

Statement by Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA

Your Excellency Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations and Chairperson of the Regional Consultation Mechanism;

Your Excellency Dr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission;

Your Excellency Ambassador Olukorede Willoughby, Acting Chief Executive, NEPAD Secretariat;

Excellencies, Executive Heads of Regional Economic Communities;

Distinguished Colleagues of the United Nations System

I am truly delighted to welcome such a distinguished gathering of eminent persons to Addis Ababa the home of the African Union Commission and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and to this 9th Session of the Regional Consultation Mechanism of UN agencies and organizations working in support of the African Union and its NEPAD programme.

In particular, it is once again a great honour to have Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and Chairperson of the RCM to lead our deliberations. She was a source of great inspiration and insight at our last meeting and we look forward to equally successful deliberations on this occasion under her able and dynamic leadership.

This occasion has been made even more momentous with the presence of my brother and friend, Dr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission. We are particularly privileged because this is the first time that Dr. Ping is addressing the United Nations system in the context of its work in support of the African Union and its NEPAD programme. Indeed, it is the first time that the Chairperson of the African Union Commission has directly endorsed our collective efforts to deepen collaboration with the African Union by taking time off to join us at a Regional Consultation Mechanism meeting. On behalf of my colleagues gathered here, I want to thank you, Mr. Chairperson, for this gesture of solidarity and support.

Ambassador Willoughby and his colleagues in the NEPAD Secretariat have continuously shown their commitment to the ideals of the NEPAD programme by working closely with us in support of this process. I look forward to even deeper engagement with them as the integration of NEPAD into the institutional framework of the African Union progresses. We are meeting at a time of serious concern about the global economic outlook. Our apprehensions about the impact of high food and oil prices on African countries have now been compounded by worries on how the global financial crisis will impact on African economies, which have grown steadily in the recent past and seemed on the cusp of sustained economic take-off. It is difficult to judge the full extent of the impact of the financial crisis on African economies if only because of the rapidly changing nature of events in global financial markets and differing degrees of exposure to them by African countries.

What is clear however is that because of its vulnerability, negative developments in the global arena pose a particular challenge for Africa. This continent is particularly vulnerable because its growth is not yet self-sustaining and it has the steepest road to travel to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the short time remaining to the target date. The

effect of recent declines in commodity prices, is a double-edged in the sense that it may mean lower costs of energy but also means falling revenues even for non-oil producers. Indeed, there is need for vigilance to ensure that the combined effect of the food, fuel and financial crisis does not derail the recent good economic performance in Africa but also that it does not undermine recent notable improvements in governance.

We must also bear in mind that the food crisis in Africa has been mainly structural and long-term in nature and therefore only exacerbated by the recent spike in prices. The theme of this RCM – A Coordinated Multisectoral Response to the Food Crisis Challenge in Africa - which places appropriate emphasis on an action oriented approach to the various international initiatives that have been adopted is therefore quite apt. We must also go beyond providing emergency food aid, or celebrating the short-term supply response to higher prices to address the underlying cause of the structural food crisis in Africa . It is essential to guard against the inadequate attention and provision to agriculture that lies behind the structural food crisis in the continent while working vigorously to implement the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme of NEPAD.

What is emerging from the recent crises, be it high food and fuel prices or financial meltdown is the important role of coordinated international action to fashion a response and reduce their negative impact. In other words, either due to conviction or because unilateral action has proved ineffective, international cooperation has taken centre-stage in seeking solutions to dampen the effect of these challenges to global growth and prosperity. This belief in the effectiveness or inevitability of international cooperation to tackle these and other serious challenges like climate change underscores the key role of multilateral institutions like the United Nations at the global level and the African Union at the regional level in the search for answers.

The three pillars of United Nations work, peace and security, development and human rights have particular relevance for Africa because they are at the heart of continental aspirations for socio-economic progress. The ideals of the United Nations and its universal aspirations have brought about wide-ranging programmes and projects to support African regional integration and cooperation particularly through the African Union and regional economic communities. Moreover, the Political Declaration adopted at the recent high level meeting on Africa's Development Needs stressed the need to strengthen the capacities and capabilities of the UN system to support Africa 's development. In doing so, however, there is increasing recognition the need for greater coherence and coordination of UN support to avoid duplication of efforts, maximize synergies and avoid waste of scarce resources.

This meeting of the Regional Consultation Mechanism, the 9th in the series reflects the common commitment of the UN system to supporting Africa 's regional aspirations in a coherent and meaningful manner. The Deputy Secretary-General chairs the RCM to signify this commitment of the UN leadership and our efforts have received additional boost by the presence of the Chairperson of the AU Commission. Our task therefore is to build on this momentum by making the RCM an effective and viable mechanism for supporting the work of the African Union Commission, the NEPAD Secretariat and the Regional Economic Communities.

In addition to the thematic focus of this meeting, permit me to highlight three other issues that must engage our attention at this gathering. The first relates to ensuring that our institutional make-up, especially the cluster system is meaningfully aligned to the priorities of the African Union Commission and can effectively promote the implementation of the Ten-

Year Capacity Building Programme for the African Union. This would require that our deliberations on the outcome of the recent review meeting on “Measures to enhance the functioning of the RCM in Support of the African Union and its NEPAD Programme” should lead to clear and implementable recommendations.

The second has to do with how we operate to improve coherence and deliver on the Ten-Year Capacity Building Programme. We should clearly specify our intentions and the resources that we are willing to commit over specified time-frame to achieve this objective. This would require as we agreed at the last meeting that each cluster articulates and implements multiyear business plans to guide its activities and serve as a basis for coordinated action.

The third issue that I would flag for your attention relates to the secretariat of the RCM which ECA proudly hosts. The RCM Secretariat belongs to all of us and its make-up should reflect this common ownership. I therefore expect that this meeting will build on the momentum of the last RCM to broaden participation in the work of the Secretariat.

I am optimistic that this gathering will lead to clear actionable recommendations on these issues as well as other items on its agenda.

Thank you for your kind attention.