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**Economic Commission for Africa
Bureau of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance,
Planning and Economic Development
Extraordinary meeting**

Addis Ababa (online), 9 April 2020

**Report of the extraordinary meeting of the Bureau of
the Conference of African Ministers of Finance,
Planning and Economic Development****Introduction**

1. Pursuant to the agreement reached at its meeting on 17 March 2020, an extraordinary meeting of the Bureau of the fifty-second session of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development was convened by the secretariat of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to meet the statutory requirements of the secretariat following the postponement of the fifty-third session of the Conference as a consequence of the outbreak of the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. At that meeting, the Bureau had also agreed that the extraordinary meeting would be held at the ministerial level, with the participation of the ministers of the member States appointed to the Bureau.

I. Opening of the meeting [agenda item 1]

2. The meeting was hosted by the ECA secretariat on an online platform and held on Thursday, 9 April 2020.

A. Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by the ministers or their delegates from the following member States: Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Morocco, Togo, Zambia.

B. Opening statements

4. The meeting was chaired by the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the African Union and the Economic Commission for Africa, Mohammed Arrouchi. Opening the meeting, Mr. Arrouchi welcomed all members that had been able to attend the meeting and expressed his deep appreciation for their participation, notwithstanding the many challenges posed by COVID-19 to traditional work arrangements, resulting in an additional workload and pressure for government officials.



5. The Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, Vera Songwe, welcomed the members of the Bureau and voiced her appreciation to them for setting aside valuable time while performing their COVID-19 pandemic-related responsibilities and working under heightened pressure. She explained that the online meeting had been convened to give the Bureau an opportunity to consider the statutory issues of ECA, so as to enable the secretariat to ensure their timely submission for consideration by the various organs of the United Nations.

II. Adoption of the agenda [agenda item 2]

6. The following agenda was adopted, as set out in document E/ECA/CM/53/EM/1/Rev.1:

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Statutory issues:
 - (a) Report of the Executive Secretary on the activities of the Economic Commission for Africa (covering the period from April 2019 to March 2020);
 - (b) Proposed programme plan for 2021 of the Economic Commission for Africa;
 - (c) Proposed programme budget for 2021 of the Economic Commission for Africa.
4. Consideration of recommendations and adoption of resolutions.
5. Other matters.
6. Closing of the meeting.

III. Statutory issues [agenda item 3]

A. Report of the Executive Secretary on the activities of the Economic Commission for Africa (covering the period from April 2019 to March 2020) [agenda item 3 (a)]

7. The representative of the secretariat presented the report of the Executive Secretary on the work of the Commission, covering the period from April 2019 to March 2020, set out in document E/ECA/COE/39/14. He highlighted key results achieved by the Commission around six interlinked thematic areas consistent with the major development challenges confronting the continent and gave a brief account of the Commission's collaborative efforts to implement the African Union–United Nations Framework for the Implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in partnership with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and the regional economic communities, and also with the private sector, multilateral institutions, civil society organizations and other key stakeholders. In conclusion, he highlighted the role played by ECA in the United Nations reform process, with a view to ensuring that full cognizance was taken of the specific circumstances of Africa.

8. The ministers took note of the presentation and commended the secretariat on its efforts over the reporting period to advance the African development agenda at both continental and global levels.

B. Proposed programme plan for 2021 of the Economic Commission for Africa [agenda item 3 (b)]

9. In considering the above agenda item, it was decided to forgo the presentation by the secretariat of the background document E/ECA/CM/53/EM/3 owing to technical problems arising in the conduct of the online meeting and in the interests of time. That decision was facilitated by the secretariat's action in making the background document available well in advance to the Bureau, together with a copy of the slide presentation. It was also agreed that a brief presentation would be made later during the meeting under agenda item 4, in order to inform the Bureau about key aspects of the Commission's 2021 proposed programme plan and budget.

C. Proposed programme budget for 2021 of the Economic Commission for Africa [agenda item 3 (c)]

10. The representative of the secretariat presented the Commission's proposed programme budget for 2021, set out in document E/ECA/COE/39/17, outlining the distribution of the financial and non-post financial resources under the respective budget sections of ECA. The proposed 2021 budget for all three sections mirrored the 2020 appropriation and therefore reflected zero growth. Attention was drawn, however, to a change consisting in a net decrease of \$752,000 under the programme support element of section 18, representing the removal of non-recurrent requirements in support of the renovation project of the Africa Hall at ECA. With regard to the 2021 extrabudgetary proposal reflecting the Commission's resource mobilization expectations for the year, a total of \$25,423,300 was being sought under section 18 to fund posts and support non-post activities. In conclusion, the representative provided the following financial resource breakdowns: \$105,534,300 for section 18 regular budget and extrabudgetary resources; \$1,061,400 for section 11 regular budget resources; and \$7,523,700 for section 23 resource requirements.

11. The ministers took note of the proposed programme budget of ECA and endorsed the budget for 2021.

IV. Consideration of recommendations and adoption of resolutions [agenda item 4]

A. Resolutions

12. Representatives of the secretariat briefly explained the genesis of the two draft resolutions and the rationale for their consideration. The text of the resolutions is set out in the annex to the present report.

1. 2021 proposed programme plan and budget

(a) Presentation

13. Presenting the draft resolution on the 2021 programme plan and budget, the representative of the secretariat highlighted salient provisions of the resolution, including its identification of priority programme clusters of ECA and the role of those clusters in advancing implementation of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development. The resolution also affirmed full support for the continuing efforts by the Executive Secretary to secure additional posts and non-post resources for the implementation of the secretariat's updated programme of work, so as to enable the Commission to deliver on its new strategic directions and mandates in support of its member States.

(b) Discussion

14. The ministers expressed their appreciation of the continuing efforts by ECA to articulate ideas to advance the African development agenda and to advocate the common positions of Africa at the global level. They unanimously recognized the comparative advantage of ECA in formulating and operationalizing major regional frameworks and initiatives and, in particular, commended ECA on its key role in conducting analytical work designed to advance the socioeconomic development of African countries.

15. The ministers declared their support for the Commission's request for additional resources in its 2021 proposed programme budget. They affirmed that those resources should be commensurate with the ambitions enshrined and detailed in the ECA strategic directions and vision, to enable the secretariat to deliver on its stated mandates, notwithstanding the current global crisis and the liquidity problems experienced by the United Nations.

2. Coronavirus disease 2019**(a) Presentation**

16. In presenting the draft resolution on the COVID-19 pandemic, the representative of the secretariat noted the call therein for member States to seek greater support from the international community for the continent's response to the pandemic. He outlined the four sections of the draft resolution and reviewed the specific measures on which ECA was seeking responses from member States.

(b) Discussion

17. In view of the increasing number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Africa and the likelihood of the pandemic spreading widely, the ministers invited the Executive Secretary to undertake a situational analysis of the continent's preparedness in terms of what was being done on the continent, its existing health-care system, infrastructure capacity and capabilities, options for the development of treatment and other factors. They also called upon ECA to provide consolidated support to African researchers and institutions to help the continent's 1.2 billion inhabitants better face the pandemic. The ministers insisted that, notwithstanding the attested wide gap in the area of research, Africa must not continue to rely solely on external partners. It was suggested that ECA could facilitate African scientific research in that area by bringing together relevant institutions to work in a concerted and coordinated manner for an appropriate collective response at the continental level.

18. Welcoming those suggestions, the secretariat reassured the ministers that it was well aware of work under way in African institutions, including a research project in Morocco; work in Senegal, in cooperation with France and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and a major health project in South Africa. Better coordination and collaboration was needed among all such ventures. Noting the effectiveness of the online meetings of the African ministers of finance, hosted by ECA to coordinate action to slow the spread of COVID-19, the secretariat would now investigate modalities to replicate that encouraging practice for African scientific researchers and would report back to the Bureau with practical proposals to that effect.

19. The ministers noted that, while Africa should continue to press on with its request to the international community for \$100 billion in assistance, the continent must remain vigilant when opening up its borders to the unimpeded movement of essential medical supplies and food, so as not to let in suspicious products that in the long run might aggravate the health situation and livelihood of its population.

B. Recommendations

20. Given the importance of the two draft resolutions under consideration, the ministers unanimously agreed on the need for more time to report back to their capitals for consultations with relevant national departments. They agreed to report back to the secretariat through the Chair of the Bureau, who would be responsible for consolidating the official amendments received from the various capitals with a view to informing finalization by the secretariat of the two draft resolutions.

21. To that end, it was agreed that the secretariat would channel the two draft resolutions through the usual lines of communication to the respective capitals of the Bureau representatives. The Chair of the Bureau would then ensure, through his country's focal point, that feedback received from the capitals would be consolidated for onward transmittal to the secretariat by noon on Wednesday, 15 April 2020, with a view to the revision and subsequent adoption of the resolutions. That arrangement would make possible the timely submission of the outcomes of the extraordinary meeting of the Bureau for consideration by relevant United Nations bodies, including the Economic and Social Council.

22. Accordingly, following completion of the procedure outlined above, the secretariat finalized the text of the adopted resolutions on the basis of the drafts that had been circulated. The resolutions are set out in the annex to the present report.

V. Other matters [agenda item 5]

23. No other matters were raised by the Bureau members.

VI. Closing of the meeting [agenda item 6]

24. The Chair thanked the members of the Bureau for their active participation in and contributions to the deliberations of the meeting. He also applauded the Executive Secretary's initiative to organize the online meeting during the current difficult time of social distancing, commended the members of the secretariat on their presentations and thanked all other staff members who had worked to make the online meeting possible.

25. The Executive Secretary echoed the Chair's appreciation both to the Bureau members for their active participation and to the secretariat staff members for their hard work in organizing and participating in the meeting under the current stressful conditions occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Annex

Resolutions

970 (LIII): 2021 programme plan and budget

The Conference of Ministers,

Recalling General Assembly resolution 71/243 of 21 December 2016 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, in which the Assembly called upon the United Nations regional commissions and the United Nations development system to fully implement the statement of collaboration between the United Nations Development Group and the United Nations regional commissions in support of Member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,¹

Recalling also General Assembly resolution 72/279 of 31 May 2018 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, in which the Assembly reaffirmed the role and functions of the United Nations development system at the regional level, including the regional economic commissions and the regional teams of the United Nations development system, and underlined the need to continue to make them fit for purpose in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda,

Reaffirming its resolution 956 (LI) of 15 May 2018 on the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, in which it requested the Economic Commission for Africa, in collaboration with the Institute, to take all steps necessary to request the General Assembly to increase the regular grant to the Institute in support of the Institute's programme,

Reaffirming also its resolution 968 (LII) of 26 March 2019 on fiscal policy, trade and the private sector in a digital era: a strategy for Africa, in which it urged the Commission to support member States and the African Tax Administration Forum in their efforts to develop frameworks that leveraged digitization to strengthen revenue mobilization and public financial management through automation, digital identity and the modernization of fiscal processes,

Reaffirming further its resolution 969 (LII) of 26 March 2019 on digitization and the digital economy initiative, in which it requested the Commission to fully operationalize a centre of excellence on digitization and the digital economy, with a view to tackling the critical issue of capacity shortfalls in the digital sector of member States, in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the regional economic communities, the African Development Bank, the African Tax Administration Forum, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Bank, development partners and African institutions of higher learning,

Noting the priorities articulated by the Economic Commission for Africa in the 2021 programme plan and budget² to advance the implementation of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development,

¹ General Assembly resolution 70/1.

² E/ECA/COE/39/8.

Noting also that a submission made by the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa to United Nations Headquarters for support in requesting additional resources in the amounts of 2,264,400 United States dollars for 2020 and 4,500,600 dollars for 2021 for the implementation of the programme of work of the Economic Commission for Africa was not approved, primarily because of the current liquidity situation that the United Nations is facing,

Affirming its support for the continuing efforts of the Executive Secretary to secure additional resources that will put the Commission in a position to effectively deliver on its mandates,

Affirming also the repositioning of the Commission to focus on creating a prosperous Africa through the generation of ideas and the transformation of those ideas into implementable actions that will make an impact and change lives by leveraging the three core functions of the Commission, namely, its function as a think tank, where it generates innovative ideas and knowledge that address major challenges in a practical manner; its convening function, by providing a platform to consult and build consensus on regional and transboundary solutions for change; and its operational function, where it supports member States in implementing solutions that will effect change in people's lives on the ground,

Noting the deepening collaboration of the Commission with the private sector, in support of policies that foster stronger private sector participation and private sector governance of African economies, and South-South and triangular cooperation as significant forms of partnership for advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union,

Noting with appreciation the refocused work of the Commission, guided by the implementation of the African Union-United Nations Framework for the Implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which will contribute to strengthened partnership and coordination between the United Nations organizations and the African Union Commission for the collective achievement of the development agenda of Africa, including the peace, security and development nexus,

Recognizing the continued efforts of the Economic Commission for Africa to reposition itself and to enhance its programmatic orientation to be able to effectively support the implementation of and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development³ and Agenda 2063,

Having examined the 2021 programme plan and budget of the Economic Commission for Africa,

1. *Decides* to adopt the 2021 programme plan and budget of the Economic Commission for Africa;
2. *Requests* the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa to continue to support the efforts of the Commission in securing the additional resources needed to conduct critical evidence-based analyses of the socioeconomic consequences of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic as a basis for assisting the region to adopt the strategies and measures necessary to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on the development prospects of African countries;
3. *Requests* the Economic Commission for Africa, in collaboration with the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, to design

³ General Assembly resolution 69/313, annex.

e-learning and tailor-made training and capacity development programmes for member States in response to their requests;

4. *Also requests* the Commission to organize and coordinate meetings under the African Union-United Nations Framework for the Implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to report on the status of implementation of the Framework;

5. *Further requests* the Commission to support member States, the regional economic communities and the African Union Commission in operationalizing the digital transformation strategy for Africa, through the building of inclusive digital skills and human capacity across the digital sciences, the judiciary and the education sector;

6. *Requests* the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa to report to the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development at its next session on the implementation of the programme of work of the Commission.

971 (LIII): Coronavirus disease 2019

The Conference of Ministers,

Concerned that the number of confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Africa is increasing rapidly and will accelerate with more widespread testing,

Mindful that, in the absence of coordinated, adequate and timely international assistance, the continent's limited access to personal protective equipment, fragile health-care systems and narrow fiscal space will undermine its capacity to launch an effective response to the pandemic and derail all chances of fulfilling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,⁴

Cognizant that the strength of the response to COVID-19 in Africa will depend on the effectiveness of its preventive measures, the capacity of its health-care systems to treat affected individuals and the adequacy of resources to finance such measures,

Conscious that preventive measures are constrained by limited access to testing kits and personal protective equipment due, in part, to limited supplies and fierce competition among countries, which have inflated prices and crowded out countries with fewer resources, and consequently fuelled community spread of the disease,

Recognizing that, given the context of community spread, personal hygiene and social distancing measures are vital to stemming further contagion,

Concerned that the majority of people in Africa have no access to household hand-washing facilities and that the prevalence of slum dwellings and weak social protection coverage undermine the effective implementation of social distancing policies,

Observing that, owing to weak preventive measures, the weight of the response to COVID-19 is disproportionately borne by already fragile health-care systems that are characterized by limited access to personal protective equipment, low per capita numbers of hospital beds and intensive care units, inadequate numbers of health-care professionals and very high levels of dependence on imported medicinal and pharmaceutical products,

Noting that the fragility of health-care systems in Africa is further magnified by weak enabling infrastructure, in particular in respect of energy,

⁴ General Assembly resolution 70/1.

transport, water and sanitation and information and communications technologies,

Concerned that plummeting commodity prices and the virtual collapse of the tourism and air transport sectors, coupled with high debt levels, have limited the fiscal space of several African countries and undermined their capacity to respond to the pandemic,

I

Addressing the human crisis

1. *Reiterates* the need to address the human crisis; to provide debt relief and fiscal stimulus to all countries; to ensure liquidity relief to the private sector, in particular to the tourism and airline industries and to small and medium-sized enterprises; to promote a coordinated trade policy environment; and to use information and communications technologies to better manage the crisis across the continuum of raising awareness, providing support, upholding accountability and ensuring transparency;

2. *Commends* the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa for initiating and hosting two online meetings of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to exchange views and develop all possible actions to slow the spread of COVID-19;

3. *Also commends* the co-chairs of the online meetings, the Minister of Finance of South Africa and the Minister of Finance of Ghana, for issuing a call for debt relief from bilateral, multilateral and commercial partners, and for support from bilateral and multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank Group and the European Union, to ensure that African countries obtain the fiscal space required to deal with COVID-19;

4. *Calls upon* the international community, development partners, Governments and the private sector:

(a) To coordinate the global health response in respect of vaccines, data, research and the procurement of essential drugs and items that are vital to the COVID-19 response, such as testing kits, ventilators and personal protective equipment;

(b) To set up a central hub to manage the procurement process, in collaboration with the World Health Organization;

5. *Calls upon* Governments to scale up social safety net measures, including the provision of digital, cash and in-kind transfers, with a view to boosting resilience and reducing the socioeconomic burden of social distancing and lockdown measures;

II

Stimulating the economy and mitigating the economic impact of the pandemic

6. *Calls upon* development finance institutions:

(a) To release 100 billion United States dollars in development assistance, of which 44 billion dollars will go towards debt relief for all African countries;

(b) To devote an additional 50 billion dollars to the recovery process in 2021 if the crisis persists;

7. *Calls upon* members of the International Monetary Fund which do not need their special drawing rights for liquidity purposes to use them to replenish the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust loan accounts;

III

Providing liquidity to the private sector

8. *Calls upon* the Group of 20, the European Union and all development finance institutions to support the refinancing and rescheduling of debt and the implementation of guarantee schemes and liquidity facilities for the private sector in Africa;

9. *Calls upon* the European Union in particular to use its guarantee and refinancing facilities, which amount to more than 7 billion dollars, to support trade credits and guarantees, debt stand-still and interest payment rescheduling for the private sector;

IV

Supporting international trade and the unimpeded movement of essential medical supplies and food

10. *Calls upon* all countries:

(a) To suspend tariffs on imports of essential COVID-19 medical supplies;

(b) To open trade and humanitarian corridors to allow for the continuous flow of goods;

(c) To make a diplomatic case against the imposition of export limits by certain countries on essential COVID-19 medical supplies;

V

Supporting long-term recovery

11. *Calls upon* national Governments and development partners alike:

(a) To support nascent pharmaceutical firms in the production of personal protective equipment and COVID-19 testing kits and related drugs;

(b) To step up investment in research and development to produce vaccines at affordable prices for all countries to prevent future pandemics;

VI

Supporting Governments in their recovery efforts

12. *Calls upon* the Economic Commission for Africa:

(a) To continually evaluate estimates of the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on Africa in the light of the fluid nature of the crisis, including, among the areas of special attention: estimates of immediate fiscal stimulus requirements needed for the recovery of the economy, employment and trade and the reduction of poverty; and the nexus between pharmaceuticals and food security in the African Continental Free Trade Area;

(b) To provide a platform for experience-sharing among African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, along with other stakeholders, on effective response measures to the crisis;

(c) To assist Governments in forecast planning to better anticipate and respond to future crises, including by supporting the recalibration by Governments of their fiscal and monetary frameworks, in line with the exigencies of combating COVID-19 and the need to strengthen the employment-inducing effects of trade initiatives;

13. Requests the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa to continue to work with African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, together with other partners, to address the concerns of African countries regarding the impact of COVID-19 on their societies and economies and to devise strategies and policies to establish an enabling environment for the development of industries, including the pharmaceutical industry, that can respond to the needs and challenges of African countries with regard to the current outbreak of COVID-19 and any future outbreaks.
