



Eighth Annual ECOWAS-Development Partners Coordination Meeting

**ECOWAS Commission, Abuja
02 -03 June 2011**

Strengthening Coordination for Better Cooperation and Deeper Integration

Opening Address by:

**H.E. James Victor GBEHO
President of the ECOWAS Commission**

- Your Excellency David MacRae, Head of the EU Delegation to Abuja,
- Your Excellency Daouda Touré, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations,
- Your Excellencies Colleague Heads of ECOWAS Institutions,
- Your Excellency the Vice President and Commissioners of the ECOWAS Commission ,
- Your Excellencies Heads of Mission accredited to ECOWAS,

- Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
- Distinguished Representatives of International Organizations and Development Cooperation Agencies,
- Distinguished Development Partners,
- Representatives of Civil Society Organizations,
- Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my singular honor and pleasure, on behalf of the Institutions of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), to welcome you most cordially to the beautiful city of Abuja and to this eighth gathering of our extended family, the Annual ECOWAS-Development Partners Coordination Meeting that has become a permanent feature of the ECOWAS annual calendar.

As you are aware, compelling circumstances have necessitated the shifting of this important gathering from its traditional beginning-of-the-year slot, but as they say, however, 'it's better late than never'. We are, therefore, very delighted that you have found time and space in your competing schedules to honour our invitation. For this, I wish to express my profound gratitude to you all, particularly those who have made the long journeys from all

corners of the world to be with us. Your gesture is yet another indication of solidarity with ECOWAS and your unwavering commitment to our integration project.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Eighth Annual Meeting is taking place in a context that is worth explaining. First, when we met last year, West Africa had begun taking tentative steps out of the global financial, food and fuel crisis, with economic growth rate estimated at 4.4 percent in 2009. Building on that achievement, the region recorded an estimated growth rate of 6.2 percent in 2010, and it is on course to hit 6.5 this year. Even though this figure masks significant disparities between Member States and remains below the minimum 7 percent economic growth rate required for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it nonetheless shows an upward and optimistic trend.

Secondly, no active war is taking place in our Community today and democratic culture is taking root, with several successful elections taking place. By steadfastly applying the policy of 'Zero Tolerance' to power obtained or maintained

by unconstitutional means, ECOWAS, with the cooperation of the African Union, the United Nations, and our development partners, has succeeded over the last year in restoring constitutional order and legality in Guinea, Niger and Cote d'Ivoire. Similarly, the adherence to the constitutional convergence principles of ECOWAS with respect to democracy and good governance yielded relatively peaceful, transparent and credible outcomes in the conduct of the recent presidential elections in Guinea, Niger, Benin, and Nigeria. The post-electoral crisis witnessed in Cote d'Ivoire consumed a lot of time and effort, but was eventually resolved thanks to the principled stance and concerted efforts of the ECOWAS Authority and the international community.

Despite the remarkable progress, ECOWAS itself is the first to admit that the security situation in the region continues to be characterized by fragility and unpredictability. Governance institutions remain weak and greater efforts need to be applied, in collaboration with civil society and our partners, to strengthen institutions, reform the security system to make it more responsive to democratic control

and human rights; and ensure greater separation of powers, adherence to the rule of law and anti-corruption principles.

Drug trafficking, Terrorism, money laundering and other forms of international organized crime also continue to undermine the security of the region and constitute a veritable time-bomb.

Thirdly, the ECOWAS Commission finds itself in a state of transition with the anticipated replacement of the first contingent of Commissioners with a new team.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the distractions and challenges, ECOWAS has persevered in forging ahead with our Community Development Program by scaling up the operationalization of its requisite strategic documents. This step is aimed at building internal capacity and strengthening coordination among stakeholders for results-based interventions towards the realization of the *ECOWAS Vision 2020*. In this regard, we are fully committed to the goal of transforming the region from an *ECOWAS of States into an ECOWAS of peoples living in a peaceful and secure environment and*

benefitting from the abundant potentialities and resources of our region.

Within the constraints enumerated above, ECOWAS has continued to achieve appreciable progress, including in the following areas:

- Promotion of free movement;
- Poverty reduction;
- Agriculture and Food Security;
- Infrastructure development;
- Macro-economic Convergence and the promotion of other initiatives towards the Common Market;
- The consolidation of peace, democracy and good governance; and, of course
- Enhancing internal capacity and coordination for effective delivery.

Permit me to dwell a little more on a few of our recent interventions in these areas. With regard to free movement, initiatives are underway to address identified challenges. For instance, with the help of a European Union grant, the ECOWAS Commission has begun the process of implementing its Transport and Transit Facilitation Program,

the major part of which involves the construction of joint border-posts along the major corridors in the region. This is a first major step in the fight against delays and extortion at crossing points, and a move towards the eventual elimination of internal borders. In addition, the unanimous adoption by Member States of the ECOWAS Passport Scheme is further testimony to Member States' determination to create a single Community space where citizens can move, settle and trade freely in any country without let or hindrance. The visa-free travel regime is a first in African integration diplomacy.

Our Community is basically impoverished, agrarian, and rural. Consequently, poverty reduction and the development of the agricultural and rural sectors are non-negotiable priority areas in our collective efforts to achieve an ECOWAS of peoples. In this regard, the launch of the Regional Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (RPRSP) in January 2010 provided the Community with a roadmap for tackling the root causes of poverty and attaining key MDG goals.

Further, the adoption in 2009 of the ECOWAS Common Agricultural Policy with accompanying sectoral programs,

supported by funds from within and from partners, constitutes a major milestone in our drive to maximize the region's comparative advantage and ensuring food security.

The Community is also engaged in an elaborate exercise aimed at rolling out a comprehensive infrastructural base to spur integration, particularly in the areas of transport, energy and telecommunications.

In the interventions by the Vice-president and Commissioners in the course of this forum, we shall avail ourselves with the opportunity to delve deeper into these and other initiatives.

In this enterprise, we have enjoyed the tremendous support of our partners within and outside the region, whose continued solidarity, cooperation and assistance we shall continue to count on in the future. That is why we should continuously take steps to renew and strengthen our cooperation.

I must add that, in order to maintain our cooperation on a sound footing, there is the need for frank, open and

dispassionate dialogue between ECOWAS and its partners on the progress that we have made; on our strengths and weaknesses; as well as on the opportunities that exist to maximize outputs and minimize the shortcomings. In this regard, the Meeting last year which, apart from the thematic discussions, focused on the promotion of partnerships based on a strategic and coordinated strategy, came up with a number of useful observations and recommendations. In the course of the year partners also raised concerns about the state of our partnership. With regard to the concerns, the following were identified as being among factors hampering effective implementation of partner-funded initiatives:

- Weak internal capacity and low absorption rate, particularly with regard to the 10th EDF;
- Ineffective coordination mechanisms, resulting in poor information flow and reporting;
- The slow pace of the finalization of the Annexes to the Draft Joint Financing Arrangement (JFA) to regulate the Pool Fund capacity building program. In particular, the non-completion of the Capacity Building Plan, Procurement and Financial Procedures, as well as the

slow pace of finalizing the Draft JFA, were adjudged to be hindering the signing of the Document;

- The slow pace of developing plans of action to provide a clear roadmap in the design and implementation of bankable projects under the Strategic Plan and the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), and also the 10th European Development Fund (the 10th EDF).

As Chief Executive of the ECOWAS Commission, I would like to state that I share some of the concerns raised and that the Institution needs to be more responsive to the expectations of our partners, who support key Community programs. However, flexibility is also called for from both sides with respect to the limited progress in concluding agreements.

Without appearing to sound apologetic, I wish to state that objective factors have also contributed in no small way to the challenges of effective delivery, not least the freeze on recruitment within the Commission; the persistent political crises that often divert resources and focus; and, perhaps, unrealistic expectations of partners at times, given the circumstances. Furthermore, all stakeholders bear a responsibility for the effective application of the Paris

Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, particularly with regard to the principles of context, coordination, transparency, ownership, and sustainability. Against this backdrop, it is my expectation that this forum will critically examine these factors, including, for instance, those impeding the rapid conclusion of the European Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations, and the speedy disbursement of funds for critical priority projects, such as the fight against drug trafficking and other international organized crime in the region.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

Unlike the bad worker who always blames his tools, however, we have a collective obligation to rise to the occasion despite the constraints. For this to happen, the coordination mechanisms underpinning our partnerships must function properly at the three levels, namely within ECOWAS; among partners; and between ECOWAS and Partners. We need major improvements at all the levels now.

In this regard, I am most encouraged by the knowledge that ECOWAS and its partners have stepped up efforts to ensure better coordination. I am reliably informed that, following the recommendations made at last year's meeting, we have since completed initial work on the finalization of the following key documents:

1. The Draft Operational Guidelines of the Coordination Mechanisms;
2. The Draft Monitoring and Evaluation Manual;
3. The Coordination Mechanism for the implementation of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF);
4. The Draft Key Annexes to the Draft JFA;
5. Partner comments and ECOWAS responses on the Draft JFA.
6. ECOWAP Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism;

It is our expectation that the appropriate thematic sessions will examine these documents with a view to adopting them.

Your Excellencies, Valued Partners,

Permit me, at this juncture, to recognize the substantial support of the European Union to the ECOWAS Commission,

especially in the formulation of the road map of the regional agenda aimed at ensuring greater coherence of the programs and activities of ECOWAS and the Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa (UEMOA), under the EDF.

In the same vein, I would like to underscore the importance of the support that the Commission has received from Pool Fund partners to consolidate the new approach to the coordination of assistance from all the development partners for the capacity building program.

Without being exhaustive, I would also like to appreciate the support and coordination role played by bilateral partners, such as the UK, Denmark, Spain, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and France in the implementation of key ECOWAS programs in the fields of agriculture, migration, trade facilitation, and peace and security.

Building on existing partnerships, ECOWAS has, in the last few years, has taken steps to broaden and diversify its partnership base to incorporate the emerging economies of Asia (China and India particularly), Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba and other Caribbean nations. They have accompanied us in several initiatives, particularly in the field of infrastructure,

energy and health. We are most grateful for the assistance. We cherish the support of our traditional and new partners and are determined to further strengthen these bonds to deliver mutual assistance and win-win relations.

Also in the implementation of our Community initiatives, we count on the cooperation, expertise, and monitoring acumen of civil society in its broadest understanding, particularly the private sector, traditional institutions, women and youth groups, Community-Based Organizations and specialized NGOs. ECOWAS has made conscious efforts to associate this important community in all its endeavors and we shall continue to do so as we scale up our interventions.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

With regard to the work at hand, the work program has been carefully structured and tailored towards the attainment of the main goals of this year's meeting, namely:

- A clearer picture of the direction of ECOWAS with regard to institutional arrangements and strategy;
- A clearer understanding of the short to medium-term priority areas in the Integration agenda;

- A review of sectoral performances over the last four years;
- Consensus on the key documents regulating partnerships.

Consequently, the first day will focus on discussions of general interest on the regional integration process as well as the guidelines and strategies on issues and challenges in the 2010/2011 period and beyond. The second day will be devoted mainly to key thematic group sessions to be followed by a plenary session, where the Meeting will discuss and adopt the main conclusions. In between, it is my pleasure, on behalf of ECOWAS Institutions, to invite our partners to a welcome cocktail this evening. Barring any serious objections, I encourage the house to adopt this work program as it provides a useful framework to guide our deliberations.

Your Excellencies, Dear Partners, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to take this opportunity once more to express our profound and sincere gratitude to all our partners for the invaluable support to the regional integration agenda. Our

partnership cannot be judged solely and merely in financial terms. We view our relations as a necessity in a globalized world of interdependence. We see you also as technical partners; a sounding board; and key advocates of the ECOWAS brand in the wider world. For this, we shall always cherish and nurture our friendship and bonds. Together, we can build a peaceful, competitive, and prosperous West Africa as trusted and reliable Community to Africa and the international community.

I have no doubt in my mind that this year's Meeting will be even more exciting and productive and that it will build on successes of our partnership and friendship.

I wish all of us very frank, dispassionate and fruitful interactions and a wonderful, stress-free sojourn in Abuja.

Long Live our Partnership! Long Live ECOWAS!

I thank you for your kind attention.