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International Business Conference to discuss economic and trade relationships in ECOWAS zone

The first International Business Conference (ICB) organized by the NEPAD Business Group-Côte d'Ivoire is scheduled to take place 3-5 March 2008 under the theme *Creating a Conducive Environment for Trade and Investment Development* between Anglophone and Francophone Countries in West Africa.

The theme of this conference is the outcome from the recommendations of the 1st ECOWAS Business Forum held in Accra October 29-31, 2007, endorsed by the last Summit of Heads of State of ECOWAS member countries in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) in January 2008 as well as those from the NEPAD Business Group in West Africa Forum held December 4-5, 2007 in Abuja (Nigeria).

Discussion topics include interconnectivity and market access in the region, industry and intra-regional specialization, and integration, banking and finance perspectives. The debate on the "Triangle of Stock exchanges in West Africa" and the establishment of an Observatory for business integration in the region are among the event's highlights.

The ICB will bring together an exceptional gathering of businesspeople from Francophone and Anglophone West Africa to discuss issues of trade and investment in the region. Furthermore, it will provide an excellent opportunity for businessmen and businesswomen to establish and enhance business links and network.

The conference illustrates the collaborative efforts between three business organizations located in Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana, respectively NEPAD Business Group-Nigeria, NEPAD Business Group-Côte d'Ivoire, and Private Enterprise Foundation. The event is supported and funded by the European Union ACP-Business Climate Facility (Bizclim).

Source: NEPAD Business Group- Côte d'Ivoire

Bush pledges \$350 mln to fight diseases

President George Bush has announced a 350 million dollar fund over a period of five years to combat what he terms neglected tropical diseases in Africa. These include glaucoma, river blindness and several others.

He said this at a joint press conference after holding bilateral talks with President J.A Kufuor at the Osu Castle. In addition, the US will provide 17 million dollars to support Ghana to roll back the malaria scourge. Bush stated that this money is meant for the purchase and distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets and anti-malarial drugs.

This package comes at a time when reported cases of malaria in the country is said to be up by about 13 per cent. Bush said it was unacceptable to standby and watch a generation wiped out by curable diseases and that he was looking forward to work with African leaders to save lives.

In addition, he has called on the US Congress to double support to 30 billion dollars for his Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which has enabled about 1.2 million Africans to get anti-retroviral drugs for the management of AIDS.

Source: AfricaNews, 21 February 2008



Malawi Backs NEPAD Broadband Network

Malawian President Dr Bingu Wa Mutharika on February 13 by signing the protocol on policy and regulatory framework for the NEPAD Broadband Infrastructure Network, brought the protocol into force, RNA reports.

“What this development means is that we can now go ahead to quickly implement the NEPAD ICT Broadband Infrastructure Network, comprising of UHURUNET, and UMOJANET (the terrestrial segment), to provide quality and affordable telecommunications connectivity to Eastern and Southern Africa and to the rest of the African continent”, said Dr Henry Chasia, the Executive Deputy Chairperson of the NEPAD e-Africa Commission in a statement on Tuesday.

Planning for the construction of the UHURUNET (the submarine cable) has already commenced and should be up and providing cheap connectivity to the whole continent by the end of 2009. “We expect construction of the submarine cable to start soon, and to be completed before the 2010 FIFA World Cup”, says Dr Edmund Katiti, the NEPAD ICT policy and Regulatory Advisor in the same statement.

Under the Kigali protocol, Rwanda is to house the Special Purpose Vehicle - an entity that will own, operate and maintain the broadband cable project. Political squabbles between Kenya and South Africa dogged communication cable projects for the continent. South Africa and Kenya argued over whether the previously planned East African Submarine System (EASSy) cable should be controlled by the private sector, or an open access system - approved by NEPAD - where investors and non-investors are given international bandwidth access at the same price.

The result was that both announced projects outside of the EASSy initiative: Kenya’s US\$110 million TEAMS and the South Africa-led NEPAD Broadband Infrastructure Network. Late last year, the latter \$2 Billion network was given a nod by other governments.

Source: Rwanda News Agency/Agence Rwandaise d’Information, 19 February 2008

AfDB and Cameroon Sign US \$ 76.6 Million Transport Facilitation Project Loan

The African Development Bank (AfDB) Group and Cameroon signed an agreement for a loan of US\$ 76.57 million to finance the Douala-Bangui and Douala Ndjamen road corridor, linking Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR) and Chad.

“The Multinational Programme falls within NEPAD’s framework that is aimed at creating commercially and economically viable corridors devoid of barriers, formalities and unnecessary road blocks that are the only principal causes of undue delays and high transaction costs along these corridors,” Mr. Gantsho, Bank Group’s Vice President in charge of Infrastructure, Private Sector and Regional Integration, explained after the signing ceremony.

Mr. Motaze, Cameroon’s Minister of Economy, Planning and Regional Development, explained, “The Transport Facilitation and Transit Programme of the Douala-Bangui and Douala-Ndjamen corridor is part of a sub-regional strategic investment which will enable the Republic of Cameroon, a transit country in particular, and CEMAC member states to promote and facilitate regional integration by improving free movement of people and goods.”

Source: AllAfrica.com, 22 February 2008

UPCOMING EVENTS IN FEBRUARY:

26 February: NEPAD Business Foundation Networking Forum (Johannesburg)
26-28 February: West Africa Investment Forum (Abuja)
27 February: 1st U.S.-Africa Tourism and Sports Seminar (New York)
27 February -1 March: Second Gender Justice in Africa Colloquium (Addis Ababa)

*This newsletter is published weekly by the NEPAD Support Unit of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa:
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DID YOU KNOW? A team of Ugandan computer scientists has created a new accounting software, Savings Plus, which will help thousands of micro-finance institutions and saving and credit societies to cut operation costs and increase efficiency at work. It was designed to take care of the accounting needs of consumers with special attention to their income constraints, and computer illiteracy levels. **For more information:** <http://allafrica.com>.