



African Development Bank Group

FIRST CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR CIVIL REGISTRATION & VITAL STATISTICS

Statement

by

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Your Excellency Mr. Teshome Toga, Speaker of the House of Peoples' Representatives, of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,

Excellencies, African Ministers in Charge of Civil Registration,
Your Excellency Jennifer Kargbo, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa,

Your Excellency Dr. Maxwell Mkwezalamba, Commissioner of Economic Affairs of the African Union Commission,

Distinguished delegates from Member States,

Representatives of sub regional, regional, and international organizations,

Representatives of Development Partners,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and privilege to me to welcome you all to this important and groundbreaking "First Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics."

On behalf of the African Development Bank, I would like to thank His Excellency, Mr. Teshome Toga, Speaker of the House of Peoples' Representatives Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for gracing this Conference and express my appreciation to the Ethiopian government for the special emphasis it has given to Civil Registration and Vital Statistics at the highest political level. This is evidenced by the full participation of H.E. Mr. Berhan Hailu, Minister of Justice of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in the regional workshop that we

convened in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania in June 2009. As you all know, the impetus for organizing this historic event was formulated during the Tanzania workshop and H.E. Hailu has been instrumental in making this conference. The AfDB is very much privileged to be a part of this whole initiative.

Mr Chairman,

I would also like to congratulate, H.E. Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission of Africa and his Excellency Dr. Maxwell Mkwezalamba, Commissioner of Economic Affairs of the African Union Commission (AUC) for their tireless efforts in co-organizing this very timely conference.

This Conference is unique in that it brings together about 30 African ministers to discuss and endorse important resolutions and recommendations on legal, administrative and statistical issues that touch each and every African person living in and outside the continent. As you have seen in the theme of the conference, Civil Registration and Vital Statistics is a broad area that touches every angle of public administration, functions and services and engagements with citizens on a daily basis.

In the past half century, African countries have been searching for a viable method and approach for developing and managing permanent information recording systems for their citizens and hence build up an inventory of the human capital available. Unfortunately, the current reality is that the majority of African states have not attained the level of

coverage and completeness of Civil Registration of vital events that is necessary to support effective public and justice administration systems as well as other statistical and information requirements. This has left most of the countries with no accurate information about births, deaths, marriages, divorces, amongst others.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The African Development Bank is a major user of statistics and hence has an intrinsic interest in supporting statistical development activities in African countries. The Bank is a leading institution in the region for compiling statistics and managing regional data programs like the International Comparison Program (ICP), which has helped to significantly improve the quality of price statistics and national accounts in African countries. It is the lead funding agency for statistical capacity building at the regional and sub-regional levels; and actively collaborates with other donor partners at the country level. In the last six years, it has provided over 60 Million US Dollars in direct grants to assist member countries in their statistical capacity building efforts.

Vital statistics information compiled from Civil Registration systems are the conventional data sources in measuring key national and sub-national development initiatives and programmes including many of the indicators for the Millennium Development Goals. In the statistics field, Vital Statistics constitute a critical source of information on population dynamics such as fertility and mortality statistics that update survey and population census results on a continuous and permanent basis. The Vital statistics system is the only source for generating adult and

maternal mortality measurements and also causes of death statistics as recommended by the WHO. Vital statistics also enable us to quickly identify the population at risk. A country cannot have good time-series data on these basic statistical indicators in the absence of a well functioning Civil Registration system.

Mr Chairman,

In this regard, the Bank in close collaboration with the ECA has been engaged on a number of landmark activities aimed at improving civil registration systems in African countries. These include the development of operational guidelines that were presented to the experts' meeting in the past three days. The Bank is also fully involved in the development of a regional medium-term plan for reforming and improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems, which was discussed by the experts is being submitted for consideration and eventual endorsement by this conference. And through its statistical capacity building program, the Bank is assisting African countries to incorporate issues of civil registration and vital statistics in their national statistical development strategies. We are, however, aware of the multifaceted challenges and problems of improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems in our countries. But we believe that by harnessing the current information technology, Africa can within a relatively short period significantly improve their civil registration systems.

For concrete follow up actions on this conference , and as a short run measure, I am going to direct my staff to immediately engage with our partner training institutions to develop relevant courses on building effective Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems. These would be

short term courses for targeted audiences. Furthermore, in its Phase 3 statistical capacity building program, expected to be launched in 2011, the Bank will allocate Funds to support Civil Registration activities

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I conclude, I would like to recall that the Tanzania workshop identified lack of political commitment, country ownership and leadership in Civil Registration and Vital Statistics undertakings as some of the fundamental deterring factors in improving the systems in the region. The workshop strongly recommended the organization of this Ministerial conference as a first step towards mobilizing awareness, political commitment and leadership on this critical issue. I am therefore happy to see many of you attending this conference which shows your commitment to improve civil registration in your countries. Given the high level strategic positions you hold in your countries, I sincerely believe that you are in a far much better position to make a difference in this endeavor. You could do this by championing the cause for strengthening your countries' Civil Registration systems through advocacy, setting up appropriate legal frameworks and providing the necessary resources.

I would like to end my statement by asking this high-level meeting to endorse the resolutions and recommendations that would lead and govern our interventions on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems in the coming years.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a successful meeting.

