



PRC MEETING TASKED WITH DISCUSSING A NUMBER OF ISSUES IN PREPARATION FOR MEETING OF AU ASSEMBLY



Opening session of the PRC

The 19th Ordinary Session of the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) officially opened on Monday 25 January 2010, at the Headquarters of the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The meeting started with a minute of silence in memory of the victims of the Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737 that crashed into the Mediterranean, a few minutes after take-off from Beirut airport in Lebanon.

At the meeting's opening ceremony, Mr. Ali Awidan, Libya Ambassador to Ethiopia and current Chairperson of the PRC pointed out that the year 2009 had been a special for the AUC. He recalled that important meetings were held during that year in a bid to push forward the agenda Commission's agenda and the development of the continent. He highlighted some examples such as the Special Summit on Conflict Management in Africa; the Africa-Latin America Forum, and the Special AU Summit on refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in Africa, adding that, all these meetings were aimed at bringing Africa to speak

with one voice and adopt common positions on crucial issues.

Ambassador Awidan explained that these achievements are essential for the continent especially with regard to the establishment of the United States of Africa as well as ensuring the well being of its people.

Speaking later, Mr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC) reiterated his desire "to cultivate a frank and dynamic col-

laboration with the PRC and to establish a solid relationship through periodic meetings with the Committee so as to involve them more in the activities of the Commission. This, Chairperson Ping said, could be done through mechanisms and good governance policies that promote transparency. He expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the discussions that took place earlier, with regard to the staff rules and regulations as well as the outcome of discussions on the AU budget for 2010.

Mr. Ping seized the occasion to express on his behalf and that of the continental organization, support for the victims of the earthquake that devastated Haiti and which has caused the death of over 150,000 people. He further condemned the attack in Cabinda, Angola, on the Togolese national soccer team on their way to participate in the African Cup of Nations Cup, dubbed "CAN 2010". The Chairperson also recalled that the year 2010 is an important year for African sports as South Africa is preparing to host in June and July, the 19th edition of the World Football Cup.

In its two day meeting, the PRC will dis-

cuss a number of issues. Under Legal and Institutional Matters, the Nineteenth Ordinary Session of the PRC are discussing the status of the OAU/AU Treaties and the Progress Report of the Commission on the Abuse of the Principle of Universal Jurisdiction, while under political matters, they will consider the Report on the Situation of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa as well as the Report of the Commission on Africa's Strategic Partnerships amongst others.

With regard to Economic, Social and Cultural matters, the PRC will share views on the Report of the Commission on the Dissolution of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa and the proposed AUC Directorate of Sport in accordance with the new Architecture for African Sport. They will also exchange views on the Report of the Commission on the Preparations for the First Meeting of the Ministers of Meteorology in Africa; and the Report of the Commission on the State of Play of the WTO Doha Round Negotiations.

The PRC meeting will end on 26 January 2010 to be followed by the meeting of the Executive Council from the 28– 29th and then the Assembly of Heads of States and Government from 29 January to 2 February.



High officials at the opening ceremony



Deputy AUC Chairperson, Mr Erastus Mwencha gave a wide ranging interview to the Afro FM radio station based in Addis Ababa on 25 January.

The interview covered all the crucial aspects of the Summit as well as the activities and missions of the Commission.

Mr Mwenca also expressed his condolences to the Ethiopian government, the people of Ethiopia, relatives and friends over the disaster in which an Ethiopian airliner crashed into the Mediterranean Sea on 25 January.

The interview will be broadcast on Wednesday 27 January at 07:30 on 105.3 Afro FM

“INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT”



Prof Jean-Pierre Ezin

“The African Union (AU) will target many objectives in terms of ICTs, from developing and fostering a clear statement of political will and taking concrete steps to establish foundations for an Information Society for all; to contributing towards the creation of an enabling environment in Africa by supporting the development of a harmonized continental policy framework for the ICT sector”.

This was said by Prof Jean-Pierre Ezin Commissioner of Human Resources Sciences and Technologies, for the African Union Commission (AUC), ahead of the 14th Summit of the African Union, which has the theme “Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Africa: Challenges and Prospects for Development”.

Indeed ICT development in Africa is one of the priority actions under the Development pillar of the African Union Commission's Strategic Plan 2009- 2012.

The African Union Commission will encourage Member States to develop comprehensive policies and e-strategies, which are prerequisites to increased investment and rapid development of ICT infrastructure & services in order to address the current constraints of communication costs, besides emphasizing the need to bridge the digital divide among and within member states in Africa and use ICTs to accelerate socio-economic development in Africa. The continent shall seek the support of Heads of States on AU Ministerial decisions which are essential to the realization of an Information Society for all in Africa such as the need to establish a Communication and Information Technologies Fund before 2010 to foster the implementation of the African Regional Action Plan on the Knowledge Economy.

Again, highlighting the importance of ICT as a tool to accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent, through the African Union Pan-African ICT projects and initiatives; as well as demonstrating and exhibit innovative information communication technologies will be prominent.

This summit is expected to give a clear sense of direction, by aligning the ICTs policies in Africa. Decisions addressing issues such as access to infrastructure, education, and empowerment that contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for ICT development in Africa, and increase investments in the ICT sector and address the current constraints of communication costs will then be applied at continental, regional, and state levels for an efficient use of ICT on the continent.

Africa's development through ICTs stands as a challenge, but they are changing the way companies do business, transforming public service delivery and democratizing innovation. ICTs have the power to extend economic opportunities to millions in urban and rural areas.

ICTs have been identified by a majority of international development institutions as a crucial element in developing the worlds' poorest countries, by integrating them into the global economy and by making global markets more accessible. They have been great tools in the information revolution, facilitating the transition from industrial economies, driven by the manufacturing sector, to knowledge economies.

Hence new ways to create knowledge, educate people and disseminate information have been made possible. ICT have provided speedy delivery of healthcare, and a new vision for environmental protection as well as the capacity to improve living standards for millions of people on

the continent. Utilization of ICTs is nevertheless still low, with Africa being the least connected continent in the world. A betterment of communication between African peoples should help to attain the Vision of the African Union- that of an Africa integrated, prosperous and peaceful, an Africa driven by its own citizens, a dynamic force in the global arena. ICT should also help to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Two main plans of action define ICT activities on the continent: Africa's Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action (CPA)", proposing a regional process promoting the role of science and technology to support social and economic development in Africa, and the "African Regional Action Plan on Knowledge Economy (ARAPKE) aiming at building a continent fully benefiting from ICT services.

A knowledge based economy is one in which the exploitation of knowledge has come to play the predominant part in the creation of wealth and prosperity for the communities highly correlated with the state of the economy; the availability of skilled human capital with sustainable supply process; enabling environment, and access to financial resources.

Four pillars are considered critical in attaining knowledge based economy, an economic and institutional regime, an educated and skilled population, dynamic information services, and an efficient innovation system.

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AFRICA SEEKS TO USE ICT FOR DEVELOPMENT



A session from the Ministers' meeting

Utilization of ICTs in Africa is still low, leaving ample room for further growth in the coming years. Africa is still the least connected continent in the world, both from an internet penetration perspective and in terms of the total bandwidth utilized by the continent. This new dynamic crosscutting sector requires discussion at the highest levels of Governments.

It is in this context that Ministers in charge of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) from Member States of the African Union met in Johannesburg, South Africa on 5 November 2009. The objectives of the CITMC extra-ordinary session were twofold. Firstly, the conference was expected to come up with concrete recommendations on critical issues pertaining to ICTs that will accelerate the development of the ICTs as an industry and as a catalytic tool for development.

These recommendations will be used to convince the Heads of State and Governments on the key role of ICTs in the socio-economic development of Africa, during the current Summit being held from 25 January to 2 February and whose theme is "Information Technologies in Africa: Challenges and Prospects for Development". The Ministerial meeting was preceded by an experts meeting from 2-3 November. The AU Commission was represented at the meet-

ing by the Commissioner for Human Resources Science and Technology Prof Jean Pierre Ezin and the Director of the same Department Mrs. Vera Brenda Ngosi. The South African Government was represented by its Minister of Communication Mr. Siphwe Nyanda and Ms Mamodupi Mohlala, the Director General.

At their meeting, the Ministers considered and adopted the report of the experts' meeting. Recommendations were clustered into four sub themes i.e.: ICT and development; Africa in the economics of the internet: enabling environment for ICT growth in Africa; and ICT capacity building and research and development in Africa. The Ministers were also briefed by the Commission, on preparations for the January- February 2010 Summit. The Commission presented an overview of other preparatory activities as follows:

Exhibition

An exhibition on Information and Communication Technologies in Africa will be jointly organized by the African Union Commission (AUC) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in parallel with the January 2010 Assembly from 29 January to 02 February 2010. African Union Member States are urged to participate fully, particularly since participation is free of charge. The objectives of the exhibition are: To showcase innovative ICT projects in AU Member States; to en-

courage African policy-makers to invest in new Technologies for socio-economic development and to demonstrate the potential investment return in Technology and Innovation, particularly in ICTs.

ICT Film Documentary

The African Union Commission plans to film selected ICT projects in selected Member States of the African Union and make a documentary film to be shown at the Summit. The documentary will also include short interviews on ICT with the Presidents of those Member States. The film documentary will be shown during the Assembly and dispatched to Member States for TV broadcasting.

Internet Governance (IG) Forum Workshop

The Commission also announced that it would be organizing jointly with the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology in Egypt a workshop on Internet Governance Issues from 12 to 13 November 2009. This workshop would be followed by a Ministerial Round Table for the African Ministers participating in the 4th Internet Governance Forum on 14 November 2009.

The Ministerial conference ended with the adoption (with amendments) of the Oliver Tambo Declaration, Johannesburg 2009 which lays out commitments by Member States of the African Union in the development of ICT, recommendations for the way forward and directives for the African Union to follow up.

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Group photo of the ICT ministers

MEDIA BRIEFED ON SUMMIT PROCEEDINGS



The first press conference of the Summit took place on 25 January. It was addressed by Ambassador Jean Mfasoni, Secretary to the Commission. The briefing focused on preparations that have been made by the AU for the Summit, the work program and side events of the Summit; participants and guests; and arrangements made to facilitate the work of the media.

Some of the highlights, which will take place during the Summit are:

Launching of the new flag; Handing over of flame of peace to each Head of State to take it to their countries as a manifestation of their commitment (2010 was declared Year of Peace in Africa and the AU is engaged in a campaign to highlight this theme) Handing over of two prizes to two outstanding African scientists and election of new bureau to lead the African Union for the next one year

The Secretary further informed the media of 3 major mini summits which will take place on 30 January; the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee, the Committee of Ten Heads of State on the United Nations Reforms and the African Peer Review Mechanism.

On 31 January, the official opening ceremony of the Assembly will be held under the chairmanship of Brother Leader Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Chairperson of the African Union. The guest of honour will be Prime Minister of Spain Mr. Jose Louis Zapatero. The UN Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki Moon will also attend, as will the Arab League Secretary General Mr. Amr Moussa.

After the opening ceremony, discussions will center on the theme of the Summit i.e. Information and Communication Technologies: Challenges and Prospects for Development. President Kagame of Rwanda will present the theme. After the public session, discussion will follow the agenda.



Invitees to this year's Summit include Mr. Robert Zoellick, President of World Bank and the Secretary General of the International Telecommunications Union, Dr Hamadoun Toure; Heads of UN agencies and UN special envoys as well as representatives of 53 non African Member States Finally Ambassador Mfasoni encouraged media personnel to cooperate with security personnel throughout the Summit.

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THE ARAPKE FLAGSHIP PROJECT ON THE AFRICAN INTERNET EXCHANGE SYSTEM



An internet exchange point

The project aims to facilitate the establishment of a truly African internet infrastructure through the deployment of local Internet Exchange Points and regional internet hubs.

Such deployments are indeed crucial for the development of internet in Africa, generating huge costs savings by keeping local traffic local, and offering better quality of service and new application opportunities. Connect Africa is a global multi-

stakeholder partnership to mobilize the human, financial and technical resources required to bridge major gaps in information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure across the region, with the aim of supporting affordable connectivity and applications and services to stimulate economic growth, employment and development throughout Africa.

Two of the goals bear immediately upon internet infrastructure by interconnecting all African capitals and major cities with ICT broadband infrastructure and strengthening connectivity to the rest of the world by 2012; and by connecting African villages to broadband ICT services by 2015 and implementing shared access initiatives such as community tele-centres and village phones.