global events like high food and fuel prices, the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan (a great country to which I extend sincere commiserations on the loss of life and property) and troubling fiscal conditions in Europe. Political developments in North Africa also contributed to the downward revision of growth estimates.

Africa's commitment to improved governance since the adoption of NEPAD and APRM was not misplaced and might even have provided a safety valve in some countries by helping to maintain political stability in the face of severe economic shocks. Indeed, I see the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia and changes elsewhere in North Africa as evidence of the desire to upscale and improve governance. While youth unemployment was a factor, the desire for greater freedom, demands for greater accountability and distaste with the scale of corruption also played a significant role in the demand for change. We now need to move to implementation of the recommendations of APRM National Programmes of Action while paying closer attention to policy on land, our greatest asset, and the huge illicit financial outflows from Africa.

At this stage, I wish to posit that current economic and governance conditions are merely a snapshot. We now need to begin to connect the dots of several emerging trends which indicate that we are on the cusp of a new era whose final shape is yet to emerge. Globalization has changed the nature of the world and we now have to contend with recurrent economic crisis, worsening environmental degradation and inadequate and jobless growth. When we factor in the rise of the emerging economies, faster ICT enabled flows and changing global demographics

then it is obvious that we have to find new ways of coping with the world that we now live in.

While coping with current challenges, we have to also think in terms of the future which is why the issue of “Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development” is an apt theme for the Summit. The worrying truth is that young people in our continent live in the rapidly changing world that I have just outlined but for which they lack adequate preparation and guidance. The life experience for a majority of them is of joblessness, poverty and instability aggravated by conflict, displacement and health pandemics such as HIV/AIDS. Our youth live in such despair that they are vulnerable and likely targets for recruitment into militant activities.

The obvious solution then is to channel their energies into positive and productive activities by empowering them in a manner that promotes sustainable development. A good starting point would be for our governments to provide a compelling vision and realizable plans for the future that will give hope to Africa’s youth. In this regard, at their meeting last March, the Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development pledged to develop inclusive policies to address widespread poverty and youth unemployment while continuing to mainstream related gender concerns.

We must at the same time invest in the education of Africa’s youth and equip them with skills for coping in today’s world. With only 5% of our populations enrolled in universities, every effort must be made to enable Africa’s youth to become good entrepreneurs, managers or workers. This must start from the adolescent stage when formal education is still on-going because, very often, this is when many young ones are contending with adult roles as child labourers and child soldiers, and partaking in adult vices such as sex work and drug use.

The empowerment of Africa's youth also means reducing the high rates of unemployment in their ranks. Recent studies show that youth unemployment in Africa is over 20% in many countries but even this figure underestimates the gravity of the problem. A strategy that combines public works programmes and enhanced investment in infrastructure and production is needed to tap into the nexus between job creation, sustainable development and social stability. Accordingly, we must now pay greater attention to green growth, which could leap-frog old and environmentally unsustainable technologies and enable African countries to take advantage of their current potential in agriculture, tourism, forestry, and eco-industries.

Another key issue is that of voice and inclusion. The participation of young people in societal processes can be enhanced by harnessing social media in a positive way so that they can play a more active role and transit from being mere observers to participants in shaping their own destiny. As they have the greatest stake in the future sustainability of our planet, Africa's youth should be mobilized to get out the message of sustainable development. Indeed, they also have to contribute by bringing their dynamism to bear through ideas, taking business risks and contributing to educating and mobilizing the rest of society behind agreed goals.

These laudable objectives will be difficult to achieve without meaningful integration which is why we must all welcome the recent agreement reached by COMESA, EAC and SADC to launch negotiations for the establishment of a free trade area. Regional integration will be boosted similarly by the devotion of next January's summit to intra-Africa trade and the decision of the G20 to identify sources of finance for building infrastructure in developing countries, including in Africa. The G8/Africa Joint Declaration calling for Africa to receive priority in infrastructure financing is also encouraging.

All hands must similarly be on deck to ensure that the outcomes of the on-going climate change negotiations which continue in Durban later on this year and the Rio +20 Summit taking place in Brazil next year take account of Africa's interests and concerns. In the case of Rio +20, ECA is working closely with the AUC, AfDB and UNEP to prepare the background documents that will guide Africa's negotiating position. We are also organizing the African Regional Preparatory Conference for Rio +20 in October 2011, where a common African position on the negotiations will be adopted. I call on our member States to continue to pay very close attention to this process whose outcomes will affect the future growth trajectory of our continent.

The United Nations system in Africa continues to strengthen its partnerships in support of continental development and with the conclusion of the review of the Ten Year Capacity Building Plan, the UN Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa is poised to build on previous achievements by developing concrete capacity building programmes for the African Union, its NEPAD programme and the Regional Economic Communities. RCM-Africa resolved at its 11th session which was co-chaired by the AU Commission that an annual report on its activities should henceforth be submitted to the AU Summit through appropriate organs.

Honourable Ministers, there is much to be done but I am encouraged by your active engagement on behalf of Africa and wish to reiterate that the United Nations, under the leadership of Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon who has just been re-elected with your support, stands ready as always to accompany your efforts to build the united and prosperous Africa that we all aspire to live in.

I wish you successful deliberations, thank you for your kind attention.