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**Economic Commission for Africa  
Subregional Office for North Africa**

**Intergovernmental Committee of Senior  
Officials and Experts for North Africa**

Thirty-fourth session

Aswan, Egypt, 25–28 November 2019

**Report of the thirty-fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of  
Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa**



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## **I. Opening of the session**

### **A. Organization and attendance**

1. The opening ceremony of the thirty-fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa was attended by Mr. Ahmed Kamaly, Deputy Minister, on behalf of Ms. Hala Helmy El Said, Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform (Egypt), and Ms. Kalthoum Hamzaoui, General Director of Multilateral Cooperation, Ministry of Development, Investment and International Cooperation (Tunisia), outgoing Chair of the ICE Bureau.

2. Representatives of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), international and regional organizations, universities, cooperation agencies, financial institutions, United Nations agencies and six of the member States of the Intergovernmental Committee, namely Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, the Sudan and Tunisia, also attended the opening ceremony.

### **B. Opening statements (*agenda item 1*)**

3. The session began with a statement by Ms. Hamzaoui (Tunisia), in her capacity as outgoing Chair of the Intergovernmental Committee Bureau, in which she expressed her gratitude to the members of the outgoing Bureau and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Subregional Office for North Africa for the work accomplished since the thirty-third session. She also commended the Subregional Office for North Africa on its efforts to support member States in the areas of socioeconomic development and regional integration.

4. Ms. Hamzaoui emphasized the relevance of the theme chosen for the thirty-fourth session, namely “The African Continental Free Trade Area and employment: the impact of an improved trade facilitation and regional integration in North Africa”, a timely focus, given the recent establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area with a view to strengthening economic integration on the African continent. She welcomed the fact that sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee were held on an annual basis, as they provided a unique forum for reflection and dialogue on key economic and social challenges in the subregion. She expressed thanks to the Government of Egypt for hosting the Intergovernmental Committee’s current session in Aswan and wished participants every success in their deliberations.

5. Following those remarks, participants were invited to view a video message from Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary of ECA, who warmly thanked the Egyptian authorities for hosting that statutory meeting in Aswan. The theme of the session was indeed a topical issue in view of the recent launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area and its expected positive impact on trade and employment in North Africa.

6. The Executive Secretary underscored that the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area would promote and strengthen intra-African trade and foster economic integration within the regional economic communities, and in particular among North African and AMU countries, whose intra-regional trade constituted little more than 3 per cent of their overall trade and which conducted nearly two thirds of their trade with the European Union. Certain countries in the subregion had enormous potential in terms of trade, including Morocco, Tunisia and, in particular, Egypt, a country that conducted nearly 42 per cent of its trade with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), but which could also explore new markets in the subregion.

7. Concluding her address, she once again thanked participants and wished them every success in their work.

8. Taking the floor, Mr. Kamaly expressed his country's honour to be hosting the thirty-fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee and he welcomed participants to the historic city of Aswan on the banks of the Nile. The Egyptian Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform attached particular importance to the holding of such a meeting in collaboration with the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa. He welcomed the participation of a wide range of stakeholders from member States, the public and private sectors, the academic world and civil society, which underscored that, by forging partnerships and collaborative efforts, it was possible to foster cooperation and promote integration in North Africa.

9. In closing, he reiterated his welcome to participants, expressed his warm thanks to the ECA teams, the directors and other officials at the Ministry, and the authorities in Aswan for their fruitful collaboration in organizing the current meeting and wished participants every success in the work of the thirty-fourth session.

## **II. Election of officers** (*agenda item 2*)

10. After consultation among the heads of delegations, the Committee elected the following Bureau by consensus:

<b>Chair :</b>	<b>Egypt</b>
<b>Vice-Chair :</b>	<b>Algeria</b>
<b>Rapporteur :</b>	<b>Mauritania</b>

## **III. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work** (*agenda item 3*)

11. In his introductory statement, Mr. Kamaly, Chair of the incoming Intergovernmental Committee Bureau, welcomed all the participants and thanked the member countries for the confidence placed in his country. He commended the outgoing Bureau and the Subregional Office for North Africa on the important work carried out over the previous year.

12. He remarked that the session would provide appropriate framework for reflection and exchange of views on key issues and challenges related to the promotion of sustainable development and integration in North Africa, including within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union and in line with the vision of Egypt for the implementation of its national sustainable development plan for the coming decade. Before concluding, he gave a brief overview of the main development programmes and projects that had been undertaken in recent years in a number of areas, including infrastructure, finance, trade and investment.

13. Following those remarks, the Committee adopted the agenda (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/34/1) and the programme of work (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/34/1/Add.1), set forth in annex II to the present report.

#### **IV. Special session: The African Continental Free Trade Area and employment: the impact of improved trade facilitation and regional integration in North Africa** (*agenda item 4*)

14. The main objective of the special session was to examine the potential impact of the African Continental Free Trade Area on employment. Panellists were invited to share with participants their views on the conditionalities, challenges and opportunities of the continental project, focusing in particular on how private sector engagement could ensure the success of the free trade area.

15. The special session featured the participation of Government representatives (Egypt), international organizations (World Customs Organization, World Food Programme and ECA) and private sector stakeholders.

16. The Committee noted the high quality of the presentations by the panellists and commended ECA on its effort in support of the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area. The free trade area would only be successful if relevant stakeholders took a number of key steps, namely, strengthening human resources through education and vocational training, providing more effective support to economic operators with a view to strengthening private sector engagement, and improving physical infrastructure and legal and regulatory frameworks with a view to promoting investment and facilitating trade.

17. Representatives also called for the establishment of mechanisms to ensure that the expected benefits of the continental project were shared in an equitable manner, and participants concluded that the trade facilitation measures adopted by member countries would largely determine the impact of the African Continental Free Trade Area on investment and employment.

#### **V. Ad hoc expert group meeting on the topic: “Trade facilitation in North Africa for enhanced regional economic integration: challenges, opportunities and the way forward”** (*agenda item 5*)

18. The meeting was opened by Lilia Hachem Naas, Director of the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa, and moderated by Khaled Hussein, Head of the Subregional Initiatives Section. Ms. Naas said that the meeting was timely since it directly addressed the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area and, more specifically, the challenges impeding the development of trade among North African countries. She further noted that the North Africa subregion was endowed with most of the structural prerequisites for an integrated and dynamic market, including complementarity, proximity, key infrastructure, and linguistic and cultural affinities.

19. Drawing on the results of a recent ECA survey, she underscored that there was strong potential for the development of regional value chains at the sectoral level and cited examples from specific sectors and countries. She also noted that the trade facilitation deficit and high transaction costs were among the main reasons why economic integration had been so limited in North Africa. Stressing the vital need to surmount trade barriers, an undertaking that would require a coordinated approach at the subregional level.

20. Ms. Naas underscored that trade facilitation should be pursued throughout the entire trade process by improving infrastructure and developing efficient and competitive services,

both in terms of transport, by upgrading roads, railways and ports and by making use of information and communications technology. Steps should also be taken to streamline and harmonize customs and border procedures. The adoption of a subregional approach could help relevant stakeholders coordinate their activities, set priorities, review progress, mobilize and allocate resources and monitor contribution levels.

21. In conclusion, Ms. Naas thanked the Government of Egypt, in particular the Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform, for the warm welcome and generous hospitality that they had extended to participants and she wished those taking part in the ad hoc expert group meeting every success in their work.

22. Taking the floor, Yasser Hashem, speaking on behalf of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stressed the need to involve the private sector in an effort to implement the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. He called for support measures to address the particular needs of small and medium-sized enterprises that traded with African countries and stressed the need to provide greater scope for those wishing to invest in production in order to strengthen regional value chains. Efforts should also be made to leverage the opportunities provided by technology and financial services within the subregion. Lastly, he stressed that electricity grids and maritime transport networks linking the Mediterranean area and the Atlantic could play a key role in strengthening the African Continental Free Trade Area at the subregional level.

23. The ad hoc expert group meeting provided an opportunity for participants to share their expertise, experiences and best practices in connection with the implementation of national trade facilitation programmes and promoting the use of international standards and applications in single window and paperless trade initiatives. Participants in the meeting also formulated a number of recommendations regarding policies and strategies to facilitate trade in North Africa.

## **VI. Evolution of economic and social conditions in North Africa: subregional profile review – North Africa (*agenda item 6*)**

24. The secretariat outlined the main conclusion of the report entitled: “Subregional profile: North Africa, 2018” (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/34/2). The report provided an overview of recent macroeconomic and social developments and set out the challenges facing the subregion.

25. The Committee congratulated the secretariat on a high-quality and very detailed report. At the same time, it called on the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa to establish a mechanism for collecting national data to be used in the preparation of the subregional profile. The Committee took note of and endorsed the secretariat’s proposal that an annual questionnaire should be sent to member States in order to collect national data. In preparation of the following year’s edition, a deadline of 15 June 2020 was set for completing the questionnaire.

26. The Committee asked the secretariat to include in the section entitled “Social and human development” an analysis of other complementary dimensions, including monetary and multidimensional poverty and progress achieved in connection with the Sustainable Development Goals, along with alternatives to the United Nations Development Programme human development index. The representative of Mauritania called for the analysis of intra-regional trade to be complemented by an assessment of facilitation efforts so that it more accurately reflected national achievements. The secretariat informed the Committee that the

report of the ad hoc expert group meeting, presented the previous day, and the related discussions would provide for a complementary analysis in those areas.

27. The secretariat took note of the comments made by the Committee so that they could be incorporated into the 2020 edition of the subregional profile.

## **VII. Review of the implementation of regional and international development agendas and special initiatives in North Africa** (*agenda item 7*)

28. The secretariat recalled the purpose of the report on the implementation of regional and international agendas and other special initiatives in North Africa (ECA/SRO-NA/ICE/34/3), which was to assist States in monitoring their compliance with their regional and international commitments and to ensure that the priorities of the subregion were addressed in negotiations at both the regional and international levels.

29. Participants took note of the report, underscoring the need to enhance the information that it contained by consulting with member countries on the activities carried out at the national level in accordance with commitments made. The secretariat took note of the comments made, in particular with regard to regional and global forums on sustainable development.

## **VIII. Statutory matters: (a) Programme of work of the Economic Commission for Africa for 2020; (b) Report on the activities of the Economic Commission for Africa Subregional Office for North Africa (October 2018–September 2019) and work programme for 2020** (*agenda item 8*)

30. The secretariat introduced the 2020 programme plan and budget of ECA and underscored that, in accordance with its mandate, the objectives of ECA subprogrammes were in line with the ends pursued by the United Nations and the Sustainable Development Goals. Those objectives also reflected the vision and priorities set forth in Agenda 2063 of the African Union and in outcome documents and decisions adopted by key global conferences and summits.

31. With regard to the programme plan, it was noted that, in 2020, ECA aims to build strong links between the macroeconomic environment and other fundamental development issues, such as; poverty and inequality, private sector growth, regional integration and trade, climate change, energy and natural resources, gender equality and the empowerment of women, and data and statistics. Those would be underpinned by a robust governance system and a resource mobilization regime that powered inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. To that end, ECA would continue to work closely with member States, the resident coordinator system, United Nations Sustainable Development Group country and regional teams, the African Union and the African Development Bank.

32. The secretariat also presented the work programme for 2020 of the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa and the report on the activities conducted by the Subregional Office between October 2018 and September 2019 (ECA/SRONA/ICE/34/4).

33. In reviewing the activities of the Subregional Office and its programme of work for the coming year, the Committee noted with interest the scope of the efforts being made and

welcomed the sustained commitment of the Subregional Office to support member States in the implementation of the North Africa regional integration project.

**IX. Presentation of the key messages emerging from the fifth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and from the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly (agenda item 9)**

34. The representative of Morocco, in his capacity as current Chair of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, presented the key messages and recommendations of the fifth session of the forum, held in Marrakech, Morocco, in April 2019 on the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusion and equality”. Participants had conducted an assessment of the progress made in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. The report presented at the forum provided an in-depth review of six of the Sustainable Development Goals, namely Goal 4 on inclusive education, Goal 8 on decent work, Goal 10 on reduced inequality, Goal 13 on the fight against climate change, Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions and Goal 17 on the establishment of a global partnership.

35. Following the presentation, the Committee thanked the representative of Morocco for his presentation and took note of the key messages of the fifth session of the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.

**X. Presentation of the Economic Commission for Africa Integrated Planning and Reporting Toolkit: a toolkit for integrating national development plans with the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 (agenda item 10)**

36. The secretariat then presented the Integrated Planning and Reporting Toolkit, an ECA-supported web-based application that had been developed to facilitate efforts by African countries to integrate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union into their national development plans and track implementation progress in a coherent manner. The goals, targets, and indicators of the two agendas were integrated into the application, and users could visually assess the extent to which their national development plans were aligned with the two agendas. Integrated dashboards provided an overview of alignment with the agendas and progress achieved by countries in that area.

37. The application was dynamic and adaptable to countries’ planning frameworks at national, subnational or sectoral levels. Once a country’s national development plan results framework was uploaded to the application, the user could easily assess the extent to which a national plan was in line with the two agendas. The monitoring and evaluation module allowed the entry of country data on key indicators (along with baseline data, targets and current values) from national development plans.

38. The Committee took note of the toolkit, which it believed would significantly facilitate efforts to oversee and monitor implementation of the two agendas. Representatives of member countries expressed the wish to receive training on and make use of the toolkit in North Africa.



**XI. Consideration and adoption of the draft recommendations of the ad hoc expert group meeting on trade facilitation in North Africa for enhanced regional integration: challenges, opportunities and the way forward** (*agenda item 11*)

39. In order to facilitate the deliberation of the Committee, the secretariat proposed that the recommendations formulated in the sessions of the ad hoc expert group meeting on trade facilitation in North Africa for enhanced regional integration: challenges, opportunities and the way forward, should be submitted directly to the experts who participated so that they could be amended and approved within a period not exceeding two weeks. That proposal was accepted by the Committee, which invited the Subregional Office to follow up directly in that regard with the group of experts.

**XII. Consideration and adoption of the draft recommendations of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts** (*agenda item 12*)

40. The Committee reviewed and adopted the recommendations of its thirty-fourth session, as reproduced in annex II of the present report. In addition, the Committee encouraged participants from countries of the subregion to send their amendments to the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa within two weeks, in order to enable the secretariat to include them in the final report of the session.

41. On the basis of those observations, the Committee adopted the report and requested the secretariat to relay the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Committee to the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development for consideration at its next session.

**XIII. Date and venue of the next session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts** (*agenda item 13*)

42. During discussions regarding the date and venue for the next session of the Intergovernmental Committee, the representative of Algeria expressed her country's wish to host the thirty-fifth session in 2020. She said that her country would contact the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa as soon as possible to agree on the dates and organizational arrangements of the session.

43. Following that proposal, the members of the Committee unanimously supported the invitation of Algeria to host the Intergovernmental Committee's next session in 2020.

**XIV. Other matters** (*agenda item 14*)

44. At the end of the thirty-fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee, the representative of the Sudan, on his own behalf and also that of the member countries and all participants, expressed thanks to Ms. El Said, Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform of Egypt, and to the Government and people of Egypt.

**XV. Closing of the session** (*agenda item 15*)

45. In her closing remarks, Ms. Naas expressed her satisfaction with the success of the work of the thirty-fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee, at its venue in Aswan, Egypt.

46. On behalf of ECA and member States, she also thanked and congratulated the Egyptian authorities for having successfully organized the session, in collaboration with the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa, and expressed particular thanks in that regard to Ms. El Said, Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform of Egypt.

47. She also expressed her gratitude to officials and staff at the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform for providing logistical support during the session. She also thanked the conference staff, interpreters and translators for their patience throughout the session.

48. The Chair of the incoming Intergovernmental Committee Bureau, in turn, echoed the thanks expressed by member countries and participants to Ms. El Said and to the Government and people of Egypt. He also congratulated the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa and member countries on the success of the Intergovernmental Committee's thirty-fourth session.

49. He then declared the proceedings of the thirty-fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa closed.

## **Annex I**

### **Recommendations of the thirty-fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for North Africa**

Following its deliberations, the Committee made the following recommendations and requested the ECA Subregional Office for North Africa to submit them to the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

#### **A. Recommendations on the topic of the special session: “The African Continental Free Trade Area and employment”**

*Member States should:*

(a) Give more support to economic operators by providing better information on the African market, establishing innovating financial instruments and export promotion measures, to elicit increased involvement of the private sector;

(b) Improve physical infrastructure, including those structures related to international transport and cross-border posts, and review the legal and statutory framework to promote intra-African investments and trade facilitation;

(c) Improve the quality of education and vocational training, as well as knowledge sharing mechanisms, in particular for young people and women, in order to attain the expected potential of the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area;

(d) Expedite the establishment of trade facilitation measures to maximize profits and attain the potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area, in particular in the area of investment and employment.

*ECA should:*

(a) Build the capacity of member countries to understand and assess the impact of the African Continental Free Trade Area on the economies of North African countries;

(b) Conduct a prospective study on the impact of the African Continental Free Trade Area on the economies of North Africa;

(c) Encourage the production of knowledge regarding trade and establish electronic platforms to facilitate its dissemination.

#### **B. Recommendations on the subregional profile**

*Member States should:*

Make available to ECA through national focal points the recent data needed for the production of the subregional profile.

*ECA should:*

(a) Design and establish a national data collection mechanism, including a precise schedule for the production of the subregional profile;

(b) Incorporate in the section of the report which analysed social development a review of other supplementary dimensions, such as monetary and multidimensional poverty and achievements related to the Sustainable Development Goals;

(c) Include in the report additional indicators or alternatives to the human development index produced by the United Nations Development Programme;

(d) Go beyond prescriptions and present an analysis of causes for the situational differences observed between the countries of the subregion.

**C. Recommendations related to the report on the implementation of regional and international development agendas and special initiatives in North Africa**

*Member States should:*

Keep the ECA Subregional Office regularly informed of national activities carried out as part of the implementation of regional and international development agendas.

*ECA should:*

(a) Deepen and upgrade the report by consulting with member countries on national activities carried out in pursuit of commitments made and on their participation in conferences;

(b) Enhance the capacity of member countries to use standard tools and methodologies to ensure follow-up and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

**D. Recommendation on the 2020 work programme of the Economic Commission for Africa**

*ECA should:*

Facilitate the sharing of lessons learnt and good practices from the support activities and programmes implemented by national, regional and continental partners to encourage synergy and avoid duplication of efforts, the waste of resources and overlapping programmes.

## **Annex II**

### **Agenda**

1. Opening of the session.
  2. Election of officers.
  3. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
  4. Special session: The African Continental Free Trade Area and employment: the impact of an improved trade facilitation and regional integration in North Africa.
  5. Ad hoc expert group meeting on the topic: “Trade facilitation in North Africa for enhanced regional economic integration: challenges, opportunities and the way forward”.
  6. Evolution of economic and social conditions in North Africa: subregional profile review – North Africa.
  7. Review of the implementation of regional and international development agendas and special initiatives in North Africa.
  8. Statutory matters:
    - (a) Programme of work of the Economic Commission for Africa for 2020;
    - (b) Report on the activities of the Economic Commission for Africa Subregional Office for North Africa (October 2018–September 2019) and work programme for 2020.
  9. Presentation of the key messages emerging from the fifth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and from the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly.
  10. Presentation of the Economic Commission for Africa Integrated Planning and Reporting Toolkit: a toolkit for integrating national development plans with the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063.
  11. Consideration and adoption of the draft recommendations of the ad hoc expert group meeting on trade facilitation in North Africa for enhanced regional economic integration: challenges, opportunities and the way forward.
  12. Consideration and adoption of the draft recommendations of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts.
  13. Date and venue of the next session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts.
  14. Other matters.
  15. Closing of the session.
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