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ECA Office for North Africa

Twenty-third Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee
of Experts (ICE)

Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco
10-13 March 2008

REPORT

I. ORGANIZATION AND ATTENDANCE

1. The twenty-third meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE) of the Economic Commission for Africa Office for North Africa (ECA-NA) was held in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco, from 10 to 13 March 2008. The opening ceremony was presided over by Mr. Abdel Kader Yasser Mohammed Atef of Egypt, Chairperson of the outgoing ICE Bureau.

2. Speakers at the opening ceremony included Mr. Ahmed Lahlimi Alami, High Commissioner for Planning of the Kingdom of Morocco, Mr. Habib Ben Yahia, Secretary-General of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), and Ms. Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, Director of the ECA Office for North Africa.

3. Representatives from all seven member States (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia) attended the meeting.

4. Representatives of the following institutions were present:

United Nations bodies and specialized agencies:

- International Labour Organization (ILO)
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Regional economic communities:

- Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)

International and regional organizations:

- African Centre for Applied Research and Training in Social Development (ACARTSOD)
- African Development Bank (ADB)
- Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO)
- Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (OADA)
- Delegation of the European Commission
- European Investment Bank
- International Finance Corporation (IFC)
- Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD)
- Islamic Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO)
- League of Arab States

Diplomatic corps:

- Embassy of Belgium
- Embassy of Brazil
- Embassy of Burkina-Faso
- Embassy of Cameroon
- Embassy of Canada
- Embassy of Côte d'Ivoire

- Embassy of Finland
 - Embassy of Gambia
 - Embassy of Equatorial Guinea
 - Embassy of Italy
 - Embassy of Japan
 - Embassy of Kuwait
 - Embassy of Libya
 - Embassy of Malta
 - Embassy of Spain
 - Embassy of Sudan
 - Embassy of Switzerland
 - Embassy of Tunisia
- Private sector and universities:
 - Cairo & Alexandria Stock Exchanges
 - Centre africain de formation et de recherche administratives pour le développement (CAFRAD)
 - Centre africain de recherche appliquée et de formation en matière de développement social (CAFRADES)
 - Centre de recherche, études, documentation et information sur les femmes (CREDIF)
 - Centre islamique pour le développement du commerce (CIDC)
 - Confédération générale des entreprises Maroccoaines (CGEM)
 - Confédération nationale du patronat de Mauritanie
 - Energy Research Institute (India)
 - Fédération des chambres d'artisanat du Maroc
 - Hassan II University
 - Institut national de statistique et d'économie appliquée (INSEA)
 - Institute of African Studies
 - Mohammed V University
 - New Business Opportunities Programme
 - Nour Islamic Bank
 - Union tunisienne de l'industrie, du commerce et de l'artisanat (UTICA)
 - Non-governmental organizations:
 - Association démocratique des femmes (ADFM)

5. For a full list of participants, see annex III.

II. OPENING OF THE MEETING (*agenda item 1*)

6. Opening the meeting, Mr. Abdel Kader Yasser Mohammed Atef of Egypt, outgoing Chairperson of the ICE, first expressed his appreciation to member countries for their confidence in his country's leadership of the Committee's work over the past year. He commended Director Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane and her staff of the ECA Office for North Africa for the efforts they continued to make to keep improving the work of the Committee.

7. He also thanked the dignitaries and representatives of regional and international organizations present and congratulated the ECA Office for North Africa for selecting the theme of small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) for the twenty-third meeting of the ICE, given the importance to these enterprises for the economic fabric of countries of the subregion.

8. He went on to describe the satisfactory economic performance in the subregion in 2007, despite an unfavourable global environment of rising commodity and oil prices. He urged the

countries to continue improving their economic performance in the coming years so as to overcome the challenges to social development (education, employment and health) in general, and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in particular.

9. Before concluding his remarks, he recalled the important role of North African expatriates in technology transfer and remittances in financing their national economies, more particularly in SME creation, and expressed the hope that the work and outcome of the parallel sessions devoted to SMEs would result, as expected, in the formulation and implementation of a regional strategy or plan of action for upscaling SMEs, with a view to intensifying trade and deepening integration in the subregion.

10. On behalf of Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA, the Director of the ECA Office for North Africa welcomed participants, in particular, Mr. Ahmed Lahlimi Alami, High Commissioner for Planning, Mr. Habib Ben Yahia, Secretary-General of AMU, the Chairperson of the outgoing ICE Bureau, the official delegations of member States, representatives of the private sector and civil society, representatives of organizations of the United Nations system, as well as representatives of regional and international organizations and the diplomatic corps.

11. She then reiterated her gratitude to His Majesty King Mohammed VI, the Government and People of Morocco for the warm welcome accorded to participants and for their unfailing support to her Office. She commended the excellent partnership and technical cooperation between her Office and not only the Office of the High Commissioner for Planning of the Kingdom of Morocco, but also the Secretariat of AMU, with which ECA-NA had signed a memorandum of understanding in January 2008 identifying many activities to be conducted jointly in 2008-2009 so as to forge even closer cooperation between the two institutions.

12. She recalled the satisfactory macroeconomic performance of the North African countries in 2007, highlighting their tremendous potential for exceeding the 7 per cent growth target needed to guarantee the sustainability of the gains achieved and to address social challenges and poverty alleviation, with a view to achieving the MDGs.

13. In that regard, she pointed out the exigencies of social development which more equitable economic growth must satisfy in order to better address social inequities and alleviate the problems of extreme poverty, inadequate education, persistent unemployment among the youth, university graduates and women, migration and environmental degradation.

14. She emphasized the need for the region to double its efforts to improve the business environment (as advocated by the workshop on capital mobility which her Office had organized in January 2008), economic and corporate governance for enhanced competitiveness in order to face up to globalization and meet the expectations of the productive sector, consisting mainly of SMEs. To address that last challenge, her Office, in consultation with member States, had selected the role of SMEs in sustainable development as the overall theme for its work in 2008 and had decided to organize a workshop thereon during the current ICE meeting.

15. She then reviewed the major issues to be addressed by the current meeting of the ICE:

- ♦ The 2007 report on the economic and social climate in North African countries
- ♦ Follow-up to regional and global development agendas

- ♦ Outcomes of two workshops on sustainable development and capital mobility organized by the Office during the year
- ♦ ECA-NA report on activities undertaken in the biennium 2006-2007
- ♦ Programme of work and priorities for the biennium 2008-2009
- ♦ Proposed strategic framework for the 2010-2011 programme of work.

16. Before concluding her remarks, she informed the meeting that ECA would be commemorating its 50th Anniversary or Golden Jubilee in 2008 at the joint ECA/AU Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to be held in Addis Ababa and graced by the presence of eminent personalities,. She then wished the participants fruitful deliberations and every success for the 23rd meeting of ICE.

17. Mr. Ahmed Lahlimi Alami, High Commissioner for Planning, welcomed the excellent partnership between ECA-NA and his Office. He thanked Ms. Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, Director of ECA-NA, for having invited him to participate in the current meeting of ICE, which would be focusing on SMEs in two parallel sessions. In his view, that choice was fully warranted by the important role that SMEs played in national economies throughout the subregion.

18. The current session of ICE was taking place within an international context where national economies were opening up more and more to increasingly globalized markets which held so much hope and concern that national economies were impelled to revamp and upscale their approaches to development and corporate governance.

19. He affirmed the crucial role that SMEs themselves must play in order to become more competitive and to expand their national, regional and international market shares in the face of increasingly pervasive globalization.

20. In Africa in general and in the subregion in particular, SMEs accounted for 96 per cent to 98 per cent of businesses. Although they only contributed approximately 20 per cent of GDP and less than 10 per cent of corporate taxes, they nevertheless constituted an insufficiently explored source of wealth, added value and job creation.

21. He invited participants, during the workshop on SMEs, to fully evaluate the strengths and weakness of SMEs in the subregion and to propose measures that would enable them to adapt to the new globalized environment at a time when most SMEs were suffering from:

- ♦ Inadequate resources
- ♦ Disorganization
- ♦ Insufficient access to funding.

22. He concluded by thanking once again ECA-NA for organizing the sessions on SMEs and paid tribute to the work that the Secretary-General of AMU and his organization were doing to foster greater economic integration among the Maghreb countries.

23. Mr. Habib Ben Yahia, Secretary-General of AMU, expressed his full support for the current meeting of ICE and welcomed the choice of theme, which reflected the preponderant role of SMEs as engines of sustainable growth.

24. He was grateful for the commendable efforts that the Director of ECA-NA continued to make to strengthen the working relationships between her Office and AMU Secretariat. In that regard, a memorandum of understanding had been signed between the two institutions in January 2008.

25. He informed the meeting about the interest demonstrated by the Union maghrébiennne des employeurs (UME) in the current meeting, thus reflecting the importance that AMU attached to the private sector as an indispensable player in national development and in the process of integration as a catalyst for growth in an increasingly globalized and competitive economy.

26. Worth noting in that regard were such major events as the creation within AMU a year earlier in Marrakech of UME, which brought together employers of five Maghreb countries in an effort to optimize resources for the proposed integration of Maghreb economies. Other timely initiatives for strengthening integration were the impending creation of the “Union des Foires Maghrébines (UFM)” and commissioning of the operations of the “Banque Maghrébine d’Investissement et de Commerce Extérieur (BMICE)”, whose constituent assembly would be convened in 2008.

27. Stressing that integration and economic growth could not be achieved without dynamic SMEs, he recalled their potential role in fighting unemployment, particularly among graduates and the disenfranchised in society (young people and women), and in improving the incomes and livelihoods of people in the subregion.

28. He stressed the difficulties and challenges facing SMEs, which, in addition to problems of upscaling and fierce international competition, were under-financed, mostly due to their structure and size. He recommended that SMEs, particularly those operating subregionally, should expand their cooperation and pool their resources in order to overcome these constraints. Similarly, better care should be taken to explore the possibilities of achieving economies of scale, particularly through mergers and acquisitions.

29. Before concluding, he proposed that the meeting might wish to consider the following measures:

- ♦ Action beyond legislation, important as that might be, to include support for the creation and the development of SMEs in the Maghreb
- ♦ Promotion and expansion of micro-credit development
- ♦ Development of a work culture and life-long learning
- ♦ Encouragement of support for SME operators to overcome the weaknesses of fragile businesses, notably through public/private partnerships
- ♦ Shifting to high value-added production
- ♦ According greater importance to the transition from sub-contracting to joint contracting
- ♦ Envisaging the creation of more viable enterprises to overcome the challenges of competition, with a close examination of the cases of Asian joint ventures and the merger of subregional businesses

- ♦ Development of continuing education to build and develop the required capacities.

30. Finally, he expressed the hope that the meeting would be successful and that it would result in practical proposals that would help on the way forward and would foster the spirit of collaboration not only in the Maghreb, but also in Africa and in the Arab world.

III. ELECTION OF THE BUREAU (*agenda item 2*)

31. Following consultations with Heads of delegation, the Committee elected the following Bureau:

Chairperson:	Libya
Vice-Chairperson:	Mauritania
Rapporteur:	Sudan

IV. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND PROGRAMME OF WORK (*agenda item 3*)

32. The provisional agenda contained in document ECA/-NA/ICE/XXIII/1 and the proposed programme of work contained in document ECA/-NA/ICE/XXIII/1/Add.2 were adopted.

ACCOUNT OF PROCEEDINGS

V. REPORT ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN NORTH AFRICA: ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AND SOCIAL SITUATION IN 2007 (*agenda item 4*)

33. The report on economic and social conditions indicated that, in 2007, unlike in previous years, globalization had become more pronounced. Economic performance over the period under review had remained comparable to that of 2006. In spite of an unfavourable global environment, trade had recorded a value increase due to the rise in oil prices.

34. All countries in the subregion had adopted policies for improving livelihoods, competitiveness and environmental protection. Nevertheless, even though the subregion had made some degree of progress in its social sectors, it still fell far short on economic growth and GDP.

35. The report presented conclusions and recommendations on how sources of growth not yet harnessed could be tapped to bolster the development of social policies in tandem with economic and financial policies.

36. In the ensuing discussions, participants commended ECA-NA for the quality of the report, the analyses made and the volume of information it contained on economies in the subregion. They felt that:

- ECA-NA, together with its member States, should include in future versions of the report, summary indices that would make it easier to compare North Africa with other regions and economic groupings within and outside Africa
- The analyses of economic performances of oil-exporting countries should be further deepened and placed in proper context to reflect the weight of the petroleum sector in the GDP structure and to weigh the effects of the nominal increase in petroleum prices against the strong depreciation of the US dollar, the principal petro-currency, and the strong pressure of taxes on oil products in importing countries

- The review and appraisal of economic performance generally and of unemployment in particular should be further nuanced to take into consideration the difference in the definition of concepts and standards used by countries of the subregion and, to the extent feasible, seek to harmonize those concepts
- Economic diversification should be singled out as a way of countering the adverse effects of globalization and the risks inherent in volatile growth driven inexorably by exogenous factors such as climatic conditions and global commodity and fuel prices and the creation of labour-intensive SMEs should be promoted as much as possible
- The analyses of exchange rate patterns should be broadened to include comparisons with real exchange rates in countries of the subregion.

37. Following the discussions, the secretariat thanked participants for the helpful comments, which would be taken into account and reflected in future editions of the report on economic and social conditions in North Africa. Participants were requested to send in all statistics and data at their disposal for use in updating the data presented.

VI. PANEL DISCUSSION ON SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZE ENTREPRISES AS AGENTS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (*agenda item 5*)

38. A workshop on SMEs as agent of sustainable development was held during the 23rd meeting of ICE. It was organized as follows:

A plenary session, which considered:

- ♦ An introductory note on the theme and objectives of the workshop (ECA6NA/ICE/XXIII/3)
- ♦ Presentations on access to foreign markets in Asia, Europe and North America
- ♦ A presentation on SMEs and regional integration with particular emphasis on the role of the UME
- ♦ A presentation on the role of young entrepreneurs
- ♦ Proposed terms of reference for a study on SMEs that ECA-NA planned to conduct.

Two parallel sessions that discussed:

- ♦ Opportunities and niche markets for SME development
- ♦ Ways of making SMEs more viable

A plenary session that considered the implementation of the workshop outcomes and summary recommendations

39. After taking note of the workshop outcome document, the meeting made comments and approved its recommendations with modifications.

40. With regard to the proposed study terms of reference, the meeting noted that the added value of the undertaking had been to consider specific issues that had not been addressed and to focus on major problems facing SMEs in the subregion.

41. Participants were informed about the conclusions and recommendations of the Science with Africa Conference organized from 3 to 7 March 2008 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia by ECA, with the cooperation of the African Union, the Canadian Centre for Cyberpolicy Resources, the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development, UNESCO and the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), a global network specializing in ICTs.

42. During the discussions, participants took note of the pertinent conclusions and recommendations of that conference, some of which were of particular relevance to the current discussion on SMEs:

- ♦ The establishment of linkages between industry, science and technology
- ♦ The setting of priorities in innovation as an integral part of a strategy for improving the competitiveness of African products
- ♦ The development of African R&D capacities through enhanced North-South and South-South cooperation with various partners, including the European Union, Korea and India.

VII. REPORT ON NORTH AFRICA AND INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS: MDGs AND NEPAD IMPLEMENTATION IN NORTH AFRICA (*agenda item 6*)

43. Introducing this agenda item, the secretariat reviewed the major regional and international agendas (ECA-NA/ICE/XXIII/4) of particular relevance to North Africa and having to do with:

- Multilateral trade agreements and WTO negotiations
- Environment and sustainable development
- AISI and follow-up to phase II of the Tunis 2005 WSIS
- Development financing under the Monterrey Consensus
- MDGs and human development
- Governance and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)
- New prospects in the Mediterranean
- Regional integration and economic cooperation in North Africa.

44. While presenting the report on “United Nations System-wide Support to the African Union and its New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) Programme”, the ECA representative mentioned important dates for NEPAD, including 2001 for the launching of NEPAD; 2002, the year when the United Nations General Assembly adopted NEPAD and gave ECA the responsibility of coordinating United Nations support to NEPAD at the regional,

subregional and national levels, establishing a regional consultation mechanism (RCM) to coordinate the efforts of all United Nations agencies and organizations working in Africa in support of NEPAD, and coordinating the establishment of thematic clusters within the framework of the RCM based on NEPAD priorities; 2003, the year of the Maputo Declaration for the integration of NEPAD into the structures and processes of the African Union (AU); and 2006, the year of the signing of the Framework for the United Nations Ten-Year Capacity-Building Programme for the AU.

45. The ECA representative highlighted the nine clusters as areas for United Nations system-wide support to NEPAD and provided information on a number of specific ECA interventions such as the:

- ♦ Institutional support to the African Union, the regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the NEPAD Secretariat
- ♦ Support to initiatives such as the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Plan (CAADP), the Infrastructure Short-Term Action Plan (STAP), ICT, water resources development, trade and regional integration and gender
- ♦ Key activities carried out by the NEPAD and Regional Integration Division of ECA
- ♦ Support expected from ECA subregional offices (SROs)
- ♦ Support to the African Peer Review Mechanism.

46. She also talked about the outcomes of the 7th and 8th RCMs and stressed the importance of putting in place a mechanism for subregional coordination, highlighting major challenges for subregional coordination, including recommendations for overcoming these challenges. She mentioned a number of achievements regarding United Nations system-wide support to AU and its NEPAD programme, particularly the:

- ♦ Strengthening of coordination of United Nations support to the AU and NEPAD, including the repositioning of the RCM Secretariat at ECA around a strategic coordinator
- ♦ Increased participation of the AU Commission, the NEPAD Secretariat and RECs in the RCM and the meetings and activities of thematic groups
- ♦ Continued commitment of substantial amounts of physical and financial resources in support of AU and NEPAD
- ♦ Support for the APRM process.

47. She concluded her presentation by pointing to some lessons learned and the way forward, with particular emphasis on the seventh RCM, which generated significant momentum for United Nations support to NEPAD, including the strengthening of partnerships with African regional and subregional organizations. This momentum was consolidated during the eight RCM, which laid the groundwork for the way forward and advocated the following measures:

- ♦ Communication with the AU Commission, the NEPAD Secretariat and RECs should be enhanced to provide an effective link between United Nations agencies and institutions and these regional and subregional bodies

- ♦ Confidence-building between the United Nations agencies and the AU Commission, the NEPAD Secretariat and the RECs, and between United Nations agencies themselves should continue to be strengthened
- ♦ Priority should be given to the Ten-Year Capacity-Building Programme for the AU and to the strategic plans of the AU Commission, the NEPAD Secretariat and the RECs.

48. During the discussions, participants noted the paucity of information on the practical achievements of NEPAD in North Africa. The Secretariat recalled such achievements as:

- ♦ The preparation of African countries for UN Water Africa, which allowed them to articulate a common position in international discussions
- ♦ Progress on the APRM process, with Algeria being well advanced in the process among North African countries.

49. While welcoming the fact that the transition period for Tunisia had been favourable in terms of trade coverage (exports/imports), participants noted that the entry into force of the free trade area with the European Union could have a significant impact on tax revenue.

50. Participants felt that before embarking on the process of a Mediterranean Union, it would be important to draw all the lessons to be learned from the implementation of the Barcelona process.

51. To better reflect the subregional dimension, participants called for broader consultation between ECA and other United Nations agencies in the subregion. They also called for the establishment of an information mechanism for member countries on NEPAD and the components of its programmes related to the environment and the knowledge society, and for the provision of training on information and communications technology.

VIII. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH AFRICA (*agenda item 7*)

52. The Secretariat made a presentation on the interaction of economic, social and environmental factors on sustainable development in North Africa, highlighting the multiple facets of sustainable development:

- Indicators (economic growth, agriculture and sustainable development, adaptation to climate change, water management and biodiversity and desertification control, energy and natural resources management and achievement of the MDGs)
- Stakeholders (public authorities, private sector, researchers, the entire spectrum of civil society, particularly young people and women, the international community and regional organizations)
- Facilitators (education and training, infrastructure, public-private partnerships, international cooperation and solidarity and knowledge management and sharing).

53. The presentation described the positive role of migrants in national development and called on the international community to act in concert with countries in addressing the displacement of people resulting from the adverse effect of climate change. It showed that, even

though costly, environmental protection generated considerable benefits and that best practices in North Africa could be replicated elsewhere to ensure that the subregion's economic growth is sustainable and equitable for all components of society through job and wealth creation, without compromising either the ecological balance of the region or the interests of future generations.

54. The listing of ECA activities in sustainable development focused on:

- The institution of the Clim-Dev information system initiative to facilitate Africa's sustainable development
- The proposed establishment, in cooperation with 2007 Nobel peace prize winner Mr. Pachauri (GEIC), of an African centre for climate change adaptation policies
- The active participation of ECA-NA at the conference on international solidarity and climate change organized by the Tunisian Ministry of Environment in Tunis in 2007
- The participation of the executive director of the Biodiversity Secretariat in the expert group meeting on sustainable development organized by ECA-NA in November 2007 as an initial step to implementing the memorandum of understanding signed between the Biodiversity Secretariat and United Nations regional commissions
- ECA participation in preparing, servicing and following up the Bali Summit.

55. A publication of the ECA Office for North Africa on this issue was tabled at the meeting. It recommended the institution of research mechanisms for eliciting creativity through education and training based on innovative financing tools that would enable all development partners (in particular farmers, SMEs, youth and women) to adopt those technologies that facilitate adaptation to global economic and environmental shocks and to commit themselves to the determined and sustainable pursuit of development. These efforts were to be made within the context of regional cooperation, the pooling and rational use of resources and the sharing of experiences. It was also necessary to pursue development strategies even more explicitly from the standpoint of sustainability, through broader coordination of economic, environmental and social policies under the overarching objective of human development.

56. Participants maintained that the management and sharing of knowledge had become essential indicators of sustainable development.

57. They noted that the demographic transitions in the subregion call for the speedy implementation of sustainable development policies that addressed, among other things, the emerging requirements of the nuclear family and an aging population.

58. They also felt that the use of renewable energy should play an even more important role than it had in the past as the subregion pursued sustainable development. The Secretariat informed the meeting that ECA-NA was preparing programme activities that sought to extend the use of renewable-energy sources and innovative financing mechanisms.

IX. CAPITAL MOBILITY IN NORTH AFRICA (*agenda item 8*)

59. Presenting document ECA-NA/ICE/XXIII/5, the Secretariat indicated that even though significant growth had occurred in the region, the level of intraregional capital flows remained

poor. They had yet to achieve a critical mass to affect North African economic activity. There were concentrated by country and type of flow. Nationally, Egypt accounted for more capital inflows while Morocco accounted for more capital outflows. Three quarters of these flows mainly consisted of FDI, leaving only one quarter for portfolio investment.

60. The investment environment was marked by weaknesses, country differences and controls as well as blockages to capital flows. Banking systems and financial markets had not achieved the same degree of reform. The regional scene was dominated by bank intermediation and the Egyptian stock exchange, which had become a de facto regional stock exchange.

61. The risks of financial crisis in the midst of avowed benefits from the development of capital mobility called for preventive measures to be taken to limit their adverse effects.

62. The meeting thanked ECA-NA for the presentation and raised a number of issues regarding the causes of the paucity of intra-subregional flows and how they might be developed.

63. The meeting felt that these causes were generally be the same as those that could be adduced for global flows. Among the reasons given were the differences in growth rates and resistance to the single window.

64. The meeting proposed that the draft recommendations should be enhanced in order to promote intra-subregional flows, and that the removal of constraints on capital mobility had to do with national policy commitment and economic development priorities.

65. Participants suggested that the analysis might be pursued along such lines as investment returns, which are important in attracting investors and the establishment of a subregional stock market and a subregional investment code.

66. The representative of AMU informed the meeting about activities being conducted by his organization to promote the financial integration of the Maghreb countries.

X. ACTIVITIES OF ECA-NA IN 2006 – 2007 (*agenda item 9*)

67. The Secretariat presented the activities of the Office for 2006-2007, reviewing meetings, workshops, seminars, ad hoc expert meetings, publications and special events as reported in document ECA-NA/ICE/XXIII/6.

68. It was noted that the main activities conducted by the office had focused on trade in 2006 and on infrastructure in 2007, and had to do with the sharing of experiences, policy analysis and capacity-building and been carried out in close cooperation with member States, RECs, regional organizations and United Nations agencies. The output had comprised publications, meetings, seminars, advisory services and special events.

69. The Secretariat then highlighted the major areas of activity: analysis of economic conditions, regional integration, water and sustainable development, gender, governance, trade, infrastructure, migration and ICTs. In addition, the meeting was informed about the outcome and recommendations of the North Africa Development Forum on trade organized in February 2007 to round off 2006 activities on trade.

70. The Secretariat also highlighted the stronger cooperation between the Office and such partners as AMU, with which a memorandum of understanding had been concluded and a number of consultations conducted.

71. Participants took note of the report and commended the Secretariat for the quality and relevance of the activities undertaken and efforts made to meet the needs of and to work in concert with member States and RECs.

72. They recommended that the report should be transmitted to the ECA Conference of Ministers for final approval.

XI. PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR 2008-2009 (*agenda Item 10*)

73. The Secretariat introduced document ECA-NA/ICE/XXIII/7 on its programme of work for the biennium 2008-2009. After briefly describing the ECA repositioning exercise that had been completed in August 2006, the Secretariat gave an overview of the new strategic directions of the subregional offices, which focused more on their mandates and missions as well as on improving their products and services. The strengthening of the role of the regional commissions would be achieved specifically through an enhanced role of the SROs, which must create subregional coordination mechanisms to lead other organizations in the United Nations system to support NEPAD at the subregional level.

74. The Secretariat went on to describe the two main pillars of ECA underpinning the preparation of the programme of work of the Office:

- i) Promotion of regional integration
- ii) Developmental challenges facing the countries of North Africa.

75. In that regard, the Secretariat described in detail the various activities which the ECA Office for North Africa would be conducting in 2008, highlighting the two main themes for the biennium: SMEs/SMIs for 2008, and matching of education and training to employment needs in 2009.

76. Particular emphasis was placed on the provision of assistance to the RECs, particularly AMU, with which ECA-NA had signed a memorandum of understanding on 14 January 2008. The Secretariat also reviewed the main activities that the Office would be conducting in a number of thematic areas by way of studies, seminars, workshops, expert meetings, knowledge management and implementation of field projects.

77. The meeting took note of the detailed programme for 2008 and the general outline of the 2009 programme of work. During the discussions, the meeting sought and obtained further clarification on knowledge management and field projects.

XII. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE 2010-2011 PROGRAMME OF WORK (*agenda item 11*)

78. The proposed strategic framework for the 2010-2011 programme of work contained in document ECA-NA/XXIII/8 and concerning the activities of ECA-NA was presented for discussion and approval.

79. After requesting and obtaining clarifications on three goals from the Secretariat, participants recommended that:

- ♦ REC support should be coordinated with ECA divisions which served as focal points for CEN-SAD and COMESA
- ♦ The proposed strategic framework should be submitted to the ECA Conference of Ministers for final approval.

XIII. DATE AND VENUE OF THE 24TH MEETING OF THE ICE (*agenda item 12*)

80. It was agreed that the 24th meeting of the ICE would be held late February or early March 2009 prior to the next Conference of Ministers. Unless any member State informed the Secretariat of its wish to host the event, it would be held in Rabat.

XIV. ANY OTHER BUSINESS (*agenda item 13*)

81. The Secretariat reminded participants that the ECA Conference of Ministers would be held in Addis Ababa and would be preceded by a meeting of its committee of experts. Member States were strongly urged to confirm their participation and inform ECA as early as possible of the composition of their official delegations.

XV. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT (*agenda items 14*)

82. Following the presentation of the draft report, participants tabled some amendments and adopted the report by acclamation.

83. At the end of their deliberations, participants expressed their appreciation for the quality of work done by the staff of the ECA Office for North Africa and their satisfaction with the success of the meeting.

XVI. CLOSING OF THE MEETING (*agenda item 15*)

84. The 23rd meeting of the ICE then addressed a Vote of Thanks to His Majesty Mohammed VI, King of Morocco and to the authorities of the Government of Morocco (see annex IV).

85. The Chairperson of the Committee thanked ECA-NA and more particularly its Director, Ms. Bounemra Ben Soltane, for the support she provided to him throughout the meeting and said he was convinced that this excellent collaboration would continue throughout the year.

86. In her closing remarks, the Director of ECA-NA reiterated the many issues addressed during the meeting, and the main outcomes and recommendations that will be submitted to the ECA Conference of Ministers. She also reminded participants that, in celebrating its 50th Anniversary, ECA was renewing its commitment to the service of member States.

87. Finally, she extended her gratitude to the member States, the ICE Bureau, the different institutions, the conference participants, the staff of ECA-NA, the interpreters as well as the hostesses and logistics personnel.

ANNEX 1

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE XXIII MEETING OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS

After due deliberation, members of ICE made the following recommendations which they requested the ECA Office for North Africa to transmit to the Conference of Ministers for adoption:

I. Member States should

Economic and social performance

1. Provide the ECA Office for North Africa with the data needed to prepare summary indices for facilitating the international comparison of North Africa's performance with that of other regions and economic groupings within and outside Africa.
2. Harmonize the concepts and definitions used in evaluating employment and unemployment.
3. Provide the ECA Office of North Africa with the oil-producing-country data needed to conduct a deeper analysis of the degree to which fuel prices impact national economic and social performance.
4. Continue to diversify their national economies in order to counteract the adverse effects of globalization and their vulnerability to such external factors as climatic conditions and global prices.
5. Deepen the economic and social cooperation between UMA countries and North Africa to improve the level of integration in the subregion.

Small and medium-size enterprises

6. Recognize the role played by SMEs in economic and social development and transmit to the ministerial department, private sector, professional association and university representatives concerned the recommendations of the workshop on SMEs as agents of sustainable development held from 10 to 13 March 2008 in Rabat for follow-up and implementation.

Agendas

7. Pursue the efforts already being undertaken to implement the recommendations contained in international and regional agendas and to speed up the achievement of the MDGs.
8. Become more involved in the implementation of regional infrastructure projects under NEPAD, in collaboration with the regional economic communities.

Sustainable development

9. Transmit the recommendations of the workshop on sustainable development in North Africa held from 18 to 21 November 2007 in Tunis to the sectoral departments concerned for follow-up and implementation.
10. Encourage national and subregional universities and research centres to forge greater synergies with a view to mobilizing the human and financial resources needed to conduct research on this subject.

Capital mobility

11. Transmit the recommendations of the workshop on capital mobility organized from 17 to 19 January 2008 in Casablanca to the sectoral department concerned for follow-up and implementation.
12. Explore together the possibility of creating a subregional stock exchange and instituting a subregional investment code.

II. ECA Office for North Africa should

1. Compile summary indices for facilitating the international comparison of North Africa's performance with that of other regions and economic groupings within or outside Africa.
2. Analyze the economic performance of oil-exporting countries in depth and in proper context, to reflect the weight of the petroleum sector in the GDP structure and to weigh the effects of the nominal increase in petroleum prices against the strong depreciation of the US dollar, the principal petro-currency and the strong pressure of taxes on oil products in importing countries.
3. Review and appraise economic performance in general and unemployment in particular in proper context to reflect the differing concepts and definitions used by countries of the subregion and, to the extent feasible, seek to harmonize those concepts.
4. Work in partnership with all stakeholders towards the implementation of the recommendations of the workshop on SMEs acting as agents of sustainable development held from 10 to 13 March 2008 in Rabat.
5. Institute a mechanism for briefing member countries about NEPAD and its various programmes, especially those relating to the environment and the knowledge society.
6. Deepen the analysis of issues such as investment returns, attraction of capital, the possibility of establishing a subregional stock exchange and a subregional investment code.
7. Transmit for final approval to the ECA Conference of Ministers the report on ECA-NA programme activities for 2006-2007, together with the proposed strategic framework for 2010-2011 and the ICE report.

ANNEX II

AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Election of the Bureau
3. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work
4. Report on social and economic conditions in North Africa: economic performance and social situation in 2007
5. Small and medium-size enterprises: actors of sustainable development
6. Report on North Africa and international and regional development agendas, the MDGs and implementation of NEPAD in North Africa
7. Presentation on sustainable development
8. Presentation on capital mobility
9. Report on the activities of ECA-NA in 2006-2007
10. Programme of work for 2008-2009
11. Strategic framework for the 2010-2011 programme of work
12. Date and venue of the next meeting of ICE
13. Any other business
14. Review and adoption of the Committee's report
15. Closing of the meeting

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ANNEX IV

VOTE OF THANKS TO HIS MAJESTY KING MOHAMMED VI OF MOROCCO

At the closing of the twenty-third meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts of the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa held in Rabat from 10 to 13 March 2008, we, the participants at the meeting, have the honour to express to your majesty our thanks and appreciation for the hospitality and attention we received during our stay in the generous Kingdom of Morocco.

The theme of our meeting this year - "small and medium-size enterprises as agents of sustainable development in North Africa"- was particularly important because these enterprises account for the vast majority of economic activity in the subregion and are essential for the promotion of regional integration. Indeed, Morocco's considerable experience in this area served as inspiration for our discussions and interventions during the meeting.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our satisfaction with the support we received from various authorities of the Kingdom in organizing this meeting. We would also like to express to your Majesty our deepest regards for the substantial support which the Government of Morocco has provided and continues to provide to the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa, to enable it to achieve the economic and social objectives that are shared by the entire subregion of North Africa.

We hereby offer our wishes of good health to your Majesty and continued success and progress to the people of Morocco, under your Majesty's stewardship.

Rabat 13/03/2008