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Adv. GAWANAS

COMMISSIONER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS

**DURING THE EXPERTS' MEETING ON 2009 REPORT ON ASSESSING
PROGRESS TOWARDS ATTAINING THE MDGs**

8TH APRIL, 2009, ADDIS ABABA

Ms. Lalla Ben Barka. Deputy Executive Secretary of UNECA

AfDB Country Representative

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of my colleague, Dr. Maxwell M. Mkwezalamba, Commissioner for Economic Affairs, who is coordinating the work the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and indeed on my own behalf, I wish to welcome you to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and to the African Union Headquarters in particular. Dr. Mkwezalamba could not be here with you today owing to other engagements. On his behalf, I wish to thank you for your effort to be here to attend this external review of the 2009 Report on Assessing Progress towards attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa.

To give some background, the African Union Heads of State and Government at various Summits, requested the African Union Commission, in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank to prepare status reports on progress towards attaining the MDGs in Africa. Following this Decision, the 2007 and 2008 reports have been jointly prepared and submitted to the African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and to the subsequent AU Summits.

Let me point out that observations have been made by AU member States regarding the inadequacy of data in the reports. It is for this reason that we have decided to involve experts from AU Member States in the process of preparing the report, before submission to the Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning, and Economy, scheduled to take place in Egypt in June 2009. The source of data to be used in preparing these reports is also a matter of concern and need to be addressed during this meeting. I would like to take this

opportunity to appeal to Members States of the African Union to sign and ratify the African Charter on Statistics that was adopted by the February 2009 AU Heads of State and Government Assembly to enable it to enter into force, and thus provide a regulatory framework for harmonised statistics development in the continent.

Ladies and gentlemen: The 2009 MDGs Report indicates that there has been significant improvement in reporting and in coverage of the MDGs. This improvement is commendable and we would like to urge relevant ministries responsible for MDGs to ensure that adequate reporting is maintained on all indicators for monitoring purposes. Notably are improvements on data reporting for the additional indicators of the MDGs.

Previous reports have revealed that Africa is on track to meet some of the targets of the MDGs, including the primary education target, achieving gender parity in primary education, and in HIV prevention and treatment. However, the recent figures show that many countries would not meet most targets by 2015. For instance, this year's report notes that health MDGs are among those that remain a major challenge to be achieved by the 2015. One of the issues affecting the slow progress in achieving the Health related MDGs is maternal mortality and related child deaths. Thus the AUC in collaboration with numerous Partners such as the UNDOC, the UNFPA, UNICEF and IOM is proposing an AU Campaign for the reduction of Maternal Mortality to be launched this year during the upcoming fourth Session of the AU Conference of Ministers of Health, in an effort to meet the daunting challenges of maternal mortality. This issue remains a critical challenge in most African countries despite a decade of global economic boom. The challenge to meet the health MDGs is, of course, exacerbated by the slow progress, particularly for the rural population, in access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

The challenges that Africa faces in attaining the MDGs will most certainly be affected by the ongoing global financial and economic crisis. It has been widely assessed that the impact of the current global financial crisis will spread to many countries, including those in Africa and hinder Africa's economy growth. Current estimates show that Africa's growth will slow down from an average of more than 6 per cent in recent years to around 3 per cent in 2009. This will obviously undermine efforts aimed at reducing poverty.

The impact of the crisis has already been felt in many African countries. These include: a global slowdown in consumption of commodities; closure of mines in countries like Botswana, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has resulted in loss of jobs; reductions in trade volumes; reduction of remittances from the African Diaspora; reduction of aid volumes; and low levels of foreign domestic investment. Further, many African countries are expected to experience external balance deterioration which will lead to huge accumulation of external debt as governments try to finance the current account deficit.

Clearly, Africa faces a lot of challenges in attaining the MDGs. We need to work together in our pursuit towards attainment of the MDGs. Assessing progress towards attainment of the goals is one way of monitoring what has been done, what needs to be done and how it can be done. This meeting is a first step towards working together for the attainment of MDGs in Africa.

Let me conclude by commending the AUC, ECA, and the AfDB for the effort made in preparing this joint report. However, the success of these reports will depend largely on the level of support received from African countries in terms of timely provision of relevant documents and data for tracking purposes. I, therefore, call on all African countries to support this endeavour.

Once again, thank you for accepting our invitation to this meeting and I wish you fruitful deliberations.

I thank you for your kind attention.