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EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
Fifth Ordinary Session
23 June – 3 July 2004
Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA

EX.CL/89 (V)
Original: French

REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN TO
LAUNCH THE PROJECT ON THE UNIFIED
NUMBERING SPACE OF TELE
COMMUNICATIONS IN AFRICA

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PROJECT ON THE UNIFIED NUMBERING SPACE OF
TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN AFRICA**

INTRODUCTION

The principal objective of the Commission of the African Union, in compliance with Article 3 of the Constitutive Act, is to accelerate the socio-economic development and integration of the Continent. To this end, one of the vehicles of rapid and coordinated integration of the continent resides in the establishment of effective telecommunication systems and the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Unfortunately, there is a noted inadequacy, disparity and obsolete nature of telecommunications infrastructures and ICTs in Africa. In addition, services in this sector do not perform effectively. Furthermore, there is a prevailing practice, which consists in each African country having a policy of codes and national telephone numbers that are rarely synchronized with those of neighbouring countries.

To enable Africa to speed up its integrated development and fit into the global economy, there is an imperative need to implement continental projects. The Project for a Unified Telecommunications Numbering Zone comes under this context.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The objectives of the Project are as follows:

1. Integrate the African space in terms of telecommunications and ICTs with a view to putting an end to the current multiplicity of national telephone codes and promote in the long term, a single code for the Continent. This would contribute to substantially reducing the costs of intra-African communications, by facilitating direct relations between countries, thereby avoiding transit outside the Continent and the payment in hard currency of transit taxes;

2. Facilitate the introduction of new innovative Pan-African services, including number portability;
3. Increase competitiveness in Africa through equitable access to telecommunications numbering resources.

CONDUCT OF THE PROJECT

To attain these objectives, the Project will be implemented in the following two phases:

Phase 1: Creation of the African Telecommunications Numbering Space (ATNS). This phase is characterized essentially by the attribution to Africa of codes for groups of countries and by the coexistence of the said codes with the current national codes to ensure a seamless transition towards total unification.

Phase 2: Evolution towards a unified numbering zone, characterized by an integrated numbering plan, with the elimination in the long run of national codes, the use of Pan-African telephone numbers and the integration of various communication services at continental level (telephone, fax, Internet, etc).

The feasibility of the Project will be established through three technical studies on:

1. The structure of the numbering plan;
2. Call routing;
3. Transferability of Pan-African numbers.

An economic and legal study will complement the technical studies.

The feasibility study will be completed in August 2006. The estimated cost of the Project is US\$1,500,000.

A Project Steering Committee known as the Inter-Institution Coordinating Committee (IICC) will be established. In addition to the Commission of the African Union which will preside it and it will include ITU, ATU, ECA, RASCOM, NEPAD, the RECs, and ADB.

CONCLUSION

The proposed Unified Telecommunications Numbering Zone is in keeping with the mission and the objectives of the African Union. Its implementation will constitute a powerful symbol of the integration and unity of the Continent, a symbol of belonging to the same geographical, political and economic entity. The Project will contribute to the development of ICT infrastructure on the Continent, the development of Pan-African communications products and services, the reduction of the digital gap between Africa and the rest of the world, and the promotion as the ultimate goal, of the welfare of the African peoples.

The aim of the present document is to:

- 1) Brief Member States on the Project and its implications;
- 2) Enlist their subscription and support for the Project;
- 3) Elicit their observations and suggestions which are essential to the effective implementation of the Project;
- 4) Establish an Inter-Institutions Coordination Committee (IICC);
- 5) Obtain the requisite funds for the realization of the Project.

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