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REPORT ON AFRO-ARAB COOPERATION

INTRODUCTION

1. The Strategic Plan of the African Union adopted in 2004, provides an important place to Afro-Arab Cooperation and outlines the following two major objectives of “Afro-Arab Fraternity”,

- (i) Strengthening ties and fraternity between Africa and the Arab world and
- (ii) Forging partnership pact between Africa and the Arab world.

2. The plan also elaborates the following priority activities for realization of the two objectives:

- (i) Advocacy for a common vision for the Arab World and Africa
- (ii) Formulation of an Afro-Arab Fraternity Pact
- (iii) Redefinition of the mission of the Afro-Arab Cultural Institute
- (iv) Opening of an African House and AU Diplomatic Mission in Riyadh or Jeddah
- (v) Regular organization of the Afro-Arab Trade Fair
- (vi) Re-energizing the Coordination mechanism
- (vii) Establishment and coordination of the Afro-Arab Partnership in Economic and Trade Matters
- (viii) Promotion of Afro-Arab Investments in the Agriculture Sector
- (ix) Arab Financing of AU Programs
- (x) Promotion of Afro-Arab Cultural Cooperation

3. This report is divided into five parts. Part I and Part II, elaborate the efforts exerted to strength the Coordination Mechanism and convene meetings of Joint Policy Organs of Afro-Arab Cooperation. Accomplishments in the areas of Political and Diplomatic, Economic and Cultural cooperation are discussed under Part III, Part IV and Part V, respectively. Part VI is conclusion.

Part I. STRENGTHENING THE COORDINATION MECHANISM

General Agreement on Cooperation with the League of Arab States

4. A new General Agreement on Cooperation was signed with the League of Arab States in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on 29th March 2007. The Agreement is intended to replace the previous similar instrument signed in 1986 between the then Organization of African Unity and the League of Arab States. The new Agreement, which takes on board changes and developments that took place since the signing of the first Agreement, calls on the African Union and the League of Arab States to adopt common policies on regional and international issues, through regular consultations and exchange of information. It also envisages organization of meetings, seminars, workshops, trade fairs, exhibitions etc. aimed at coordinating actions and strengthening cooperation and brotherhood ties between Africa and the Arab regions. The Agreement further urges the two sides to grant mutual observer status to each other's meetings at Ministerial level, Summit and Conferences that are not open to observers but discussing agenda items identified and agreed upon as being of common interest to the two organizations. The Agreement has come into effect.

Maintaining close working relations with Arab Specialized organizations

5. With the aim of creating direct working relations with Arab Specialized Organizations, in the past three years the Commission signed Memorandums of Understanding with the Arab Fund for Technical Assistance to African Countries (AFTAC) and the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), while negotiations have been finalized with the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) and the Arab Authority on Agricultural Investment and Development (AAAID).

6. The above listed Specialized Arab Organizations have been involved in implementation of Afro-Arab programs through provision of technical and/or financial assistance.

Establishing Regular Consultations Mechanisms

7. One of the major shortcomings of the institutional Cooperation between Africa and the Arab world, as identified during the various AU/LAS meetings and consultations, was the absence of a joint mechanism to coordinate and follow up the cooperation process. In response to this, in 2005 an agreement was reached with the League of Arab States to hold annual Inter-secretariat Consultative Meetings, alternatively in Addis Ababa and Cairo, to review developments in the Afro-Arab regions and follow up implementation of agreed upon programs and projects. Accordingly, the first annual consultative meeting was held in Addis Ababa in May 2005, the second in Cairo in December 2006, the 3rd in Addis Ababa in December 2007 and the 4th in Cairo in December 2008. The two sides have now reached to an agreement to upgrade the

annual consultative meetings to a level of College-to-College meetings. A detailed modality would be worked out.

PART II. AFRO-ARAB JOINT POLICY ORGAN MEETINGS

Second Afro-Arab Summit

8. The Afro-Arab Summit is the supreme organ of Afro-Arab Cooperation. Although the Joint Summit was expected to meet every three years, it had never convened since 1977, mainly due to political reasons. During the 4th AU/LAS Inter-Secretariat Consultative Meeting held in Cairo, Egypt from 3 to 5 December 2008, the two sides have reached to an agreement to convene the Summit towards the end of 2009. To that effect the two sides have also agreed to establish a Joint Preparatory Committee and designate focal points to coordinate and follow up the preparations. They have also agreed to continue high-level consultations to determine exact dates, venue and modalities for the organization of the Summit. The convening of the Summit is important to continue the political dialogue between the two regions.

13th Session of the Standing Commission of the Afro-Arab Cooperation

9. The Standing Commission of the Afro-Arab Cooperation, which is an executive arm of the Afro-Arab Summit, is composed of twelve Ministers each from the African and Arab Sides. The African side is represented by Angola, Burkina Faso, Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritius, Mozambique, Sera Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania and Tunisia, while Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syria and United Arab Emirates are members of the Standing Commission on the Arab side. The Standing Commission is responsible for ensuring the implementation and follow up of decisions of the Summit. It shall also approve projects for funding.

10. Consistent with Article 4 of its Rules of Procedure, the Standing Commission was expected to meet in Ordinary Session twice every year alternatively at the Headquarters of the two Organizations. Nevertheless, in its more than 31 years of existence, the Standing Commission was able to convene only 12 Sessions. The last Session took place in Algiers, Algeria from 18 to 19 April 2001.

11. The Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had generously offered to host the 13th Session of the Standing Commission and a proposal was forwarded to the League of Arab States to hold this Session in Tripoli from 17 to 18 December 2008. The Session was, however, postponed based on the request of the League of Arab States and new dates would be determined through consultations between the three parties. The 13th Session will be preceded by a consultative meeting of Committee of Twelve on the African side, as per the Decision EX.CL/Dec 438 (XIII) of the 13th Session of the Executive Council, held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt from 24 to 28 June 2008.

PART III. POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC COOPERATION

Political situation in Sudan, Somalia and Mauritania

12. During the 4th Annual Inter-Secretariat Consultative Meeting held in Cairo, Egypt from 3 to 5 December 2008, the Commission and the League of Arab States exhaustively reviewed the political developments in the Sudan, Somalia and Mauritania.

13. After exchange of views on the situation in the Sudan the two sides commended the willingness demonstrated by the Government of the Sudan to cooperate with the UN and other partners. They also appreciated the cooperation between the African Union and the League of Arab States in the Sudan and recommended that the same modalities to be adopted for Somalia. The Chairperson of the Commission and Secretary General of the League of Arab States were requested to pay a visit to Khartoum to monitor recent developments.

14. The two sides noted, with concern, that the most serious tension in Africa is the political instability in Somalia, which is compounded by piracy. In this regard, they felt that, the withdrawal of the Ethiopian forces from Somalia, although it is in line with the Djibouti agreement, would create a security vacuum in that country unless the AMISOM force is strengthened to fully control the situation. They, therefore, underscored the urgent need to support AMISOM in terms of deployment of the nine-battalion peace keeping force and through provision of logistical support.

15. With regard to the situation in Mauritania it was noted that all concerned parties are working together to restore democracy in that country and bring back the legitimate Government into power.

Establishment of Afro-Arab Committee of Ambassadors

17. The African Union and the League of Arab States have taken necessary Decisions to establish Afro-Arab Committees of Ambassadors in selected capitals and cities, where Africa Union and League of Arab States have representations. The objective is to enable the two sides consult each other, and where possible, adopt common positions on major regional and global issues of concern to the two sides. The activity is in line with Paragraph 17 of the Cairo Declaration and Program of Action on Afro-Arab Cooperation, which urges African and Arab countries to “coordinate their actions at the international level, in particular, at the United Nations, on questions of common interest. Both the African Union and the League of Arab States have contacted Heads of their Permanent Missions in these capitals and requested them to take concrete measure towards the establishment of the Committees.

Coordination between the African and Arab Peace and Security Councils

18. The African Union Commission and the League of Arab States have reached an agreement to develop a viable mechanism to foster coordination between the African

Peace and Security Council and the Arab Peace and Security Council in order to enable them jointly deal with issues of common concern. The objective of this initiative is to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication of efforts between the two structures.

PART IV. ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Cooperation in Agricultural Development and Food Security

19. During the past one year, the African Union Commission and the League of Arab States were in consultation to develop a Joint Action Plan (JAP) for Agricultural Development and Food Security in the two regions. A study was conducted by two African and Arab Consultants and a High Level Experts meeting was convened in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in November 2008 to review and endorse the findings of the study. The High-level Experts meeting was opened by His Excellency Dr. Fahad Balghunaim, Minister of Agriculture of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who reaffirmed the Kingdom's commitment to promoting agricultural production at home and in the Arab and African countries.

20. The Riyadh meeting endorsed the four major components of the action plan, namely; Agricultural Intensification (inputs, irrigation, value addition); Strategic Food Reserves Initiative; Trade and Market Access and Agricultural Research and Development and Technology Transfer Initiative and two cross cutting areas namely: Climate Change and Capacity Building.

21. For the implementation and follow-up of the Joint Action Plan, the Experts proposed establishment of a Facilitation Unit. The also proposed the creation of a joint Afro-Arab agricultural investment funds, and a joint Afro-Arab agricultural investment guarantee fund to encourage participation of a private investment.

22. The Joint Action Plan and the Implementation and Follow Up Mechanisms were considered by the 4th AU/LAS Inter-Secretariat Consultative Meeting and the two sides have agreed to organize a Joint Afro-Arab Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Food Security in 2009 to endorse the plan and the follow up mechanisms.

23. Council is expected to endorse the organization of a Joint Afro-Arab Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Food Security to be held in 2009 in a venue to be determined.

Afro-Arab Trade Fair

24. The decision to organize Afro-Arab Trade Fair on a regular basis was taken by 10th Ordinary Session of the Standing Commission of the Afro-Arab Cooperation held in Kuwait in June 1989. The Fair aims at facilitating direct contact between economic and trade communities of the two regions with a view to developing trade and investment flows between African and Arab countries.

25. The Fair is organized every two years alternatively in an African and Arab countries. The Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) sponsors participation of African Least Developed countries in the Fair.

26. Since 1993, six editions of the Fair were organized. The Seventh Edition was originally planned to take place Khartoum, Sudan in 2005. Nevertheless, due to low level of confirmations, it was first postponed for one year and then cancelled. Since it is the turn of the Arab side, the League of Arab States has now designated Djibouti to host the Seventh Edition.

Afro-Arab Development Forum

27. The Afro-Arab Development Forum is intended to enhance the role and participation of African and Arab civil societies and private sectors in the development of Afro-Arab Cooperation. It shall create a platform where African and Arab researchers, academicians, civil societies, private sectors, professional associations, and prominent individuals will meet and discuss issues of common concern. Recommendations emanating from such discussions will be submitted for consideration of the policy organs of the African Union and the League of Arab States.

28. Afro-Arab Development Form has a Steering Committee composed of the African Union (AU); the League of Arab States (LAS); the Afro-Arab Cultural Institute/Afro-Arab Institute for Culture and Strategic Studies; Union of African Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Agriculture and Professions; Union of Arab Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture; Representative of the African Civil Societies; Representative of the Arab Civil Societies, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA).

29. The Steering Committee is the supreme body of the Forum. It is mandated, among other things, to determine theme, date and venue of editions of the Forum, elaborate resource mobilizations strategy, approve budget of each edition of the Forum and follow up utilization, conduct periodic review and evaluation of the editions of the Forum and advise the African Union and the League of Arab States.

30. In compliance with Decision of the Council, EX.CL/Dec.438 (XIII), the Steering Committee held its Inaugural Meeting at the Headquarters of the AU Commission in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 17 to 18 November 2008. At this meeting, the Committee also agreed to organize the First Edition of the Forum in an Arab country towards the end of 2009, under the general theme: ***Towards a Strategic Partnership***. The Steering Committee also agreed on five sub-themes.

31. The Steering Committee urged African and Arab Financial Institutions including the African Development Bank and BADEA to support the Forum on a sustainable basis. To that effect, the Steering Committee requested the Chairperson of the Africa Union Commission and the Secretary General of the League of Arab States to officially approach these institutions.

32. The Steering Committee also requested African Union and the League of Arab States to earmark US\$100,000 each in 2009, as seed money for the First Edition of the Forum. African Development Bank and BADEA are also requested to contribute to the First Edition of the Form.

33. An Organizing Committee composed of the African Union, League of Arab States, the Host Country and sponsoring organizations will be set up for each edition of the Forum to deal with technical and logistical matters.

34. Council is expected to endorse organization of the First Edition of the Forum.

AU/LAS High Level experts Meeting on the prospects of investment in Africa and the Arab World.

35. Agreement has been reached with the League of Arab States to organize a High-Level Experts Meeting on the Prospects of Investment in Africa and the Arab world towards the end of 2009. The meeting will be organized in collaboration with the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa, African Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and others African and Arab Funds. The two sides have agreed to establish a joint Committee to discuss and agree modalities and logistical aspects of the organization of the meeting.

The Afro-Arab Workshop on “The Role of Chambers of Commerce in promoting Afro-Arab Trade Relations.”

36. The workshop held in Cairo, Egypt from 29 to 30 November 2008, among other things, proposed the establishment of a joint Afro Arab Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Agriculture and Professions (AACCIAP). Consultations will be resumed between the Commission and the League of Arab States to elaborate and materialize the proposal.

PART V. CULTURAL COOPERATION

Afro-Arab Cultural Institute

37. The Afro-Arab Cultural Institute (AACI), based in Bamako, Mali was jointly set-up by the African Union and the League of Arab States in April 2002. Objectives of AACI are to facilitate and promote mutual knowledge between African and Arab peoples through their respective cultures; strengthen cultural co-operation between African and Arab countries and provide technical and/or financial assistance to needy African and Arab countries for the development of their national culture and the promotion of African and Arab cultural exchanges.

38. The supreme organ of AACI is the Executive Council composed of five Member States from the African side; namely Chad, Kenya, Malawi, Senegal and Tunisia, five

Member States from the Arab side, namely Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Libya, AU, LAS, and relevant African and Arab Institutions. The Executive Council adopts the general policy and activities of the Institute. AACI also has an Academic Board composed of Two Member States each from the African and Arab sides and relevant African and Arab Institutions. The Academic Board is entrusted with preparations of long, medium and short-term programs of the Institute.

39. In its six years existence, the Executive Council held eight Ordinary and one Extra-Ordinary Sessions alternatively in an African and Arab countries. The 8th Session of the Executive Council of the Afro-Arab Cultural Institute was held in Amman, Jordan from 27 to 29 October 2008. The meeting elected Kenya as Chairperson, Jordan as Vice Chairperson and Tunisia as Rapporteur.

40. The Executive Council of the Institute agreed to hold its 9th Ordinary Session in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in October/November 2009.

Transformation of the Afro-Arab cultural Institute into an Afro-Arab Institute for Culture and Strategic Studies

41. Towards the end of 2006, the African Union and the League of Arab States commissioned a study on “Development of an Institutional Mechanism for Afro-Arab Strategic Studies/Redefinition of the Role of Afro-Arab Cultural Institute” with the objective of creating a mechanism, under the auspices of the Afro-Arab Cultural Institute, to address strategic problems affecting the Afro-Arab regions. The study also focused on the redefinition of the role and mandate of the Afro-Arab Cultural Institute to enable it accommodate the new task. The activity, which is in the Four-Year Program of the Commission, is part of the on-going efforts by the African Union and the League of Arab States to revitalize and further enhance Afro-Arab Brotherhood on the basis of mutuality and true sense of solidarity.

42. The completion of the study was followed up by an establishment of a Task Force, composed of the African Union Commission, the League of Arab States and the Afro-Arab Cultural Institute. The Tripartite Task Force was mandated to examine the report of the Study in Bamako, Mali” and advise the African Union and the League of Arab States on practical steps to be taken to implement the recommendations of the study.

43. Consistent with its original work program, the Task Force held three meetings in Bamako Mali, April 2008; Cairo, Egypt, June 2008 and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, November 2008. At these meetings the Task Force critically examined recommendations of the Study and assessed the capacity of the existing Institute in Bamako, Mali. It also reviewed all relevant documents available in the Afro-Arab Cultural Institute, the Commission and the League of Arab States and re-drafted basic documents of the Institute. The Task Force also formulated a five-year indicative program.

44. It was agreed that the transformation of the Afro-Arab cultural Institute into an Afro-Arab Institute for Culture and Strategic Studies will be done without prejudice to the on going and planned programs of the Institute. Cultural cooperation will continue to be the major occupation of the Institute and the process will not disregard the achievements of the Institute. It will rather build on the experience and goodwill accumulated in the past six years. The transformation will enhance the capacity of the Institute by way of providing additional human and financial resources, and hence enable it play a central role in the whole process of Afro-Arab Cooperation. The process was carried out with the full participation of the Executive Council of the Institute, represented by its Chairperson, and the Director General of the Institute. The Chairperson and the Director General were part of the study team while the latter is a member of the Tripartite Task Force.

45. The report of the Task Force was recommended by the 4th AU/LAS Consultative Meeting for endorsement by the policy organs of the two organizations.

46. It is to be recalled that the Executive Council, through its Decision EX.CL/Dec.363 (XI) “appreciated the role to be played by the Afro-Arab Institute for Culture and Strategic Studies in addressing strategic issues and shaping the future directions of Afro-Arab Cooperation on the basis of research findings’ and ‘urged the parties to take all necessary measures to facilitate the early transformation of the Afro-Arab Cultural Institute into an Afro-Arab Institute for Culture and Strategic Studies”.

47. As follow up of its Decision and based on the recommendations of the Task Force, Council is expected to endorse the Transformation of the Afro-Arab Cultural Institute into an Afro-Arab Institute for Culture and Strategic Studies.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

48. Indeed, there are great opportunities for promoting Arab investments in Africa, given, for example, the hydro-geological and agricultural potentials of the latter on one hand and the strong demand for agricultural products in the Arab regions, on the other. Arab financing would also be crucial for effective implementation of NEPAD. The existence of very strong Arab Diaspora in Africa, and specially in western Africa, where they are integrated into the national economies of these countries and the existence of African Diaspora in Arab countries and pilgrimage and other religious practices facilitating movement of people from one to the other region are also opportunities that could be exploited to strengthen people to people relations. These and other conducive factors such as geographical proximity, historical, linguistic and religious ties have created an excellent opportunity for the two sides to develop a strong solidarity among themselves.

49. The growing political instability and economic problems in Africa and the Arab regions and the need for solidarity to deal with global challenges such as terrorism,

cross boundary diseases, food and energy crises, etc.. are also making Afro-Arab Cooperation mandatory and indispensable.

50. The past four years witnessed growing interest and commitment on the part of the League of Arab States to revitalize Afro-Arab cooperation and reinforce the coordination mechanism. Afro-Arab Cooperation is continuously on the Agenda of most of the policy meetings of the League of Arab States.

51. In light of the above, it is recommended that a high profile be accorded to this very important cooperation arrangement and the process of upgrading of the current one-man Afro-Arab Cooperation Unit to the level of a Division, in line with the Decision EX.CL/Dec.411 (XII) of the 12th Session of the Executive Council, be expedited to enable the portfolio cop up with the growing responsibilities.

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