

**Regional Expert Meeting on Developing an African
Eco-labelling Scheme, 11 June 2007, UNCC, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

Opening Remarks by Mr. Nadir Meran, Representative of the African Union Commission

- Mrs Josephine Ouedraogo, Acting Deputy Executive Secretary of UNECA
- Mr Strike Mkandla from UNEP
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the African Union Commission and on behalf of Her Excellency Mrs Elisabeth Tankeu, Commissioner in charge of Trade and Industry, who would have wished to be among us, but for her already heavy schedule, I have the honour to address this august assembly.

First, please allow me to kindly thank the organizing team for this experts' meeting on eco-labelling system, which turns out to be a particular dimension that the international community should take into account and adequately develop for a harmonious and sustainable development.

A number of stakeholders have been trying since 1977 to incorporate environmental needs and standards into their programmes, such as Germany, which is considered as a forerunner in this field with its Blue Angel Programme.

Other programmes have also arisen such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), the Fairtrade Labelling Organization (FLO) and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).

This is to say that this topic is worthy of interest and that many stakeholders are trying to bring their contribution to its development. However, we should acknowledge that many studies and data banks should be elaborated, in order to promote awareness of the eco-labelling effects and established political recommendations, even if these effects remain hard to assess.

It is imperative to see to it that eco-labelling dimension has to be integrated into economic and trade policies. This effort should not be considered as constituting a constraint to trade and therefore viewed as a non-tariff barrier.

To this end, there is a need to deepen coordination and harmony between efforts aiming encouragement of the practice of fair trade without barriers, and efforts made within the framework of the environmental processes.

Ladies and gentlemen
Distinguished guests,

The ongoing negotiations within the World Trade Organization (WTO) on this topic don't seem to come to a definitive conclusion in the short or the medium term. Nevertheless, efforts should be maintained at the level of the trade and environment committee under the theme of the Doha cycle, as well as at the level of the committee on technical barriers to the trade, of this same institution.

Even if it has been said that the former does not have authority to create new rules or to amend the existing ones, the latter, however, does. Therefore, coordinated work can be done and presented in the framework of these two committees.

While adopting this process, Africa should meet the conditions, which would help to establish a mechanism, to improve the environmental profile of its products, and to extend market access.

In its annual programme, The African Union Commission plans for instance to organize an African Conference of Ministers in charge of natural resources. This conference will tackle the issue of environment and strive to develop a programme that considers production and consumption norms.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is also an appropriate programme to develop a lot of actions related to environment, within the framework of the Action Plan for the NEPAD Environment Initiative.

The sustainable production and consumption modes comprise the following priority axes:

1. Energy;
2. Habitat and urban development;
3. Promotion of industries based on renewable resources
4. Water and sanitation

We should also encourage green production, which are green chemical and recycling industries. Notable African competencies do exist in that field and should be associated to this process. In this regard, it is important to point out the African Union Commission supports the efforts made and wishes to launch an appeal those competencies, in order to help to define and integrate into African societies' sustainable production and rationale consumption patterns.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

I reiterate the availability of the African Union Commission to articulate the ongoing process with the collaboration of all the stakeholders and I wish all the experts a fruitful deliberation, in order to identify actions leading to sustainable development for the benefit of African populations.

Thank you for your attention.