

**UNEP's Opening Remarks to the Regional Expert Meeting on
Developing an African Ecolabelling Scheme
11 June 2007, UNCC, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
*Delivered by Strike Mkandla
Representative to AU, UNECA & Ethiopia***

Representatives of the African Union & UNECA

Participants of the Expert Meeting,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of UNEP and its partners allow me to express our gratitude for accepting our invitation to participate in this important expert meeting. One year back, we hosted the high-level launching of the African 10 Year Framework Programme and the Fourth African Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption in this same conference centre. And today we are happy to host this Regional Expert Meeting which is addressing one of the key issues identified during the Fourth African Roundtable. I believe, the fact that we have twenty one institutions represented in this expert group meeting is a clear testimony to the timely importance of this issue to the region.

Over the last few years, it has been repeatedly pointed out by a number of reports that for African countries to make significant progresses towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, they need to have a sustained economic growth of about 7% over 10 years. Such a sustained economic growth would require the expansion of the global market by a significant margin. This would require African countries to make a concerted effort to develop their own niche markets while expanding the benefits they get from their traditional products. The two principal challenges that African countries have in this regard is the further valorisation of African products through value-addition and the development and implementation of effective trading and marketing strategies.

One of the value elements of a product that has increasingly become a key element in the market profile of a given product is the environmental profile of the product. As was noted in the background note of this expert meeting, the growing use of different

ecolabelling programmes and initiatives in the global and regional markets could provide new opportunities as much as it could pose potential threats to African products. This activity is being undertaken with a purpose of assessing the overall situation and laying down the basis for a common strategy through which the Region can maximize the benefits from the evolving new opportunities and contain or reduce the adverse impact from the possible challenges.

As part of the preparation for this expert meeting, UNEP has supported a regional and international assessment of existing programmes and initiatives that are relevant to the region. The outcomes from this assessment will be presented during the first session and this will be supplemented with the presentation of the institutional experience by the respective participants. But most importantly, it is your deliberation on the second and third day which will identify the building blocks and elements of the strategy that needs to be followed by the region. I sincerely hope that the presentations on the first day would give you a good basis for your deliberation during the subsequent days of the meeting.

I personally believe that with all the accumulated experience that is available in this house and the preparatory work that has been done so far, we will have some kind of a roadmap as to how Africa would address this challenging task. In this regard, I would like to assure you that UNEP will work closely with the key partners in the region in order to build upon what would come out of this expert meeting and taking the process forward. In this context, UNEP recognizes the high importance of the leadership role that could be played by the African Union in this process and we very much look forward to work closely with the African Union Commission.

Finally, allow me to thank UNECA for partnering with us in co-organizing this expert meeting and for all participating institutions for their contribution. I would particularly like to express our appreciation to the German Ministry of Environment which has provided its support through the Marrakech Taskforce on Cooperation with Africa.

I wish you a fruitful deliberation and thank you very much for your attention.

