



**United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa**

Opening Statement

By
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At the Consultative Workshop on Land Policy in North Africa
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
3-5 December 2008

Land Policy in Africa: A framework of Action to Secure Land Rights, Enhance
Productivity and Secure Livelihoods (An AU-ECA-AfDB Land Policy Initiative)

Representative of the African Union Commission (AUC), Dr. Abebe Haile-Gabriel;

Representative of the African Development Bank (AfDB), Mr Eskendir Alemseged;

Representative of the Executive Secretary, Communauté des États Sahélo-sahariens (CENSAD), Mr. Bakary Coulibaly;

Distinguished Representatives of Governments, Civil Society, Private sector, UN organizations, Centers of Excellence, Development Partners,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, I would like to welcome you to ECA for this regional consultation on land policy in North Africa. Accept warm greetings from Mr. Janneh, who has continued to give invaluable support to this pan-African Land Policy Initiative.

Indeed ECA is extremely pleased to work closely with the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank on this Initiative, a collaboration that emanates from our commitment to work with various partners to enhance our collective impact on Africa's political, economic and social development. And, allow me to acknowledge the financial support of our core partner, the African Development Bank, for providing funds to conduct the Regional Assessments and to hold this consultative workshop for North Africa.

Distinguished guests and participants,

North Africa was the first region on the continent to recognize the need to urgently address land related challenges, embarking on reforms which have been relatively successful, in comparison to other parts of Africa. As a result, North Africa is well placed to provide useful lessons in crafting a Framework and Guidelines for land policy formulation and implementation in Africa.

As you are aware, Africa faces many challenges in this regard. First, many parts of the continent are riddled with land related conflicts, related to failures in systems for land governance, control and use. Second, providing secure land rights for the millions of Africans who depend on land as a basic source of their livelihood is a critical concern for most African countries. Third, reducing the costs of attaining secure land rights is necessary for the development of agribusinesses and the agro-industrial sector and, therefore, for agricultural transformation and addressing the current as well as the structural food crisis of the continent.

Fourth, the rapid urbanization currently taking place in Africa -- with the proportion of urban populations projected to increase from 38% in 2000 to 55% by 2030 -- is raising land values and increasing the insecurity of informal settlers. This is especially true for

North Africa, a region that has already some of the highest levels of urbanization and where this trend is expected to continue. It is imperative that the land rights of slum dwellers and squatters are acknowledged, and that low cost methods for acquiring, documenting and managing these rights are provided for.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Resolving these and other land related challenges require that our laws and legislation adequately deal with the pluralistic systems of land tenure. It is well acknowledged that customary and religious systems, which govern the majority of land in Africa, are under pressure from population growth and competing land uses. Yet, the law, in most cases, does not provide adequate protection for customary rights holders due to multiple, and at times, conflicting legislation relating to land acquisition and management. We must provide guidance to our governments on legal and institutional mechanisms of ensuring an effective co-existence of formal and customary systems of land tenure.

The good news is that African governments are making progress in reforms aimed at better governance of land and natural resources. We need to catalyze these reforms through increased political-will, resource mobilization, peer learning and review of progress made, to avoid losing the gains that have already been realized. This is why our three pan-African regional institutions, AUC, ECA and ADB, are spearheading this process to develop a land policy framework that provides guidelines and principles for better land governance and land reforms.

It is my hope that, in the next three days, you will carefully tease out the key land-related issues in North Africa that should inform the continental framework and guidelines. This workshop should also explore the challenges and gaps in land policy formulation and implementation, and identify appropriate mechanisms for knowledge management, lesson sharing and capacity building in support of land policy formulation and implementation within North Africa and beyond.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me end by assuring you of ECA's commitment to work with you to ensure that the outcomes of this workshop guide our work as we assist African governments to improve the governance of land and natural resources for poverty reduction, wealth creation and employment for all Africans.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and thank you for your kind attention.