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Conference of Ministers of Education in Africa (COMEDAF) III

**Remarks by Commissioner
Human Resources Science and Technology.**

2nd April 2008

- **Honourable Ministers**
 - **Excellencies**
 - **Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**
1. On behalf of the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union and on my own behalf, it is my pleasure to welcome you to this session of the Bureau of the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF III) convened here at the African Union Head Quarters in Addis Ababa. I hope you had safe flights and enjoyed the usual Ethiopian hospitality since your arrival here in Addis Ababa.
 2. **Honourable Ministers** you would recall the meeting we had in Tunis in November 2007, which was co-organised by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), and also attended by Regional Economic Communities (RECs), United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the African Development Bank (AfDB). Your active participation at that meeting is a true testimony of your dedication and commitment to the work we share in common with our development partners, as we seek to move Africa forward to the next level in the field of education. With the start of the COMEDAF III term, I am convinced that we shall witness the most successful period in the second decade of education for Africa.
 3. African Union's collaboration with Regional Economic Communities has taken on a new momentum in this term of COMEDAF III. It will ensure that we communicate our work programme with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and we have requested the same from them. This will enable both parties to be informed of what is happening across the board, but more important, to be able to benefit from synergies where activities are synchronised. Experts' meeting on Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), which we held in collaboration with Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) in Johannesburg in December 2007, is a good case to cite in this regard. We were able to share resources and realised achievement of a higher level of efficiency and effectiveness. One of the tangible outcomes of that meeting is an instrument for assessment of the capacity of Member States to implement Education Management Information Systems (EMIS). The instrument will be piloted in a number of countries before full-scale implementation.

4. **Honourable Ministers**, Strategic partnerships on which we report at every education meeting have begun to bear fruits. Our partners have begun to demonstrate their commitment in practical ways. For instance, recently the Association of African Universities (AAU) co-hosted a meeting of higher education experts and partners. The UNESCO Regional Office for Education for Africa (BREDA) was represented in this meeting by the Director of the Mali Cluster and a senior consultant for the Arusha Convention. The experts and partners agreed on a proposed way forward concerning the merging of the African Strategy for Harmonisation of Higher Education in Africa, with the process of revision of the Arusha convention. The meeting also proposed a way forward for the implementation of the African Strategy for a Quality Rating Mechanism for African Higher Education. This meeting was particularly significant as it brought into sharper focus the need for our partners' education programmes for Africa to be aligned to the second decade plan of action. The Arusha Convention is an important framework that was initiated by UNESCO over twenty years ago. 20 Member States ratified the convention, though implementation was slower. I am therefore pleased that we shall avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts between UNESCO and the African Union.
5. Since the forum of ministers of education under the auspices of UNESCO (MINEDAF) merged with the African Union forum of Ministers of Education, that is, COMEDAF, we have no choice but to align our programmes involving the Ministers. The revision of the Convention will therefore take into account the views of those member states that already ratified the convention, and therefore own it, as well as those who had not yet ratified it, but will be beneficiaries there-of.
6. The statement of commitment signed by the participants at this meeting detail a way forward, and will be circulated to you. We have also begun collaboration with the African Council for Distance Education, in a bid to ensure that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is taken into consideration along with conventional higher education programmes, as a critical and indispensable means for ensuring quality higher education.
7. Allow me, to congratulate you of progress made in the Mwalimu Nyerere African Union Scholarship Scheme. The African Union Commission, through a selection committee comprising of leading

educationist from the five regions of Africa facilitated the first selection of African students to benefit from the award of excellence. 43 young men and women have been selected to study for first degrees in African Universities, and will be required to commit to working in African countries for at least three years after graduation.

8. **Honourable Ministers** I know that you have not forgotten the commitments made by COMEDAF III, and particularly those made at the Tunis meeting, concerning support for capacity building of Regional Economic Communities and the African Union Commission to ensure successful implementation of the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa. In this regard, let me recall the commitment to provide support through internships and Junior Professional Officers programmes, and believe that more will be said at this Bureau meeting to concretise the offers. As you may be aware, my department has had difficulties resulting from lack of professional staff to implement the second decade plan of action.
9. I am particularly pleased that this year we have two new senior officers. I wish to express sincere appreciation to UNESCO for seconding a Senior Programme Officer to the Division of Education. The officer will be a useful addition to our human resources. Furthermore, he will provide an important link between the African Union Commission, UNESCO and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), and help to improve understanding of the African Union Commission's work among these key partners.
10. Let me once more commend UNESCO and ADEA for the practical support they have provided so far, and especially in integrating the second decade plan of action into their programmes for Africa. At the Tunis meeting, one proposal was that ADEA would co-host a meeting of ministers on language, culture and history. My staff will present to you our schedule of activities for this year, so that more specific commitment can be made by you Honourable Ministers as well as by UNESCO and ADEA towards the realisation of the plan.
11. One key activity is a project on African History in which the African Union Commission will collaborate with UNESCO because of the excellent work already being done in this area. Collaborative support is sought in terms of preparation, hosting and ensuring widest participation. We also plan to host a pan-African Conference on

African Educational Publishing later in the year. At this conference, we shall address publishing as a vital link in Africa's education system, especially for ensuring Africentric educational materials that uphold the dignity of African culture while providing excellent quality in content; the use of African languages in the education system; encouraging latent indigenous writers; establishing a reading culture, encouraging pan African collaboration in production of educational materials and establishing continental and regional book policies for these purposes, just to mention a few areas. The East African Book Development Association has committed to assisting with logistics for hosting the conference.

12. **Honourable Ministers**, I would fail if I did not recognise the important progress we have made in working with Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The Southern Africa Development Community in particular was the first to integrate the second decade plan of action into their regional education programme. Your assistance in encouraging domestication and implementation of the Plan of Action at Regional Economic Community levels is indispensable. The African Union Commission will make available its officers to visit and assist in any way necessary. This arrangement is open also to partners who wish to align their programmes with the Plan of Action. For purposes of follow up and reporting on the implementation of this Plan of Action, it will be important for Regional Economic Communities to hold their regional conferences of Ministers of Education at least twice before COMEDAF IV. I request your assistance, in making this possible within your respective regions.
13. Finally Honourable Ministers I am aware that there is much yet to be said. However, I believe that your Experts had an opportunity to brief you on the agenda items and their deliberations over the last two days. Let me therefore conclude by wishing you fruitful deliberations in your Ministerial Session.

I thank you for your attention.