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**First Conference of African Ministers
of Integration (COMAI)
30-31 March 2006
Ouagadougou (BURKINA FASO)**

COMAI/Min/Rpt.(I)

REPORT

REPORT OF THE FIRST CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS OF INTEGRATION

INTRODUCTION

1. The First Conference of African Ministers of Integration on the Rationalization of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) took place in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, from 30 to 31 March 2006. A Meeting of Experts held from 27 to 29 March 2006 at the same venue, preceded the Ministerial Conference. The preparatory work for the Conference had started with the holding of two regional consultative meetings held in Accra, Ghana, in October 2005 and Lusaka, Zambia, in March 2006. The African Union Commission (AUC), in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa organized these consultative meetings, including the Conference of Ministers. The AUC and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) jointly prepared the technical documents for the meetings.

Agenda Item I. OPENING CEREMONY

2. The African Union Commissioner for Economic Affairs, Dr. Maxwell M. Mkwezalamba, delivered an introductory address to the Conference. He thanked the Government and the People of Burkina Faso for accepting to host the Meeting on the Rationalization of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and welcomed the delegates to the Conference. He recalled the preparatory Regional Consultative Meetings. In advocating for rationalization, he highlighted some of the key challenges facing African integration including the proliferation and overlapping of RECs pursuing similar mandates and causing resource dispersion as a basis for the need for rationalization. He further recognized the difficulties associated with rationalization and called upon the Member States to take all the necessary steps to bring about efficiency and effectiveness to the RECs, which are the building blocks of the African Economic Community. He emphasized that rationalization would assist Member States and the RECs to accelerate and deepen economic integration as it is the only credible alternative for achieving sustainable development on the Continent. He invited the Conference to consider the report of the Experts and come up with clear recommendations for submission to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) in July 2006.

3. The Commissioner thanked the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) for working closely with the AUC in preparing the documentation that was used in the regional consultations culminating in the Conference of Ministers. He also expressed his gratitude to the Global Coalition for Africa (GCA), the African Economic Research Consortium, the Association of African Universities (AAU), the Association of African Central Banks (AACB) and the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) for their cooperation in this work.

4. The Acting Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Mrs. Josephine Ouedraogo, also delivered brief remarks at the opening session. She recalled the stages in the creation of the African Economic Community as stipulated in the Abuja Treaty. In this regard, she noted that some RECs had made significant progress. However, she pointed out that a lot still needed to be done, notably in relation to macroeconomic policy convergence, infrastructure development and free movement of people. She also noted the need for a clear and common understanding of the meaning of RECs to guide the discussions on the subject.

5. In conclusion, she pledged that the ECA will continue to work to strengthen its partnership with the AUC and the African Development Bank (ADB) in order to advance the development agenda of the continent.

6. The Conference was officially opened by His Excellency Mr. Youssouf Ouedraogo, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation of Burkina Faso. He welcomed the delegations to Burkina Faso and wished them a good stay in Ouagadougou. He recalled the various efforts made to deepen integration in Africa, including the entry into force of the Abuja Treaty. He emphasized that economic integration constituted an important means to attaining sustainable economic growth and to mitigate the negative effects of globalization. He also noted the important role played by RECs as the building blocks of the African Economic Community and the remarkable progress made in integrating the Continent.

7. He then pointed out the challenges facing the African integration process and added that rationalization was one way of trying to transform the RECs into more efficient and effective institutions. In this regard, he encouraged the Ministers to draw on their wisdom in discussing the subject of rationalization in order to submit appropriate proposals to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the AU to enable it make informed decisions for the acceleration of the integration of the Continent. Finally, the Minister declared the Conference officially open.

8. The Conference was attended by the following Member States: Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

9. It was also attended by RECs, namely, Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and Southern African Development Community (SADC). Also in attendance were the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Global Coalition for Africa (GCA).

Agenda Item II. ELECTION OF THE BUREAU

10. The Conference elected the following Bureau:

Chairperson	Burkina Faso;
First Vice Chairperson	Libya;
Second Vice Chairperson	Cameroon;
Third Vice Chairperson	Botswana
Rapporteur	Kenya

Agenda Item III. ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

11. The Conference adopted the following Agenda as amended:

- I) Official Opening Ceremony
 - Introductory Address by Dr. Maxwell M. Mkwezalamba, Commissioner for Economic Affairs of the AU Commission
 - Remarks by Mrs. Josephine Ouedraogo, Acting Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa
 - Welcome Address by His Excellency Mr. Youssouf Ouedraogo, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation of Burkina Faso.
- II) Election of the Bureau
- III) Adoption of the Agenda and Organization of Work
- IV) Exchange of Views on the Economic Integration Process in Africa
 - a) Communication by Hon. Duncan Mlazie, Assistant Minister of Finance and Development Planning of Botswana (SADC)
 - b) Communication by Hon. Rosemary Museminari, Minister of State in charge of Cooperation of Rwanda (COMESA),
 - c) Communication by Mr.Mavinga-Bata Jean Delphin, Plenipotentiary Minister Representing the State Minister for Economic Integration of Republic of Congo (ECCAS),
 - d) Communication by Hon. Danson B. Mungatana, MP, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kenya (IGAD),
 - e) Communication by the Representative of CEN-SAD
 - f) Communication by Hon. Andrew Chenge, Minister for East African Cooperation of Tanzania (EAC);
 - g) Communication by the African Union Commission.
- V) Consideration of the Report of Experts
- VI) Consideration of the Draft Declaration

- VII) Adoption of the Draft Report and Draft Declaration
- VIII) Any Other Business
- IX) Date and Venue of the next Conference
- X) Closing ceremony

12. The Meeting adopted the following working hours:

Morning	09:00 - 13:00 hrs.
Afternoon	15:00 - 19:00 hrs.

Agenda Item IV: EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON THE ECONOMIC INTEGRATION PROCESS IN AFRICA

13. Under this agenda item, the Chairpersons of the Council of Ministers of the different RECs or their Representatives presented progress reports on the integration process, taking place in the RECs. Below are summaries of the presentations made at the Conference. The full texts of the reports are annexed to the Report.

a) Presentation by SADC

14. The Assistant Minister of Finance and Development Planning of Botswana, Hon. Duncan Mlazier, on behalf of the SADC Chair of Council of Ministers, presented the report on SADC. The presentation consisted of (i) historical and political background to the establishment of SADC, (ii) the main transformation which has taken place to-date, (iii) SADC main achievements and (iv) SADC general position on the rationalization of the RECs.

15. With regards, to the historical and political background, the presentation indicated that Southern Africa Development and Coordination Conference (SADCC) was established in 1980 and transformed into Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) in 1992 through a formal Treaty. More recently, SADC has undergone a restructuring process and developed a Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), which rationalizes its programme of action by realigning the priorities and articulating the policies and strategies to achieve the overarching goals of SADC of deeper integration, poverty eradication and sustainable development.

16. SADC main achievements (in 25 years of existence) include political stability, development and implementation of regional programmes and projects of economic and social development.

17. SADC strongly advocates the need for coordination and harmonization of the African integration process and hence the importance of rationalization at continental level.

18. SADC, therefore, recommends to Member States and the RECs to adhere to the rationalization of the RECs. To this effect, SADC proposes that dedicated studies on the rationalization of each REC be undertaken to determine the nature and characteristics of rationalization, which would best suit the interests of Member States and the RECs.

b) Presentation by COMESA

19. The Minister of State in charge of Cooperation of the Republic of Rwanda, Honourable Rosemary Museminari and current Chairperson of the Council of Ministers of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) presented a statement on the advancement of the COMESA integration agenda. The Minister reported that COMESA was initially established in 1981 as the Preferential Trade Area (PTA) within the framework of the Organization of African Unity's (OAU's) Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos. The PTA was then transformed into COMESA in 1993.

20. As one of the six objectives of COMESA, the Member States have agreed to contribute towards the establishment of the African Economic Community. In this connection, COMESA established a Free Trade Area in 2000 and is working towards establishing a Customs Union by 2008. As part of the build up towards the attainment of a Common Market, COMESA has also made progress in deepening the free movement of capital and investment and in the removal of impediments to the movement of persons.

21. The presentation also highlighted on going efforts at harmonization taking place between the regional groups in the Eastern and Southern Africa intended to attain convergence in all areas bearing in mind the ultimate objective of attaining an African Common Market. COMESA has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with EAC, IGAD and the Indian Ocean Community (IOC) and the three institutions have also established an Inter Regional Consultative Committee for programming common regional programmes. COMESA and SADC have, moreover, set up a Joint Task Force to harmonize their programmes. All the institutions recently agreed to coordinate their efforts in ongoing negotiations with the EU.

22. Other achievements of COMESA include the establishment of key institutions such as a regional Bank and Re-Insurance Company to advance the integration process; infrastructural development and removal of non-tariff barriers; peace and security and private sector development. COMESA provides support to Member States in multilateral negotiations (WTO and EPA's) and has a programme on gender.

23. Finally, it was emphasized that COMESA Member States are determined to continue working with all sister African institutions as well as the Joint Secretariat of AUC, African Development Bank (ADB) and ECA as well as the RECs to deepen the integration process of Africa.

c) Presentation by ECCAS

24. Mr. Jean Delphin MAVINGA-BATA, representing the Minister of State in charge of Economic Integration of the Republic of Congo, presented a report on behalf of ECCAS. His presentation covered the following:

1. Assets and opportunities available in Central Africa

25. Compared to the other regions of the continent, this region has the greatest economic development potentials.

2. Integration objectives

26. Integration objectives are mainly implemented within the framework of two economic communities, CEMAC and ECCAS, their specialised institutions and some Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs) on the field of action, more specifically CICOS, COMIFAC and OHADA.

3. Results achieved

27. Among the results achieved, the following can be mentioned:

In CEMAC

28. Several gains have been made in the field of trade and establishment of community institutions.

In ECCAS

29. After a few years' period of inactivity due to inadequacy of contributions and various armed conflicts in the sub-region, a relaunching programme has been put in place. To-date, the creation of conditions which enabled the relaunch to be consolidated in order to make it irreversible is observed. In this respect, a financing mechanism has been adopted (CCI). A capacity building programme is still being carried out. In the same vein, discussions are ongoing for the establishment of a regional defence staff and the impending regional brigade within the framework of the African Union Peace and Security Council. Several projects and programmes have been adopted.

4. Difficulties encountered

30. In spite of some progress made, the global assessment of regional integration in Central Africa remains mitigated. In fact, several factors explain and justify the bad performance and the limits of the integration process in Central Africa. Some are of endogenous origin while others are exogenous.

In CEMAC

31. Difficulties which surfaced during the first stage (1999-2004) induced CEMAC policy makers to request for a far-reaching brainstorming which would enable all the lessons of the first five years to be drawn and indispensable reforms for the relaunch and development of the institution to be proposed.

In ECCAS

32. Non-adaptation of the current organisational chart and resources mobilised for the old and new missions assigned to the community.

33. On the whole, several decisions have been adopted but have still not been fully implemented.

d) Presentation by IGAD

34. Hon. Danson Mungatana Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kenya presented the report on behalf of IGAD. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) initially created in 1980 to deal with drought and desertification had its mandate expanded in 1995 to include, the following areas of cooperation among the Member States; Food Security and Environment Protection; Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution; Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration; and Development of Physical Infrastructure. In this regard, IGAD among other Regional Economic Communities (RECs) signed the Protocol on Relations between the African Economic Community and the RECs on 25th February 1998. This formalised the implementation of the African Economic Community between the AU and the RECs as outlined under the Abuja Treaty (1991).

35. In implementing projects and programmes in its priority areas IGAD endeavours to pursue a strategy that focuses on the promotion of regional integration and cooperation in order to achieve sustainable development, and peace and security in the region. This is in recognition that peace and security are necessary conditions for any meaningful economic development and integration in the region. The underlying principle is that IGAD remains focused on policy interventions and development projects, programmes and processes of trans-boundary nature with regional relevance.

36. IGAD Member States address common development problems more efficiently and effectively through joint efforts and development endeavours. The objectives are enshrined in the IGAD Strategy that is currently under implementation. This is done by adding value and complementing development efforts of the Member States in a consultative process that enhances cooperation and spirit of partnership in projects/ programmes and implementation process. In this regard, IGAD has established effective and efficient mechanisms, networks, processes, specialized institutions and partnerships for the execution of its regional activities. These entities include, Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CERWAN), IGAD Business Forum (IBF), IGAD Climate Prediction and Application Centre for monitoring, forecasting (ICPAC), and IGAD-NGO/CSO Forum, East African Standby Brigade (EASBRIG) and IGAD Sectoral Ministers committees.

37. IGAD is of the view that the need to establish a mechanism for harmonisation and coordinated sectoral planning at the level of the African Union is overdue. This is the best way forward to achieve the establishment of the African Common Market and removal of mitigating institutional constraints in regional integration and coordination. This underscores the need and the urgency to rationalize the Regional Economic Communities programmes with a view to facilitating the much longed for regional economic development and integration. The present rationalization endeavor must take into consideration the sovereign rights of groups of countries to form regional groupings for their own strategic and political interests.

38. Developmental needs of the IGAD region and its special character warrant the region special development considerations that cannot be generalized in the interest of regional economic or geographical configurations. These problems must be addressed in totality and not in isolation in the IGAD region, bearing in mind the unique characteristics of the region. Rationalization is meant to avoid duplication of programmes and promote synergy. It should also promote exchange of information and experiences between RECs, which approximates South-South technology transfer. Finally, the rationalization process must be incremental and implemented over a specified timeframe, for example, five years within which continent wide clearly defined benchmarks and prescribed policy measures must be put in place. As a first step, this may call for the strengthening of the AU Commission itself to give it the economic wherewithal to coordinate joint programming, coordination and harmonization of the RECs. The protocol on working relationship between AUC and RECs should be finalized and reactivating the joint AU/ECA/ADB and RECs mechanism.

39. At their 11th Summit of IGAD, the Heads of State and Government resolved to ensure that IGAD remains a Regional Economic Community as defined under the Abuja Treaty and the AU Constitutive Act. The Executive Secretary of IGAD was further directed to redouble his efforts to enhance IGAD's role as a vehicle for regional integration and economic cooperation.

d) Presentation by CEN-SAD

40. H.E. Mr. Bruno Zidouemba, Ambassador of Burkina Faso to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union Commission, made the presentation on behalf of the Chairperson of the Executive Council of CEN-SAD, H.E. Mr. Youssouf Ouedraogo, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation of Burkina Faso. He indicated the major activities as well as prospects in terms of community policies and programmes. The CEN-SAD authorities welcomed the organization of the conference, which created an opportunity for identifying ways and means of accelerating economic integration of the continent in the spirit and letter of the Abuja Treaty of 3 June 1991 and the Sirte Declaration of 9/9/99.

41. It was indicated that the policies and programmes implemented by the Treaty dated 4 February, 1998, on the establishment of CEN-SAD, originated from the Abuja Treaty of 3 June, 1991.

42. The Ambassador further noted that CEN-SAD Member States started discussions with a view to liberalizing free flow of goods and services and also the free movement of persons on the basis of ongoing studies under the technical supervision of the African Development Bank and the ECA.

43. The Conference was informed that CEN-SAD organizes workshops on the development of communication infrastructures with particular interest in integration-oriented infrastructures, the missing linkages and the neighbouring interconnections.

44. Further, the Conference was informed about other activities undertaken within the framework of CEN-SAD, relating to the promotion of peace and security, rural development, eliminating food insecurity, desertification, etc...

45. The Conference noted that as part of its policies and programmes, CEN-SAD remains open to all partnerships, in particular with the other regional communities. On behalf of CEN-SAD, the Ambassador finally called on Member States to see to the implementation of the policies and measures decided upon within the framework of the RECs and further called on the AU Commission to play the role of coordinating and harmonizing the RECs' activities.

e) Presentation by the East African Community

46. The presentation for the East African Community was delivered by Hon. Danson Mungatana, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kenya on behalf of Hon. Andrew Chenge, Minister for East African Cooperation, Tanzania, and Chairperson of the East African Community Council of Ministers. In his presentation, Hon. Mungatana stated that the East African Community is an intergovernmental organization of `the three Partner States, namely, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania established through a Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community signed on 30th November 1999.

47. The Vision of the Community is "to create a prosperous, competitive, secure (stable) and politically united East Africa". He went on to state that the Mission of the Community is "to widen and deepen economic, political, social and cultural integration in order to improve the quality of life of the people of East Africa (EA) through increased competitiveness, value added production, trade and investment". The main objectives of the Community is to develop policies and programmes aimed at widening and deepening cooperation among the Partner States in political, economic, social and cultural fields, research and technology, defence, security and legal and judicial affairs for mutual benefit.

48. Regarding the achievements of the Community, the most conspicuous one is the completion of negotiations of the EA Customs Union Protocol and the launching of the East African Customs Union. With the operationalization of the Customs Union, the process of integration in the East African region has reached an important stage where it is expected to demonstrate tangible benefits to the East African people. EAC has embarked on the negotiations of the EAC Protocol on the EAC Common Market to facilitate the movement of persons, services and factors of production within the region. The EAC believes that the movement of people, services and factors of production as one aspect of a common market follows, logically, after operationalization of the Customs Union. Also, the study on "Monetary Union among Members of the East African Community – Preconditions and Policy Directions" has been finalized. Central Bank Governors are now taking stock of the

issues raised in order to map out the road forward towards the establishment of a Monetary Union at the appropriate time.

49. EAC places great importance on the role of the private sector in the regional integration process. To this extent, EAC commissioned a study on the EAC Private Sector Development (PSD) Strategy, which has been completed and is awaiting formal launch for its implementation. In an effort to harmonize policies in the education, science and technology sector, EAC established the East African Science and Technology Council (EASTECO), a body which coordinates and promotes regional and international cooperation in the development of science and technology. Other projects include infrastructure which are at various stages of implementation, including Roads, Civil Aviation, Maritime Safety, Communication, Meteorology, and Railways. In immigration, the East African Passport and inter state passes serve to ease travel across the East African borders. EAC places a lot of emphasis on establishment of supra national institutions to support the policy making function of the Community. To that extent, the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), and the East African Court of Justice as institutions of the Community are in place and operational to assist in the policy making function of the Community.

50. In 2005, EAC Heads of State decided on fast tracking the process towards achieving a Political Federation. This is aimed at expediting the pace of integration in East Africa in a clear, definite and enabling political framework.

51. On rationalization of RECs, the East African Community acknowledges challenges faced by Regional Economic Communities and appreciates the efforts being undertaken to enhance capacities, harmonize policies, strategies and activities among the RECs. EAC has done this through memoranda of understanding and cooperation agreements. EAC supports the efforts to enhance mechanisms for harmonization of policies and strategies and strengthening of coordination mechanisms at both regional and continental levels towards achieving the objectives of the Abuja Treaty. It, however, cautions that the process should be undertaken in a manner that is incremental to the gains already made by the RECs and other specialized institutions on the continent

GENERAL DISCUSSION

52. Following the presentations by the Chairpersons' of Council of Ministers of the different RECs or their Representatives on progress made in economic integration in their respective regions, an issue was raised on the definition of rationalization as perceived by the AUC. The AUC clarified that rationalization meant addressing the considerable constraints impinging on the RECs' ability to generate and channel a sustainable collective effort towards Africa's integration. Some of the constraints, among others, are the proliferation of RECs pursuing similar mandates and programmes, the multiplicity of membership to RECs, overlapping of RECs and inadequate resources.

53. The meeting noted that the multiplicity of RECs and lack of coherence of their activities was a problem that had to be addressed. It was further agreed that the proliferation of RECs and the resultant duplication of programmes and inefficient use of Africa's resources justify the ongoing efforts towards their rationalisation.

Moreover, the meeting underscored the importance of the rationalisation process as an important step in ensuring the realisation of the Abuja Treaty for the establishment of an African Economic Community (AEC).

54. The meeting noted that the consultative meetings of Accra and Lusaka as well as the experts meeting of Ouagadougou, in preparation for the Ministerial meeting, all strongly suggested that **harmonization and coordination** of the policies and programmes of the RECs is the preferred option for rationalization, at this point in time.

55. The meeting expressed the view that consultations, involving all stakeholders including the civil society and private sector, on the rationalization of RECs should continue. It was felt that the consultations and the results of cost-benefit analysis are necessary tools for making informed decisions on the rationalization of RECs. The meeting observed that discussions on the issue should not be limited to the negative aspects of the proliferation of RECs, pointing out that significant gains made by some of these organizations should be acknowledged. Peace and security, and protection of the environment were cited as notable examples. Furthermore, the meeting recognized the contribution of specialized organizations to the integration process in Africa, and requested that this should not be overlooked in discussions on rationalization of RECs.

Agenda Item V. CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORT OF EXPERTS

56. The Rapporteur of the Experts Meeting presented the Report of Experts to the Conference and in particular drew the attention of the Ministers to the recommendations in the report. The Ministers took note of the report and made the following recommendations:

Member States

- a) Speed up the rationalization process taking into account the diversity of RECs and the level of development and interests of Member States;
- b) Build the capacities of the existing RECs and national institutions in order to make them more effective and ensure that they implement the community programmes;
- c) Urge Member States to honour their financial and other obligations to RECs to enable them carry out their mandates with particular reference to the integration process;

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- d) Retain the configuration of the eight RECs and harmonize their policies and programmes within the framework of the Abuja Treaty;
- e) Adopt a moratorium to halt the recognition of new RECs;

- f) The integration agenda should not be limited to rationalization but should be considered in a holistic manner and address all other related issues such as peace and security and NEPAD. In pursuing rationalization of RECs, the process should be informed by the role played by RECs in conformity with the Protocol for the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council and in particular the African Standby Force based on five brigades;
- g) Elaborate a clear definition, criteria and action plans for the various scenarios for rationalization that would assist Member States in taking appropriate decisions on the way forward in that regard;
- h) Convene continental consultative meetings involving stakeholders such as civil society, private sector, parliamentarians, tax and customs officials for their inputs in the discussion on the rationalization process;
- i) Convene Ministerial Conference in 2007 to examine the outcome of these consultations;
- j) The meeting of African Ministers responsible for integration should be institutionalized and held annually;
- k) Strengthen the AUC/ADB/ECA Joint Secretariat and revitalize the coordination between the Joint Secretariat and the RECs in order to assist the RECs in the harmonization and coordination of policies and programmes towards continental integration;
- l) Finalize the new Protocol on Relations between the AU and the RECs for signature in the shortest time possible.
- m) Revisit the Abuja Treaty to rearrange the timetable of its implementation taking into account the provisions of the Sirte Declaration of 9.9.99;
- n) Speed up the setting up of AU financial institutions as provided for in the Constitutive Act and the Sirte Declaration of 9.9.99 as one way of accelerating integration;

Regional Economic Communities

- o) In order to enhance integration, RECs should be encouraged to promote free movement of persons, goods, capital and services;
- p) Have the rationalization issue included on the agenda of statutory meetings of the RECs and that wider consultations with stakeholders such as civil society, private sector and parliamentarians be undertaken;

AUC/RECs

- q) Harmonize and coordinate policies and programmes of RECs as important strategies for rationalization;
- r) Put in place mechanisms to facilitate the process of harmonization and coordination within and among the RECs;
- s) Carry out an institutional audit of the RECs to assess the challenges and efficiency constraints in implementing the Abuja Treaty. In this regard, the AUC should, in consultation with the RECs and in collaboration with ECA, provide a clear timetable and benchmarks for the implementation of the Treaty taking into account the Sirte Declaration of 9.9.99.

Agenda Items VI and VII. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT REPORT AND THE DRAFT DECLARATION

57. The Conference considered its report and adopted it with some amendments. In addition, it considered and adopted a Draft Declaration (attached).

Agenda Item VIII. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

58. No item was raised under this agenda item.

Agenda Item IX. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

59. Considering that the Ministers had recommended that the Conference of Ministers in-charge of Integration be institutionalised, Rwanda offered to host the second Conference of the African Ministers of Integration in 2007 and the offer was favourably welcomed by the Conference.

Agenda Item X. CLOSING CEREMONY

60. The AU Commissioner for Economic Affairs expressed his gratitude to the Member States, which honoured the invitation extended to them by the AU to attend the first Conference of African Ministers of Integration. He also commended the Conference for the courageous recommendations made on this sensitive issue of Rationalization of RECs and assured it of the commitment of the AU Commission to implement the recommendations falling within its mandate. Further, he thanked the Government and the People of Burkina Faso for the success of the meeting.

61. The Chairperson of the Conference extended his sincere gratitude to the Honourable Ministers and other participants in the Conference for their frank and constructive discussions which led to important recommendations to be submitted to the next Assembly of Heads of States and Government of the AU to be held in Banjul, The Gambia, in July 2006.

62. He commended the AU Commission, the ECA and other partners for their efforts in preparing for and servicing the Conference.

VOTE OF THANKS

63. Her Excellency Mme. Antoinette Batumubwira, Minister of Foreign Relations and International Cooperation of Burundi delivered a Vote of Thanks on behalf of her colleagues and other participants. In her statement, she expressed gratitude to the Government and the People of Burkina Faso for the warm and fraternal hospitality extended to the delegations of the Conference and the excellent facilities put at the disposal of the meeting, which had contributed immensely to the success of the Conference. Further, she thanked the Chairperson of the Conference for the able manner in which he stirred the meeting. Finally, she expressed the hope that the seeds planted by this first Conference of African Ministers of Integration will grow and bear fruits in the near future.