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**Statement by Mr. Carlos Lopes, UN Under-Secretary-General
and Executive Secretary, ECA**

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**Your Excellency the Chair of the Executive Council, Minister. Moussa Faki Mahamat,
Your Excellency the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, my sister
Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma,
Honourable ministers, Deputy Chairperson and commissioners, ambassadors and high-
level dignitaries,**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to start by rightly pointing out the kind hospitality of our host. This beautifully maintained city of Kigali is deservedly a “new Africa” poster. It will be exciting for all of us to cover as much territory as we can in the coming days for the definition of Africa’s strategic direction following the approval of so many international and African blueprints last year, as embodied in the Agenda 2063 aspirations and its first 10-year plan. The conditions are met for us to do so.

The last joint AU-ECA Conference of Ministers of Finance, Economic Development and Planning, held in March, was extremely rich. It reviewed our macroeconomic progress, the latest headwinds facing the continent in its transformation and industrialization path, and the perennial issues tormenting us such as illicit flows, corruption, insufficient value addition or the limited progress in the final Millennium Development Goals assessment. It approved a number of important proposals, one of which relates to the need for Africa to have a well thought out and justified approach to the issue of migration. Allow me, therefore, to focus my intervention on that topic.

Ladies and gentlemen,

So far this year, the Italian coast guard has rescued more than 30,000 people from the Mediterranean Sea, acting with courage, compassion and efficiency. They deserve recognition from Africa because many of those souls are from the continent. Last year, more than 1 million people crossed the Mediterranean to reach Europe, many through Italy. This is a much larger number than in previous years. Of that number, about 68 per cent were from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. Of the top ten nationalities represented, only one in ten was African. The European agency dealing with the issue, Frontex, acknowledges that the number of irregular migrants from Africa pales in comparison with regular arrivals.

The humanitarian dimension associated with these latest developments has unfortunate similarities with boat people phenomena in the direction of South America, Australia, South China, Adaman, Aegean or Red Sea. Throughout history, ships were not only used for exploring new territories or to trade. Migration is a very old user of ships.

Stocks of migrants are normally accounted for in terms of nationalities and ID papers. But the phenomena precedes the modern territorial boundaries; indeed, many migration movements helped shaped them. A sense of history is therefore essential to understand the complexity of people's mobility.

According to official statistics 250 million people currently live outside their countries of origin. However, between 1846 and 1940 alone, about 50 million Europeans moved to the Americas. More Europeans have moved to other parts of the world since. It is therefore interesting to place in perspective just how many Africans are associated with the current perception of a tidal wave. According to data from the United Nations, the stock of Africans in those 250 million is 8.5 per cent. In Europe, that stock is slightly above 9 million people. For a population of around 1 billion that means the equivalent of 0.9 per cent of the continent's population.

In fact, most Africans who migrate do so to other African countries. The continent has the highest intra-continent migration levels in the entire world. Human mobility, despite the many limitations that impede regional integration, is progressing well in Africa. In the light of new demographic shifts, young Africans communicate, have better access to transport and feel less of a sense of territorial rigidity than their parents. This is a universal trend. In the United Kingdom's recent "Brexit" vote, like in many other industrialized countries where populists push for anti-migrant positions, young people voted massively for diversity and integration. Unfortunately in those countries older people have been convinced that their lifestyles are under threat by migrants. Any specialist or well-informed citizen knows the opposite is true.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me focus first on why people leave Africa, before turning to an assessment of the benefits of migration.

Every successful experience of industrialization has provoked movements of population. Mostly in the direction of the new production centres, but not always. Many factors influence human behaviour and a sociological context can determine parts of the population looking for exchange and interaction beyond their borders.

China has produced close to 10 million migrants in the recent economic boom period. According to this week's edition of *The Economist*, "the extraordinary outflow of people from China is one of the most striking trends of recent decades". They have left for a variety of reasons, like others did before them. Like Africans will certainly continue to do, despite high growth. Indians moving to the United Arab Emirates are no different. Mexicans go the United States of America, Indonesians to Australia, also despite high growth. Why would Africa be any different?

Not all seek migration due to ambition alone. Many are compelled to leave because they are in a situation of desperation. Conflicts provoking heavy casualties have risen significantly in the last six years on the continent. They are mostly associated with terrorism. Attacks by radical religious movements have increased 300 per cent since 2009. Exclusion of social groups has become the most pervasive governance problem Africa has to confront. Pastoralist societies are particularly hard hit as they struggle to adapt to fast urbanization and growth of services in the economy. UNHCR has around 14 million Africans listed as "people of concern", the highest number since statistics started being kept.

Opportunities in Africa itself have also proven elusive for some, as they got expelled by other fellow Africans. Since independence African countries have expelled other Africans 35 times. This lack of acceptance makes the journey elsewhere, across the waters, hazardous but potentially more attractive.

There are also educated Africans, who take planes, rather than pick-ups in the desert or small rafts in the sea. One in every six university graduates finds a way out of their country of origin, making Africa's migrants surprisingly educated. The highly skilled account for only 3 per cent of Africa's labour force but 35 per cent of the new migrants leaving the continent. That partly explains why remittances continue to rise, last year attaining US\$ 71 billion, or over 4 per cent of the continent's combined GDP.

In general Africans do not look at migration negatively. In the collective psyche the 12 million slaves forcibly moved to the Americas, as well as the less known but also significant movements of slaves to Arabia and India, have not been forgotten. In comparison they expect current flows to be handled with the solidarity promised in the human rights proclamations. Given that the current number of African migrants is relatively small, how to explain the growing concern, almost hysteria, around it?

Ladies and gentlemen,

World demographics are changing so fast that it is not possible to maintain the wealth distribution patterns we have become familiar with. It is difficult to demonstrate to the polity that austerity is not going to solve the twin problems of large debts and population ageing. The majority of countries with high debt have also a structural challenge of population ageing.

In about two months, on 21 September, Japan will hold its “Respect for the Aged Day”, when over 30,000 citizens will be applauded for their 100th birthday. They will join a further 31,000 centenarians fêted before them. The acceleration of the age curve is so dramatic in Japan that by 2025 health-care spending will rise 70 per cent, home nursing by 160 per cent, pensions by 40 per cent. Currently one in every four Japanese is over 65. The labour force – despite the increase in the age of retirement – will diminish in the next 40 years to the levels of 1950. However, a bigger challenge looms on the horizon: the national debt is already 240 per cent of GDP.

Country after country in Europe is confronted with a similar deficit of labour, and therefore of potential contributors to social security and consumption. In Europe the average debt to GDP ratio is way above 100 per cent. This amount of debt confronts a population that will have an excess of deaths in relation to births of 63 million between now and 2050. Even if the net projection of migrants going to Europe is maintained at 31 million during the said period, the population will still shrink by 32 million. As in Japan, a quarter of the population is already over 65. In 2050, if trends are maintained, the number of people over 65 years will be precisely 65 per cent. Who believes austerity on its own will diminish with current crisis?

In the Republic of Korea, the most robotized society in the world, the demonstration that robots will not resolve ageing has sunk in. The mentality of “one blood” is giving way to the embrace of migration. After all, robots do not contribute to social security. Jasmine Lee, born in the Philippines, is the first non-ethnic Korean member of parliament elected to the Korean National Assembly, breaking barriers that lasted for a very long time. China will also have to deal with the challenge of an ageing population. China’s wealth per capita is equivalent of that of Japan in the early 1970s, yet its labour force is already declining.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In contrast to many of their partners, Africa and India will be the repository of youth. The Malthusian pessimists have to look into the future with the characteristics it is likely to have, not the ones they are familiar with today. The demographic boom in Africa should be seen as part of its potential. African leaders should, nevertheless, be warned that the faith of Africans will depend on investments on human capital. There is no promised land anywhere without work and strategy.

To say international migration is to say cross-border connections: the ties linking sending and receiving countries are a significant aspect of the migration experience, appearing during present as well as past eras of migration. Once called “the uprooted”, migrants are now often called “transnationals”. This sensitivity is a result of studies underscoring the ways in which international migration cuts across national borders to produce a range of dynamic cross-border connections. No walls being erected in many parts of the world will deter such a trend.

Improvements in literacy rates, transport, ICT and public infrastructure in the last century have significantly influenced migration and transnational social connectivity and vice-versa.

Remittances sent by migrants to developing countries are large (second largest source of development finance after foreign direct investment); rising (increase of almost 100 per cent between 1999 and 2004), stable (with less volatility than capital market flows or development assistance), and do not require interest or capital payments. However, remittances alone cannot remove the structural constraints to economic growth.

A more hopeful view sees migrants serving as bridges or connectors, providing access to markets, sources of investment and expertise, while also helping to shape public debate, articulate reform plans and help implement reforms and new projects. The model of the migrants that would lose the links with their original identity is being replaced by the new reality of individuals aggregating new identities to their original ones. Migrants are acquiring cosmopolitan competences. They live in the era of Skype, Viber and WhatsApp.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The overwhelming majority of the global population get their citizenship by virtue of having been born in one particular place. There is no doubt that, in today's unequal world, having one particular citizenship offers privileges and opportunities for some that are denied to others. Gaining privilege with such a strange arbitrary criteria runs against the practice in almost any other form of organized social life. There are many examples of legislation being implemented across the world to ensure equal opportunity. Are birthrights a sort of entitlement like inheritance, or rather a lottery?

From what I have just shared, you can see that migration seems to be boxed in a category that does not respond to logic, rights, or even decency. There is a need to get out of this conundrum.

Should African institutions lead the way?

Can Africa lead the way?

Thank you.