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ECA Office for North Africa

Twenty First Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of
Experts (ICE)

Rabat, Morocco
4-6 April 2006

**REPORT OF THE TWENTY FIRST MEETING OF THE
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS**

I. ORGANIZATION AND PARTICIPATION

1. The Twenty-first meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE) of the ECA Office for North Africa was held in Rabat (Morocco) from April 4th-6th, 2006. The opening ceremony was chaired by Mrs. Ikbal Fekih from Tunisia, president of the ECA outgoing Bureau.

2. The ceremony was held in the presence of Mr. Mohamed Bijaad, Secretary General of the High Planning Commissariat of Morocco.

3. Representatives of all member States participated in the meeting: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Sudan and Tunisia.

4. The ICE meeting was attended by :

- Organizations and specialized institutions of the United Nations System:
 - International Labour Organisation (ILO)
 - ONUSIDA
 - UNDP/ICTDAR
 - United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF)
 - United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO)
 - United Nations Organization for Food and Agriculture (FAO)
 - United Nations Organization for Industrial Development (UNIDO)
- Regional and international organizations:
 - African Center for Applied Research and Social Development Training (ACARTSOD)
 - Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)
 - Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD)
 - Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)
 - Islamic Center for Trade Development (CIDC)
 - League of Arab States (LAS)
 - Observatory of Sahara and Sahel (OSS)
 - Union des administrations portuaires du nord de l'Afrique
- Embassies and Consulates:
 - Belgium
 - Cameroon, Dean of African countries in Morocco
 - European Commission
 - France
 - Germany
 - United Kingdom
 - Spain
- Representatives of the private sector, NGOs and universities

5. The list of participants is enclosed in the Annex.

II. OPENING SESSION (*Agenda item 1*)

6. In her opening statement, Mrs. Ikbal Fekih from Tunisia, President of the 20th ICE session extended her thanks to the other ICE Bureau members, the Secretariat staff and especially the Director, Ms. Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, for the support provided during her term. She

praised the initiative taken by the Secretariat to reinforce consultations with the Bureau members during the previous year and make them participate in various activities. She reviewed the different topics of the meeting and stressed the importance of the issues of water, regional integration and trade facilitation between North African countries.

7. In his statement, Mr. Mohamed Bijaad, Secretary General of the High Commissariat for Planning of Morocco reminded that this meeting is quite particular, as it is the first time that the ICE is meeting in Rabat. The Office transfer to Rabat will definitely strengthen its efficiency. He pointed out that unemployment is a significant challenge for all North Africa countries and that the ECA Office for North Africa is making all efforts to select the topics that enable taking up this challenge. He underlined the main constraining factors affecting the economic situation of the region, the performances achieved as well as measures and reforms implemented towards improvement of the business environment and attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In this particular area, Morocco has made important progress, thanks to the enlightened guidance of His Majesty King Mohammed VI.

8. Mr. Bijaad emphasized that the regional external trade remains quite geographically concentrated and poorly diversified, whereas a high potential exists for intra-regional trade. Similarly, he reminded the increasing pressure put on water resources and the lack of an effective management of these resources. This situation, he pointed out, calls for a questioning of the ways the water is managed so as to safeguard it.

9. The Director of the ECA Office for North Africa, on behalf of Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, United Nations Deputy Secretary General and ECA Executive Secretary, welcomed the Secretary General of the High Planning Commissariat of Morocco, the president of the outgoing ICE Bureau, the official delegations of member States, His Excellency Mr. Mahamat Paba Salé, Ambassador of Cameroon and the Dean of the African Group in Morocco, ambassadors and other members of the Diplomatic Corps, and representatives of the United Nations System, as well as those of regional, sub-regional and national organizations of the private sector and civil society.

10. She introduced the main topics that will be tackled in the present ICE session namely the economic and social situation of the region, trade as one of the vectors of regional integration, the evolution of economic structures, and the issue of water and environment. She informed of the launching of the Observatory of Regional Integration, whose principle was agreed upon during the 2005 ICE meeting. The meeting was also informed that the Office is also planning to organize a meeting on the merging issue of international migration. A consultation on this issue between all concerned parties is urgently needed.

11. She encouraged member States to further take into account the social dimension so as to make growth beneficial for the majority, by aiming at achieving at least the Millennium Development Goals.

12. She informed the participants that in the framework of the reforms process launched by the Secretary General of the United Nations and following the creation of a taskforce for the reflection on ECA's future orientations by Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, ECA Executive Secretary, the Secretariat has launched an initial impact study, whose findings will be analyzed over the next months.

13. She extended her warm thanks to the Government of His Majesty King Mohammed VI for the help and support provided during the transfer of ECA Office premises to Rabat. She confirmed her conviction that this decision will strengthen further the good relations the Office has with the host country and facilitate better interaction with member States and development partners.

14. She invited the participants to take part in the next ECA Conference of Ministers that will be held in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso).

III. ELECTION OF OFFICIALS (*Agenda Item 2*)

15. The Committee elected the following officials:

President	:	Algeria
Vice President	:	Egypt
Rapporteur	:	Libya

IV. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND THE ORGANIZATION OF WORK

(*Agenda item 3*)

16. The Draft Agenda (ECA-NA/RABAT/ICE/XXI/1/Rev.1) and Program of work (ECA-NA/RABAT/ICE/XXI/1/Add.2/Rev.1) were adopted.

V. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN NORTH AFRICA IN 2005

(*Agenda item 4*)

17. The Secretariat presented the report on the economic and social conditions in 2005 (ECA-NA/RABAT/ICE/XXI/2). It emphasized that this year the growth rate of the region has been maintained around 5%, as in 2004. This performance was achieved despite the impact of negative factors such as a modest agricultural campaign, the increase of energy prices and the slight decrease in world growth. The increase in energy prices has influenced in different ways the economies of the countries, depending whether they are exporting or importing countries. Proactive policies to increase demand through public investments, namely in Algeria and Morocco, and the continuation in the reform process have fostered such trend. However, the economic situation shows once again the structural vulnerability of North African economies to two factors, oil prices and climatic conditions.

18. The Secretariat emphasized that external trade has witnessed a faster growth compared to intra-regional trade, whose share is still decreasing. He also highlighted the major differences between the countries in terms of money supply structures, interest rates and central banks interventions. Despite their decreasing trend, unemployment rates remain very high. The social situation has been marked by the launching of multi-sector programs to fight monetary and human poverty, along with important financial resources, testifying of a higher response to social needs.

19. The Secretariat highlighted the recommendations contained in the report, which suggest to:

- Establish regional economic and financial stabilization mechanisms against climatic and oil prices fluctuations;
- Analyse the potential sources of growth and competitiveness at the regional level;
- Launch comparative studies of banking systems and financial markets at the regional level;
- Enclose in the Finance Laws reports impact assessment of the policies;
- Integrate poverty and unemployment indicators in the Finance Laws and in annual prospective models.

20. At the end of the presentation, the discussions turned around the following issues:

- The importance for the countries to establish national stabilization funds to mitigate the effects of exogenous shocks; to extend these funds beyond the oil sector as to include the strategic products; and exchange experiences in this area in the perspective of a regional coordination in this matter;
- The growing importance of the energy sector as a platform for regional and continental integration, especially with Egypt and Libya as new gas exporters and Mauritania and Sudan as new oil exporters;

- The need to analyze the impact of the exogenous factors, according to the situation of each country (exporter or importer);
- The importance to assess the impact of the Multi-fibers Agreement on growth and employment, especially on women;
- The need to take into account the social issues, in a systematic manner in the economic policies, and therefore in the Office's annual report. This will help highlighting the effects on the population of the economic performance.

VI. TRADE IN NORTH AFRICA (*Agenda item 5*)

21. The Secretariat informed the participants that in 2006 the Office will focus on the issue of Trade. As to ICE, this issue will break down into three parts:

- Assessing the regional integration potential (ECA-NA/RABAT/ICE/XXI/3/I)
- Rules of origin (ECA-NA/RABAT/ICE/XXI/3/II)
- E-commerce (ECA-NA/RABAT/ICE/XXI/3/III).

VI.1. Assessing the regional integration potential (*Agenda item 5.1.*)

22. This agenda item started by a presentation of the main findings of a quantitative study carried out on the trade potential of integration of North African countries (ECA-NA/RABAT/ICE/XXI/3/I).

23. Emphasis was put on the main features of foreign trade in the countries of the region, particularly the high customs tariffs, high trade concentration both as exports and imports, the poorly diversified exported products, and their geographical concentration and the weak intra-regional trade.

24. The gravity model used in the study shows that the integration of North African countries would have significant economic fallouts. Indeed, according to the model's findings, the simulated exports would be ten times higher compared to their current level, as an outcome of the creation and reallocation of trade.

25. To speed up the regional integration process, the presentation stressed the need to adopt a proactive approach and create the conditions likely to stimulate the propensity to trade between private agents in the region. For this purpose, it was recommended to (i) redefine the integration project by focusing on a reduced and coherent number of initiatives; and (ii) implement transparent mechanisms to follow-up, assess and solve trade conflicts between the operators of the region.

26. At the end of the presentation, the discussions focused around the following issues:

- The importance of trade as an instrument of economic growth and as a vector for regional integration, justifying the organization of a Forum on Trade that the Office plans to organize in November 2006;
- The weight of non-tariff barriers, such as technical and sanitary norms, which represent an obstacle to intra-regional trade;
- The importance to focus on a reduced number of regional projects, such as the development of infrastructures, namely transport, given its dynamic impact on the economy and employment, in partnership with the private sector;
- The importance to implement trade agreements that were already ratified.

VI.2. Rules of origin (*Agenda item 5.1.*)

27. The Note on Rules of Origin (ECA-NA/RABAT/ICE/XXI/3/II) was elaborated as a response to the ICE recommendation (2004) which asked to organize a meeting of experts on this topic. The Note presents the context, goals and modalities of the meeting that will be attended by North Africa experts who will review several issues such as the profusion of rules of origin within free-trade agreements, their impact on trade, harmonization of preferential rules and their adequacy with WTO non-preferential provisions. The Secretariat invited participants to share information related to the activities performed in their country and encouraged a high level participation to the workshop to be held from June 20th to 22nd, 2006. The recommendations of the expert meeting will be presented to the 22nd ICE meeting in 2007.

28. At the end of the presentation, discussions geared around the following issues:

- The importance to fully study the rules of origin, while taking into account the fact that they may lead to trade disputes;
- The complexity of rules of origin that may limit trade development;
- The long-time interest expressed by UMA to the rules of origin, especially since several issues remain unsolved;
- The availability at FAO Headquarters of updated data on rules of origin, in the area of agricultural products trade, likely to interest member States;
- Reaffirmed willingness of the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Trade to initiate a common reflection with the Office and to closely collaborate with the latter in order to prepare the seminar planned to be held in June 2006;
- The need to identify experts at relevant ministries to ensure their effective participation. Besides, important institutions in this area such as WTO and ITC (International Trade Center) will be present.
- With regard to institutional partnerships, other institutions should be associated with the seminar, besides the organizations already contacted by ECA. FAO can also bring its input namely regarding the agro-foodstuffs traceability issue.

VI.3. E-commerce (*Agenda item 5.3.*)

29. The Secretariat presented the report ECA-NA/RABAT/ICE/XXI/3/III that was prepared following the recommendations of the seminar on “New Information Technologies and the Development of Trade between the UMA countries” organized jointly by UMA and ECA in 2005. The report highlighted the potentialities offered by ICT for a greater promotion of intra-regional trade and pointed out that e-commerce, despite its shortcomings, including the legislative and institutional framework and the non-recognition of the electronic signature by all North African countries, could be a vector for regional integration and development.

30. At the end of the presentation, the discussions geared around the following points:

- Participants recognized that the E-commerce offers for the countries genuine opportunities to place themselves within the knowledge society, to improve their competitiveness and to fight poverty. In that regard, they praised ECA initiative to promote an e-commerce platform, in relation to the concerned partners and in particular UMA with which this activity was started.

- They stressed the importance to use e-commerce as an instrument to promote trade, especially for marketing, communication and sales of services;
- It was noted that a more global approach should be adopted and not consider e-commerce by itself. It was important to ensure at the national level an environment to foster e-commerce development and ICT use in specific areas such as E-government, banking,...For this purpose, it will be necessary to reinforce and extend the infrastructure as well as the training and to develop contents in Arabic, within the regional integration framework. ECA could plan for joint regional activities with Ministries of Trade in that regard.

VII. EVOLUTION OF ECONOMIC STRUCTURES IN NORTH AFRICA (2nd Phase) (Agenda item 6)

31. In the presentation of the Document (ECA-NA/RABAT/ICE/XXI/4), the Secretariat informed the participants that, in accordance with the 20th ICE meeting's recommendations, the Office carried out a series of activities in order to deepen the analysis of economic structures in North Africa. A particular emphasis was put on sectors entailing a greater diversification and regional integration of economies.

32. The Secretariat indicated that country case studies were carried out on each economy of the region, in order to better capture structural trends as well as their determinants and constraints. These studies also highlighted the macroeconomic and sector potentialities of integration. Moreover, a round table of North African experts was organized in March 2006 to discuss these country studies, draw the conclusions and make recommendations to the ICE.

33. The Secretariat presented the main findings, namely the methodology, the availability and homogeneity of statistical data and the sectoral opportunities for a broader economic diversification and the reinforcement of the regional economic integration process. It also presented the major recommendations, including the suggestion made to member States to focus the development strategic approach on the economy of knowledge, namely by deepening the use of information and communication technologies and by upgrading and adjusting the educational systems. As to ECA, it was recommended to carry out studies on: (i) the private sector and its perception of integration; (ii) the potential sectors of integration; and (iii) the growth-employment-poverty relationship. Besides, ECA was recommended to constitute a reliable and homogenous database for all countries. For this purpose, the Secretariat proposes to organize, within its working program, activities likely to reinforce the implementation the System of National Accounts (SNA 1993) and to carry out regional studies on leading sectors by the use of satellite accounts available in the countries.

34. At the end of the presentation, the discussions geared around the following issues:

- The identification of leading sectors should be based also on the criteria of competitiveness;
- The central role of the State, mainly with regard to investments and business environment;
- The need for public-private partnerships;
- The important role the informal sector plays in job creation and the supply of goods and services;
- The methodology used to analyse the economic structures should take into account the national specificities in terms of economic history and structures.

VIII. ECONOMIC REPORT ON AFRICA 2005 (*Agenda item 7*)

35. The presentation of the Economic Report on Africa 2005 highlighted Africa's economic performance in 2005 and the perspectives for 2006, by stressing both the challenges of poverty and unemployment.

36. Economic performance: The report pointed out that in 2005, African countries have generally achieved a satisfactory growth, with an average of 4.8% for sub-Saharan Africa. This growth can be explained by the increase of commodity prices, mainly oil, better macroeconomic environment, a substantial improvement of the current account, and a decrease of the external debt. The report expects a decline in the total debt over the coming years, following the decision made in June 2005 during the G8 Summit to cancel the debt of several African countries. As to economic perspectives in 2006, the report anticipates a GDP growth rate of 5.3%.

37. Unemployment challenge: The report highlighted the improving macroeconomic performance, but also its relatively low impact on unemployment, as growth remains concentrated in capital intensive sectors. Furthermore, a high proportion of poor workers live in African countries, especially in the informal sector and rural areas. Unemployment of young people and women remains a major problem for the continent.

38. During the discussions that followed the presentation, participants took note of the report and raised the following points:

- The growth observed in oil exporting countries cannot be exclusively explained by the increase of oil price;
- The need to use stabilization funds as instruments to thwart negative exogenous shocks and to analyse aspects linked to functioning modalities of these stabilization funds (reference price, control of uses...);
- The importance to improve the quality and adequacy of the educational system and to develop a partnership with the civil society to fight unemployment, mainly of young people and women, as well as in rural areas, was emphasized. The various incentives to increase job creation, particularly in favor of youth, were discussed.
- The need to deepen the analysis of the macroeconomic situation contained in the economic report on Africa by taking into account the main determinants.

IX. WATER, ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH AFRICA (*Agenda item 8*)

39. The Secretariat presented (ECA-NA-RABAT-ICE/XXI/5) the activities carried out by the Office to follow-up and assess the implementation by the countries of the 2025 Water African Vision. These activities were performed thanks to the mobilization of experts of the region and strategic partners such as UN-Water Africa, OSS, ADB and AMU. The activities included a full assessment of national experiences in the area of water management and environment, which findings have been published in a series of national and regional studies. A regional seminar was also organized in Tunis (February 21st-23rd, 2006) to discuss the challenge of water and environment and its impact on development perspectives in North Africa.

40. The Secretariat informed the Committee that the Tunis Seminar adopted the elements of an "Action Plan on Water, Environment and Sustainable Development" project which, once finalized, will direct all parties in their efforts to shape, implement and assess the policies and programs for an equitable and sustained use of water resources and environment protection. The action plan is structured around three main themes: water management, environment management and institutional and economic assessment tools. Conceived as a logical framework, the action plan defines the goals, actions and tools for assessment and follow-up.

41. The participants noted with satisfaction the regularity characterizing ECA work on this strategic issue and emphasized the importance of water as an element and a stake over the next decade. They took note of the report proposals on issues related to water and environment.

X. NORTH AFRICA AND REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AGENDAS FOR DEVELOPMENT (*Agenda item 9*)

42. In the presentation, the Secretariat pointed out that this report is presented for the first time to the Committee, in order to promote a global development approach that will take into account the interactions between development goals, to determine challenges and stakes they represent for the region and to highlight ECA role, and particularly that of ECA-NA, to attain them.

43. The Secretariat reviewed the development issues raised in 2005 in the areas of regional integration, trade and WTO agreements, debt, governance, millennium development goals and information and communication technologies. The emphasis was put on the stakes, the role played by countries of the region in seeking consensus during major regional and international meetings and multilateral negotiations, and to what extent the region perspectives have been taken into account in consensual documents. It also pointed out the role of ECA and ECA-NA in promoting regional approaches, fostering common positions and providing North Africa with more visibility in regional and international debates.

44. At the end of the presentation, the discussions geared around the following points:

- The participants congratulated the Office for including this initiative in the ICE agenda;
- The measures adopted by ECA in order to follow up Beijing + 10 and implement the recommendation made to organize a follow up workshop. The latter will be organized in 2006.
- Other outcomes of negotiations within WTO were noted, namely in the fish and services sectors. Similarly, the progress achieved by the Euro-Med meeting of ministers of trade held in Marrakech in March 2006, in the perspective of the effective implementation of the free trade area, were emphasized.
- The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was discussed and its advantages and the opportunity it offers to collect as much information as possible were highlighted.

XI. REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES DURING APRIL 2005-MARCH 2006 (*Agenda item 10*)

45. The Secretariat informed that this agenda item will tackle the activities of the ECA North Africa Office and those of ECA Headquarters.

XI.1 Activities of ECA Office for North Africa (*Item 10.1*)

46. The Office activities for the period April 2005 – March 2006 were presented by the Secretariat, which reviewed its works such as meetings, seminars, ad hoc meetings of experts and publications (ECA-NA/RABAT/ICE/XXI/7). It emphasized the main areas where the Office intervened: the analysis of the economic situation and the structural trends, regional integration, water and sustainable development, gender, governance and HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, it informed the Committee that two new activities approved during its twentieth meeting were launched during that period. The Regional Integration Observatory and the internship Program for students. It pointed out that the Office activities were carried out in close cooperation with member States, regional economic communities, regional organizations and institutions of the United Nations system. Efforts were deployed to involve in such activities the North African universities, civil society and the private sector. The Secretariat informed the Committee of the Tangier Office's transfer to Rabat.

47. At the end of the presentation, participants took note of the report and praised the Secretariat for the quality and relevance of the activities performed and the efforts exerted to meet the needs of member States and work in consultation with them. The committee congratulated the Office for the quality of the work achieved during that period, despite the disturbances caused by the headquarters transfer to Rabat.

48. Participants followed with interest the progress made in the development of the Observatory and invited the Office to keep on working in the same direction, and member States to provide the necessary elements, so as to make the Observatory a tool of regional integration and for decision-making.

XI.2 ECA activities (Item 10.2)

49. The Secretariat also presented a report on the activities carried out by ECA during that period. The report emphasized the policy initiatives, development programs and major institutional reforms during this period. He pointed out that ECA carried out several initiatives likely to promote the Africa development agenda, to reach a consensus and contribute to supporting African common positions. Development programs were launched namely in the areas of trade, regional integration and assessment of the Action Plan for LDCs (Least Developed Countries). The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was another activity. It pointed out that ECA performed some institutional reforms so it can effectively meet its objectives and improve the services it offers to member States. A taskforce of experts was established by the Executive Secretary and will submit its conclusions and recommendations to the Conference of Ministers in May 2006.

50. At the end of the presentation, participants took note of the report which will be discussed in more details during the Conference of Ministers.

XII. WORK PROGRAM FOR THE PERIOD APRIL 2006 – DECEMBER 2007

(Agenda Item 11)

51. The Secretariat recalled the main activities to be achieved during the period April 2006 – December 2007, in accordance with the work program approved by ICE in 2005 (ECA-NA-RABAT/ICE/XXI/8). The Office will carry out the activities in the form of reports, studies and publications, as well as the organization of experts' meetings and training workshops:

- A Development Forum on North Africa and Trade will be organized in November 2006
- Thematically, the office will carry on its activities on the economic situation, MDGs and NEPAD, trade, gender, sustainable development and water.
- It will tackle the issue of capital mobility and will keep reinforcing the Regional Integration Observatory.

52. At the end of the presentation, participants congratulated the Office for the report's clarity and took note of the work program for the period April 2006 – December 2007.

XIII. DATE AND VENUE OF THE TWENTY-SECOND ICE MEETING

(Agenda item 12)

53. The Committee decided that the date of the twenty-second ICE meeting will be determined according to that of the ECA Conference of African Ministries of Finance, Planning and Economic Development for 2007, taking into account ICE meetings of other ECA Offices.

54. The meeting will be held in Morocco, where the Office headquarters are, unless another member State proposes to organize it.

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

55. No other issue was raised under this agenda item.

XV. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT AND CLOSING OF THE 21ST ICE MEETING (*Agenda items 14 and 15*)

56. At the end of the session, participants to the 21st ICE meeting expressed their appreciation for the quality of the work performed by the Office staff, widely contributing to the meeting success.

57. Following the presentation of the draft report by the Rapporteur, the ICE introduced some amendments and adopted the report by acclamation.

XVI. CLOSING CEREMONY

58. The closing ceremony was enhanced by the presence of Mr. Habib Ben Yahia, Secretary General of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Ms. Rajah Ghannam, Director of Multilateral Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Morocco, and Ms. Maie Ayoub Von Khol, UNICEF Resident Representative and UN Resident Coordinator by interim in Morocco.

59. During his address, the Secretary General of AMU congratulated the Director of the ECA Office for North Africa and her staff for their continuous efforts aimed at promoting and consolidating cooperation and complementarities among North African countries. He underlined the importance of regional integration as a means to effectively address development challenges and globalization. He further stressed progress made by UMA in the setting up of a multilateral legal framework aiming at creating an integrated entity to facilitate free movement of goods and capital, but also in the establishment of the Maghreb Bank for Investment and Foreign Trade (BMICE) for joint projects funding. The Secretary General emphasized the activities carried out jointly by UMA and the Office during the year 2005 and reaffirmed his will to work toward strengthening that collaboration.

60. Ms. Ghannam commended the Secretariat for the quality of the documentation and the debate. She underlined the relevance of the topics covered by the meeting, putting a particular emphasis on the importance of the textile and tourism sectors. She expressed the wish that the recommendations of the ICE could contribute to alleviating the negative impact that the post multifibre agreement had on the textile sector. She further underscored the dynamism of the tourism sector, and its importance for the region. She congratulated the Office for the upcoming workshop on rules of origin, as the latter constitute a technical obstacle to trade in goods.

61. Ms. Maie Ayoub thanked the Office for the invitation to take part in such an important event. She emphasized the importance of the Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and expressed her satisfaction to see the ICE reflecting on social development issues. She underlined the increasing role that the Office is playing within the UN System in Morocco, especially following its transfer to Rabat.

62. During her address, Ms. Ben Soltane thanked the distinguished guests for attending the closing ceremony. On behalf of Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, Executive Secretary of the ECA, she congratulated Mr. Habib Ben Yahia for his new appointment as Secretary General of the AMU. She reiterated ECA's will to reinforce its collaboration with AMU with a view to accelerating the implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). She then turned to Ms. Ghannam to express her conviction that, under her control, the relations between the Office and the Government of Morocco, already very good, will be reinforced. She stressed further that the presence of Ms. Ayoub was a manifestation of the strong collaboration which exist within the U.N. family.

63. Ms. Ben Soltane stressed the proceedings of the ICE and subsequent follow-up activities. She also put forward the need to give a special attention to migration issues in the region. She underscored the first study of the Office's impact which was being undertaken and will be made available before the end of 2006. This initiative fits within the framework of the on-going reforms of the United Nations System as well as that engaged by the ECA Executive Secretary.

64. She expressed her sincere thanks to the Government of Morocco for all the support granted during the transfer of the Office, of which the positive effects start to be felt. She indicated that the results and recommendations of the ICE will be communicated to the Upcoming Conference of the African Ministers of Finances, Planning and Economic Development which will take place in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), on 10th May, 2006.

APPENDIX I

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 21ST MEETING OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS

At the end of deliberations, the ICE members made the following recommendations:

I. To member States

- Provide ECA, at its request, with information and data required for its works: studies, reports...with a particular emphasis on those intended for the Observatory;
- Appoint official national coordinators, for the countries that have not appointed them yet.

Economic and social situation

- Start the reflection and assess the opportunity to establish national stabilization funds to mitigate exogenous shocks and promote the exchange of experiences in this area;
- Study the impacts of the multi-fiber agreement phasing out on growth and employment, including on women, and encourage exchange of experiences between the concerned countries of the region;
- Systematically integrate the social aspects, including employment, in the economic programs and annual assessment of countries performances;
- Adjust educational systems to better meet the changes of the labor market, including within the framework of the knowledge society;
- Implement systems that foster job creation, in favor of young people and women and encourage information sharing on best practices in this area.

Trade and regional integration

- Strengthen the universities' capacities and research centers to carry out works on regional integration;
- Accelerate the implementation of a regional infrastructure projects based on the public/private partnership within NEPAD;
- Promote at the national level the use of ICT in trade transactions, e-government and banks.

Water and Environment

- Develop regional cooperation to address all issues related to cross-border water resources;
- Within the 2025 African Vision implement a regional action plan on water and environment, in order to ensure an optimum use of resources;

II. To ECA-NA

Evolution of economic structures

- Utilize national prospective plans and programmes to identify and establish a hierarchy of leading projects, including in infrastructure, and the strategic development choices geared towards strengthening the regional integration process, so as to highlight the leading regional integration projects;

- Deepen the identification of leading sectors in consultation with the public and private sectors and RECs, in the framework of the assessment process of the economic structures' evolution;
- Carry out a study on youth unemployment with a particular emphasis on those with high level of education;
- Integrate more systematically the social aspects and employment issue in the analysis of annual performances of countries.

Trade and regional integration

- Refine the estimations of the gravity model used within the study "The trade potential of regional integration" by using a more reduced reference group that has conditions similar to countries of the region;
- Carry out a study to identify non-tariff barriers that hinder intra-regional trade;
- Organize a regional forum on trade as planned by the Office in November 2006 and hold a trade fair intended for entrepreneurs of the region;
- Implement a coordination mechanism between North African countries on WTO negotiations within the African Trade Policy Center (ATPC);
- Continue the activities related to the e-commerce platform and ensure that it favors all member States;
- Organize information and awareness raising workshops for the economic operators on the potential of e-commerce, including for marketing, communication and sales of services, in order to develop e-commerce applications.

Workshop on Rules of origin

- Associate in the organization of the workshop on Rules of Origin ministries of trade, customs administrations and institutes in charge of the intellectual property. Focus the workshop program on technical issues and include a session on no-preferential rules;

Water and environment

- Mobilize partners to implement the actions agreed upon to ensure a sustainable management of natural resources, including within the framework of the Tunis Plan.

Regional and international agendas

- Continue to inform the ICE on regional and international development agendas and contribute, through this exchange of information, in consultations between North African countries, and therefore reinforce the positions of the region in the implementation of these agendas.

III. To ECA Headquarters

- Reinforce the capacities of regional economic communities in North Africa as to intervene in various areas, through an exchange of ECA experiences in the other African regions.
- Integrate systematically the social aspects and the employment issue in the analysis of the countries annual performance.

APPENDIX II

AGENDA

1. Opening of the Meeting
2. Election of the Bureau
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Programme of Work
4. Economic and Social Conditions in North Africa in 2005
5. Trade in North Africa
 - 5.1 Assessing Regional Integration Potential
 - 5.2 Rules of Origin
 - 5.3 E-commerce
6. Evolution of North Africa Economic Structures (2nd phase)
7. Economic Report on Africa 2005
8. Water, Environment and Sustainable Development in North Africa
9. North Africa and Regional and International Development Agendas
10. Reports on Activities (April 2005 - March 2006)
 - 10.1 Activities of ECA Office for North Africa
 - 10.2 Activities of ECA
11. Programme of Work (April 2006 - December 2007)
12. Date and Venue of the Next ICE Meeting
13. Other Business
14. Adoption of the Report
15. Closing

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**MESSAGE OF THANKS
TO HIS MAJESTY KING MOHAMMED VI
AND TO THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF MOROCCO**

At the closing ceremony of the Twenty-First meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts of the ECA North Africa Office of the Economic Commission for Africa held from April 4th to 6th, 2006, and whose opening session was chaired by Mr. Mohamed Bijaad, Secretary General of the High Planning Commissariat of the Kingdom of Morocco, we the participants in this meeting are honored to convey to Your Majesty our heartfelt gratitude and most sincere thanks.

We would like to seize this opportunity to extend to Your Majesty our deep gratitude for the utmost solicitude that the government of Your Majesty keeps demonstrating towards our meeting and for the excellent arrangements taken to guarantee its success.

We avail ourselves to express our deep interest for the Human Development National Initiative that You launched in 2005, and for the efforts that You keep exerting to reinforce intra-African cooperation.

We wish Your Majesty glory, health and happiness, may Your country enjoy progress and prosperity, and Your dear people enjoy peace and wellbeing under Your Majesty's enlightened leadership.

Done at Rabat, on April 6th, 2006