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REPORT

OF

**THE CHAIRPERSON TO
THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS
June-July 2008**

**Contributions
From
AU Southern Africa Regional Office
Lilongwe, MALAWI**

I. Introduction

In the framework of its mandate, the African Union Southern Africa Regional Office (AU-SARO) monitored the political, economic, and social development as well as integration processes in the region. The Office elaborated and promoted African Union integration agenda with all stakeholders in the region in the context of developments in the region and in the world.

II. Political, Economic and Social Situation in the Region

During this period, the Southern Africa region continued largely to maintain political stability and economic growth. The countries in the region continued to take measures to enhance good governance, democracy, human rights and accountability. The augmentation of democracy in the region was partly illustrated in the smooth transition of power in Botswana within the ruling party, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), on 31 March 2008, ahead of the general elections scheduled for October 2009. On 29 March 2008, Zimbabwe had a peaceful and orderly Harmonized Elections and is in the process of completing the Presidential aspect which requires a run-off on 27 June 2008. Other elections scheduled for 2009 are, Angola (between May & August), South Africa (April), Malawi (May) and Mozambique (November/December).

The region as a whole sustained the economic growth level which it attained at the end of 2007. The average economic growth rate for the region is about 7 per cent. The principal objective of the countries in the region is to improve on this performance, in order to attain the targets of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, there are concerns over the possible adverse impact of the rising world oil price and increases in food price on future economic growth. Rising oil price could necessitate increase in external borrowing and lead to higher cost of production. Increases in food prices could also have the undesirable effect of accentuating poverty if there are no corresponding increases in wages. Broadly, individual actions by countries are directed at mitigating the adverse impacts of both on economic growth process.

Health issues continue to remain high in the agenda of most countries. HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases are accorded priorities nationally and receiving the support of the international community. For the first time, the International Candlelight Memorial Commemoration was held in Lilongwe, Malawi on 18 May 2008. This is generally an event to give hope to people affected by the pandemic worldwide. The decision to hold the event in Southern Africa amounts to substantial confidence and moral support for the efforts of the countries in the region in their fight against the pandemic.

Migration and refugees are important issues defying solutions in the region. The destination of immigrants and refugees essentially continue to be South Africa the most developed country in the region. Migration derives from poor economic conditions at home and the need for greener pastures, employment opportunities and better standard of living; in housing, food and health. Refugees originate from areas of internal political crisis such as civil war and or inter-state conflict. Like migrants, the rationale for movement is the desire to live in politically and economically stable environment where they could secure employment and better standard of living.

The major countries of origin in both were Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Zimbabwe. In the movement towards South Africa, some migrants and refugees end up in some countries in the region, especially in Malawi and Zambia as a result of lack of resources to proceed further. Besides, it has also been noted that there are movements of migrants from Malawi and Mozambique to South Africa.

Most of the countries in the region are signatories to the United Nations and AU Conventions on refugees. However, the problem is the extent to which these countries are prepared to absorb the migrants and refugees. Some countries have developed additional national policies and institutions to cope with issues

related to emigrants and refugees. They have also coordinated with the related United Nations agencies and AU department to solve these problems. However, these notwithstanding, the conditions of migrants and refugees in transit and country of destination are still far from satisfactory. Migrants and refugees are raising a host of issues in destination countries, employment, housing, security, and health. At the extreme they could lead to social upheavals, if their presence is strongly resisted by the deprived section of the population, as noted recently in South Africa, the outburst of attacks on migrants in Alexandra on 12 May 2008. But which the South African government has strongly condemned and taken action towards its termination. There would be a need to assist those countries that cannot do so, in the development or enhancement of relevant and institutional arrangements, to cope with these problems.

Natural disasters generally influence the character of economic growth. Following heavy rains early in the year, there were massive floods in the Zambezi basin region. The countries that were particularly affected were Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. This necessitated the movement of large population in these countries from low areas to higher grounds. Some countries received the support of the international organizations to address this problem. In addition to this, an earthquake hit the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Western part of the Republic of Uganda in February 2008. The earthquake which measured 5.4 on the Richter scale resulted in major damages to houses and the loss of life. But it is clear that the countries in the region would require improved Early Warning Systems and better contingency plans to address natural disasters.

III. Integration in SADC and COMESA

The cooperation with the AU and deepening of integration continued in both integration arrangements. In January 2008, the Protocol on Relations of the RECs with the AU was signed by both RECs. In SADC, integration activities among other things included, (a) the Meeting of SADC Ministers Responsible for Land and Land Reform, which met in Johannesburg, South Africa, 25 -27 March 2008, to discuss progress on the establishment of land reform facility, (b) the SADC Summit on Poverty and Development was held in Pailles, Mauritius, 18 – 20 April 2008. The concluding Declaration, inter alia, called for urgent attention to achieve food security, address climate change and accelerating development, rehabilitation and maintenance of infrastructure for regional integration. In COMESA, the deepening of integration was further advanced through the Joint Meeting of the Ministers of Trade, Finance and Industry, which was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 4 – 5 April 2008. The Joint Meeting essentially discussed preparatory activities for the establishment of Customs Union in December 2008.

IV. Activities with AU Departments, RECs and Regional Organizations

The harnessing of the synergies of AUC Departments, RECs and Regional Organizations with those of AU-SARO are vital to the latter's execution of its mandates. Cooperation with some departments and a number of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations increased during this period. Cooperation was basically in the promotion of better understanding and implementation of AU Declarations and Decisions on integration and development in Africa and in the articulation of regional positions on integration and development.

(a) Department of Economic Affairs

The Department of Economic Affairs engaged the AU-SARO in a number of economic activities where regional or continental economic policies were evaluated and articulated. The Office participated in the Consultative Meeting on the Implementation of the First Action Plan of the Africa-EU Joint Strategy, held in Maseru, Lesotho, 14 – 15 April 2008. The main purpose of the meeting was to enable Member States contribute to the optimum approach necessary to translate into action the First Plan of Action of the Africa-EU Joint Strategy. The meeting identified areas of cooperation in the following clusters, (a) peace and security, (b) democratic governance and human rights, (c) trade and regional integration, (d) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), (e) energy, (f) climate change, (g) migration and employment and (h) science, information society and space.

The AU Regional Delegate to SADC represented the AUC at the **"2008 Annual Meetings of the African Development Bank Group"**, held in Maputo, Mozambique, 13 – 15 May 2008. One of the events at the meetings was the Ministerial Symposium on the theme **"Fostering Shared Growth: Urbanization, Inequalities, and Poverty in Africa"**. It was acknowledged that many cities in Africa are in the throes of rapid urbanization but that slums are the unacceptable concomitants of this development. The trend would be intensified in the coming years. African countries are encouraged to take appropriate policy measures to address the related social infrastructure problems.

The report on the overall continental economic performance for 2007 was encouraging, an average growth of 5.9 percent. This, among other things, reflected consistency in sound macroeconomic performance, good commodity prices and favourable climatic conditions. The continent has not been significantly affected by USA sub-prime mortgage crisis that has hit other regions of world. Generally, shareholders expressed satisfactions on the

performance of AfDB and urged it to intensify its capacity building, expand its decentralization, support urbanization projects to address poverty and increase support for African integration.

(b) Directorate of Women, Gender and Development

The AU Directorate of Women, Gender and Development, Department of Economic Affairs and AU-SARO in collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Republic of Malawi, organized the first AU Continental Conference on the **“Economic Empowerment of African Women in the Context of Integration”**, in Lilongwe, Malawi, 17 – 19 March 2008. The objectives of the Conference included the re-examination of the status of implementation of Action Plans on the Empowerment of Women and to propose mechanisms for the creation of an **African Women Trust Fund**. The Conference once again brought to the fore the critical role of women in drive to sustainable development in Africa. They are major contributors to development especially in the agricultural sector in the rural areas but their key limitation has been the lack of access to financial resources. Hence, the call for the immediate establishment of an African Women Trust Fund as stipulated in AU **Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa**, 8 July 2004.

(c) Department of Political Affairs

The Office worked with the AU Department of Political Affairs during this period on the political processes in the region. The AU Regional Delegate to SADC was appointed as the Co-ordinator for the Pre-election Assessment Mission of the Harmonized Elections in Zimbabwe, 3 – 11 March 2008 and the AU Observer Mission during the conduct of the elections on 29 March 2008.

(d) African Commission on Human & Peoples Rights

The AU team from the African Commission on Human & Peoples Rights on a promotional mission to Malawi paid courtesy call on the AU Regional Delegate to SADC. The team had discussions with the Office on the purpose of their mission and exchange views on the current situation on the subject in the country. The purpose of the mission was to increase awareness on the function of the AU African Commission on Human & Peoples Rights in the relevant government departments, institutions and civil societies in Malawi.

(e) RECs

The RECs are the building blocs for the AU. AU-SARO provides regular information on integration and development activities of the AUC to all RECs in the region. AU-SARO coordinates and works with the UNECA-SA in the effort to assist in the consolidation of the RECs.

(f) Regional Organizations

Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in the region have objectives that converge with those of the AU in integration and development. The United Nations agencies and programs are in the forefront of technical support to RECs and Southern Africa countries on integration and development.

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa – Southern Africa (UNECA-SA)

UNECA-SA continued its cooperation with AU-SARO during this period while it attempted to consummate the development objectives of the United Nations in the region. For example, AU-SARO was invited to participate in the **Southern Africa Development Forum on Progress and Prospects in the Implementation of Protocols in Southern Africa**, organized by the UNECA-SA from 29 to 31 May 2008 in Lusaka, Zambia. The Forum discussed the extent and difficulties in the implementation of Protocols in Southern Africa RECs. But more importantly, the Forum came up with proposals on the elimination of the bottlenecks in the implementation of Protocols in the region.

World Bank Institute (WBI)

Land is a critical issue in the economic development process of Southern Africa countries and efforts are constantly being made by the countries and independent research bodies to find solutions to its diverse problems. The AU-SARO participated in the **Regional Workshop on Land Administration** organized by WBI and SADC in Lilongwe, Malawi, from 12 – 15 May 2008. The Workshop focused on international experience on land administration, formulation, implementation of land policies, using conventional and alternative approaches to provide land tenure and security.

Guidance, Counselling and Youth Development Centre for Africa (GCYDCA)

The development of youth is central to sustainable development in Africa. The Office during this period continued to facilitate as appropriate the activities of GCYDCA as appropriate. The Office supported the Opening Ceremony of the course on **Regional Training on Peer Health Education** on 15 January 2008 and the Closing Ceremony on the course in **Mental Health Training for Facilitators** on 22 February 2008. Both courses aim at building the capacity of African youth for sustainable development in the continent.

Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

The Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is active in the region. The organization convened the One Village One Product (OVOP) International Seminar from 22 to 24 January 2008. The AU Regional Delegate was invited to

present a statement at the Opening Session. The OVOP, first developed in Japan in 1975, is a classical example of how focus on the production of one product in a given village location, can through cooperative effort, rapidly expand production, and lead to the alleviation of poverty in that location. The Seminar brought together the exponents of OVOP from Japan and several African countries including those that have established OVOP or its variations to share experiences in program implementation. The main purpose was to ensure how this program could be more effectively implemented in Africa as part of the strategy for the reduction of poverty in the region.

Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa (MIDSA)

Migration is an important issue in Southern African region. The AU-SARO continued to cooperate with the Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa (MIDSA), a body that seeks greater understanding of the related problems and the articulation of possible solutions. The Office participated in the Workshop on **“Regional Protection Mechanisms for Victims of Human Trafficking”** organized by MIDSA in Durban, South Africa, from 23 – 25 April 2008. The Workshop examined the current mechanisms, needs and challenges confronting Southern Africa countries in their efforts to protect the victims in human trafficking.

V. Advocacy in Southern Africa

Furthermore, increased awareness about the AU in the region is basic to the consolidation of continental integration and development. The Office, in this context, took actions to promote the AU in the region during this period. In this context, the AU Regional Delegate to SADC on 2 May 2008, delivered a Public Lecture on **“African Union (AU): A Vital Strategy for Africa’s Development in a Changing international Economic Environment”** at the Mzuzu University, Mzuzu, Malawi. The paper stressed the importance of collective continental approach to multilateral negotiations in World Trade Organization (WTO) in order to secure trade benefits. Also, that strengthened continental regional economic integration was vital in view of the lacklustre progress in the WTO Doha Round. A vibrant continental economic integration would enhance sustainable economic growth and development of AU Member States through intra-African trade expansion and industrialization.

VI. Coordination of African Group

The Office continued to organize the monthly meetings of the African Group and SADC Group in Lilongwe. The main purpose of these meetings was to exchange views on issues emerging in the region, the continent and the international community. The discussions are on the political, economic and social development in Africa and the trends in international economic issues,

international trade and capital transfer and their implications for African countries especially those in the Southern Africa region. The AU Regional Delegate to SADC at these meetings, in February and March 2008, elaborated the Outcome of the AU Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, January 2008.

VII. Conclusion

Significant actions were taken by the AU-SARO to sensitize all actors in integration and development in Southern Africa to the objectives of the AU. AUC Departments are engaging the Office more in the consummation of the objectives of the organization in the region. There is an intensification of advocacy and cooperation with intergovernmental, non-governmental and academic institutions for the promotion of continental integration. Also, there is increasing awareness by the countries in the region of the role of the AU in continental integration and development.

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