

H.E. Dr. Mansour Muhtar, Hon. Minister of Finance of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

H.E Mrs Salamatu Hussein Suleman, Hon. Minister of Women Affairs of Federal Republic of Nigeria

H.E Hajiya Aisha J. Dukku, Hon. Minister of State, Ministry of Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

Hayija Amina M Az Zubair, Senior Special Assistant to the President (MDGs), Federal Republic of Nigeria

Mr. Alberic Kacou, UN Resident Coordinator,

Mr. Shantayan Devarajan, World Bank Chief Economist for Africa Region

Ladies and Gentlemen

Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), on whose behalf I speak, has asked me to convey his apologies for his inability to be here. Mr. Janneh had looked forward to this meeting and to being here but became unable to due to last minute changes and unforeseen circumstances.

Mr. Janneh has also asked me to thank the Government of Nigeria and through them the people of this great country for agreeing to collaborate with ECA on an issue, the deep understanding of which we believe can make a demonstrable impact on our continent's progress towards the targets of the Millennium Development Goals. We would like to thank the Honorable Minister of Finance of Nigeria, Dr. Mansur Muhtar for his kind support to this meeting and his acceptance of the invitation to Open it. Hon. Minister, permit me to use this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment and to convey our commitment to work with you.

Hon. Minister, the second joint African Union Commission Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance (CAMEF) and ECA Conference of

Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development comes up next month in Cairo, Egypt. We have already sent you an invitation to the Conference. May I use this opportunity to express our hope that you will be able to join us and your peers from across the continent at the Conference to discuss issues of vital importance to the health of African economies and to agree the way forward on some of these pressing issues.

We also welcome the Hon. Minister of Women Affairs and the Minister of State for Education in the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

We would also like to thank the Hon Minister of State for Finance Mr. Aderemi Babalola. This meeting is the Outcome of conversations and meetings with him that began during his participation in the first joint African Union Commission Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance (GAMEF) and ECA Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development in Addis Ababa, last year. We thank the Hon Minister of State for Finance for his active encouragement.

We thank Amina IM. Az Zubair, the Senior Special Assistant to the President of Nigeria on MDGs and her team. We have worked with her in 2006 to kick-start the African Ministerial Conference on Financing for Development. We have watched with admiration the dynamism, innovation and passion that she has brought to Nigeria's drive to achieve the MDGs. Her team has been especially supportive and has displayed most exemplarily what it means to co-organize a meeting.

### **Ladies and gentlemen**

The slow progress of our continent is worrying. All assessments, including the forthcoming report on Africa's progress towards the targets of the MDGs jointly prepared by the three leading continental institutions – ECA, African Union Commission and the African Development Bank - confirm one thing: that there is progress in Africa on some of the targets but in the aggregate, the continent will not meet all the MDGs by the target date.

Ours might be the only region in the world to fail in this regard. This need not be so and should, we believe, not be.

While positive progress should be commended, the snail's pace of progress in general needs to be a source of concern. It is for this reason that we must intensify our efforts to identify innovative ways and other internal actors and drivers to contribute to the MDGs efforts. The United Nations, under the leadership of the Secretary General continues to urge elevation of efforts to accelerate progress in Africa to meet the targets. One of the things that the Secretary General did upon assuming office was to set up the Africa MDGs Steering Committee supported by an Africa MDGs Working Group chaired by the Deputy Secretary General to come up with ways, particularly on financing to accelerate progress. Concurrent with this, the Secretary General also set up an MDG Gap Task Force to report on progress towards Goal 8.

At the continental and regional level, there continues to be very strong commitment to the MDGs at the highest levels. Last July, African leaders meeting in Sharm El-Sheikh at the African Union Summit adopted a resolution urging member States to take necessary measures to accelerate progress towards the MDGs. They also renewed their mandate to the African Union Commission and the ECA to prepare, on an annual basis, a report assessing progress towards the MDGs in Africa.

With approximately 6 years to the target date, it is important that we think innovatively about how to accelerate progress especially in the context of the current global financial and economic crisis. While additional resources are important, equally important if not more important are the structures – institutional and otherwise through which MDGs and other development interventions are delivered. An important component of the development delivery architecture in all of our countries is the sub-national set up. Many of our countries have decentralized – some constitutionally, others through legislation. These sub-national units or entities are as we see them important actors in the development process and should be brought into

the equation of our efforts to achieve the MDGs. They are important “development and cost centers”.

The report of the Africa MDGs Steering Group and the UN Millennium Project Report on Investing in Development recognize the central role of decentralized units in the MDGs efforts. This meeting is, therefore, to help us begin to understand how our continent can much more effectively harness these decentralized units in our efforts to achieve the MDGs. Our basic premise is that they are making some contribution but that more can be achieved. To do that, we need to better understand what it is that they are actually doing.

The outcome of this meeting will feed into other processes. First it will feed into the Ministerial processes of the African Union and the ECA. It will also feed into the annual Report on Assessing Progress in Africa towards the MDGs, which will be presented at the July 2009 AU Summit and to the United Nations ECOSOC also in July 2009. Finally, it will serve as input into an African regional review of progress towards the targets of the MDGs that ECA will convene later this year. The purpose of this regional review is to prepare the continent for the UN General Assembly Review of Progress towards the MDGs in 2010. The Outcome of this meeting has the possibility to make an important contribution to ongoing efforts in the policy and research arenas to scale up efforts to achieve the MDGs in Africa. Sub-national jurisdictions need to and must be integral to these efforts.

Finally, let me once again thank you all for accepting to come to this meeting. And to the government of Nigeria, the UNDP and the World Bank, we say thank you and do look forward to continuing partnership with you to much more effectively accompany our countries in their development journey.

I wish you a fruitful and successful meeting.