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**Speaking notes for meeting of the COMEDAF III Bureau of  
Ministers of Education, Addis Ababa, 02 April 2008**

Dr Beatrice Njenga, Director of HRST in the AU  
Professor Nagia Essayed, Commissioner HRST  
Ambassador Dr Musa bin Jaafar Hassan, President of the General  
Conference of UNESCO  
Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Education

I am pleased that we have managed to convene the first meeting of the Bureau for 2008.

This bureau has inherited a significant mandate from the bureau that retired in August 2007. Allow me to congratulate the newly appointed bureau members and to wish them well in executing our tasks of organizing the work of the bureau and collaborating with the HRST commission of the African Union.

The former chairperson of the bureau – former Minister of Education of Algeria set a very high standard of bureau leadership. I trust we will all endeavor to exhibit a similar commitment to the African Union and to the development and promotion of education in our continent.

As I have indicated our mandate as a bureau is a tough and challenging set of objectives. It is important for the bureau to develop a focused approach in its work programme. I trust that the steering committee will assist us with that aspect.

Secondly, it is important for the bureau does not become a technocratic administrative structure and also not become an alternative ministry of education – trying to exercise policy powers and system management from Addis Ababa.

The bureau is a facilitation oversight and support mechanism. We should facilitate collaboration and sharing of expertise within and between countries and regions.

We should also ensure that the opportunities existing in the AU and other significant institutions are readily available to all the countries on the continent. This means the bureau can play a useful co-ordination function by generating opportunities and by collating information on opportunities and communicating these to all our ministries.

Recent evidence from UNESCO, ADEA and other research bodies suggests that Africa is on the march toward significantly impacting on education access and quality provision. The progress recorded in a range of reports indicates positive progress, but also points to several countries lagging behind. The bureau and the commission should develop templates on best practice and support the sharing of expertise through Regional Economic Bodies and other relevant institutions.

In the process of reflecting on continental and international reports, the bureau can also play a role in encouraging focused research on the barriers to education progress and on the development of solutions that target identified challenges.

It is very clear that Africa does not need talk shops and exciting debates; the people we serve expect action and a change in their lives. This implies very concrete direct action to realize their and our education goals.

Back then to our concrete mandate, the second decade plan of action for education in Africa.

Our task in simple terms is to ensure the objectives of the decade are met. We need to ensure that the AU through ADEA engages in a regular and sustained process of data collection and review of Africa's progress in education. This data will be the basis of future planning and targeted support by the AU commission.

Country profiles will have to be compiled on each of the member states – our universities could play a vital role in this regard. If a common template could be developed by ADEA we could move toward having a continental education database that supports policy making, implementation and evaluation.

This may be a necessary part of our work because of the need to base action on information.

It is possible that such data is already available, we would then have to use it to shape our work in the commission and our various ministries.

I am looking forward to the reports on our partnership with ADEA and the progress with our research support institute. Development in these areas will serve as a catalyst for the active stage of our work as a bureau.

Finally, the matter of resourcing must receive attention. Many partners have been very supportive, but several promises have not come into fruition – We should perhaps devote one of our future bureau meetings to partnerships in order to assess the degree to which promised support has been translated into concrete co-operation and support.

I am pleased that we are able to begin our meeting with the success achieved through the meeting with RECs and the very promising

support that is evidenced by the ADBs work with the Commission and UNESCO's development of an African focus plan.

I thank you.