**African Union Commission**                                    **Republic of Côte d'Ivoire**

Third Conference of African Ministers responsible                    AUC/CRMC3/2015/1

  for Civil Registration


Yamoussoukro, Republic of Côte d'Ivoire
9-11 February 2015


# Concept Note


# *Theme: Promoting the use of civil registration and vital statistics in support of good governance in Africa*

# I.  Introduction

1.  The Third Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration will be held in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, from 9 to 13 February 2015, under the theme "Promoting the use of civil registration and vital statistics in support of good governance in Africa". African ministers responsible for civil registration, ministers of health, heads of civil registration offices and national statistics offices, and representatives of regional and international organizations, relevant United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations are expected to participate.

2.  The First Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, which was held in Addis Ababa in August 2010, recognized the importance of civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) and identified CRVS as one of the continent's key development imperatives. Building on the resolutions of the Conference, during the 2012 African Union Summit African Heads of State and Government institutionalized the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration as a statutory body of the African Union Commission (AUC) and directed the Conference to report on progress and challenges to the Summit every two years.[1]

3.  At the Second Conference, held in Durban, South Africa, in September 2012, ministers reiterated the continued importance of CRVS for advancing Africa's development agenda, including accelerating regional integration, achieving the priorities of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), creating an African Union strategic framework for pan-African socioeconomic development, and meeting the Millennium Development Goals. In their final declaration at the end of the Conference, the ministers noted:

    (a)  The central role that CRVS play in governance and economic development;

    (b)  The role of CRVS in improving access to basic services at all levels, including meeting the Millennium Development Goals;

    (c)  The pervasive way in which CRVS impact individuals in their daily social, political and economic lives.

4.  Among the key outcomes of the Durban Conference was, first, the endorsement of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS), which provides a policy and programmatic framework for implementation of CRVS systems on the continent, and second, the decision that all countries will undertake comprehensive assessments of CRVS systems and prepare costed national plans irrespective of the state of development of their systems.

5.  The upcoming Third Conference is intended to contextualize CRVS in the realm of governance and to provide a forum for discussions on how a complete and efficient CRVS system can help countries to achieve good governance. The Conference is expected to help

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[1] Assembly/AU/Dec.424 (XIX). Available from: http://www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/Assembly%20AU%20Dec%20416-449%20%28XIX%29%20_E_Final.pdf

member States to envision this important linkage and to guide them in developing and implementing specific strategies and operational plans that will facilitate good governance and help to mainstream a good governance approach in the implementation of CRVS systems.

6.      For the first time, the Conference is being organized under the auspices of AUC. The Conference, and all future Conferences, will therefore be conducted in accordance with the rules of procedure of AUC. The Third Conference is being organized in collaboration with the regional CRVS core group, which is made up of the African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Children's fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO), INDEPTH Network, Plan International, the secretariat of the African Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD), represented by Statistics South Africa, and ECA (which serves as the secretariat of APAI-CRVS).

## II.      Objectives of the Third Conference

7.      The First Conference helped to galvanize much-needed high-level political support for accelerated improvement of CRVS systems on the continent and facilitated the establishment of a permanent political forum under AUC for providing policy guidance and for taking stock of the progress made in implementing the regional CRVS programme on a biennial basis. The Second Conference unanimously recognized CRVS as a development imperative, endorsed APAI-CRVS as a guiding policy and programmatic framework for the development of CRVS systems in Africa, and urged countries to take systematic and time-bound steps for their accelerated improvement.

8.      The Third Conference, in addition to taking stock of the progress made with regard to APAI-CRVS, will provide policy guidance to address the various challenges experienced. It is expected to provide clear directions for the establishment of sustainable CRVS systems on the continent and identify priority actions that will lead to concrete outcomes in the short term. The Conference will also allow participants to discuss the notion of good governance, in particular its ability to facilitate the realization of human, political and economic rights, improved service delivery and evidence-based policymaking, and to build knowledge on a good governance approach to CRVS.

9.      The specific objectives of the Conference are to:

(a)      Review the progress made by countries against the commitments made at the past two Conferences and also against the targets set in the APAI-CRVS medium-term plan;

(b)      Deliberate on policy and programmatic actions for the next phase of implementation of the regional medium-term plan.

## III.      Expected outcomes

10.      The Conference is expected to deliver on the following outcomes:

(a)      Review progress made against the targets set in the medium-term plan of the APAI-CRVS;

(b)     Review progress made against the ministerial resolutions of the past two Conferences;

(c)     Enable member States to learn from one another's successes and challenges in implementing CRVS programmes;

(d)     Ensure that a good governance approach to CRVS is widely appreciated and recognized;

(e)     Provide policy and programmatic guidance towards establishing complete and efficient CRVS systems in Africa by addressing the following issues:

(i)      Sustainable capacity development strategy on CRVS;
(ii)     Accessibility of registration services, particularly through the health sector;
(iii)    Interoperability with national ID and electoral systems;
(iv)     Choice of appropriate technology solutions;
(v)      Civil registration in conflict and emergency situations;
(vi)     Gender and CRVS;

(f)     Provide an accountability framework to measure and monitor progress made against past commitments.

## IV.    Theme of the Conference: CRVS and good governance in Africa

11.     One of the formally declared objectives of the African Union is to promote good governance. The objectives and principles enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, particularly articles 3 and 4, emphasize the significance of good governance, popular participation, the rule of law and human rights. Additionally, an official function of the Pan-African Parliament is to encourage good governance, transparency and accountability in member States.[2] The African integration agenda also addresses various dimensions of good governance, including peace and security, peaceful electoral processes, economic integration within the continent, and the efficient and effective movement of people across borders. Strong CRVS systems are at the core of achieving these continental priorities.

12.     Although, there is no universally agreed single definition of good governance, there is a broad consensus between Member States of the United Nations and major international development institutions and agencies regarding the characteristics, mechanisms and outcomes of good governance.[3] Increasingly, good governance is associated with democracy, civil rights, transparency, the rule of law, and efficient and accountable public services.[4] In terms of delivering state services to the public, good governance reforms advance human rights by improving the State's capacity to provide the public goods that are essential for the realization of a number of human rights, such as the right to an education, health care and adequate food.[5]

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[2] http://au.int/en/organs/pap.
[3] http://go.worldbank.org/G2CHLXX0Q0.
[4] The World We Want, Report, UN Survey For a Better World, 2013. Available from: http://www.worldwewant 2015.org/bitcache/9158d79561a9de6b34f95568ce8b389989412f16?vid=422422&disposition=inline&op=view.
[5] http://www.ohchr.org/en/Issues/Development/GoodGovernance/Pages/GoodGovernanceIndex.aspx.

13.    A civil registration system is imperative for inclusive and good governance. By its very nature – in that it records vital events pertaining to every single member of the population on a continuous basis – the civil registration system is universal and the most inclusive data gathering system that a country can have. Such a system is essential for meeting the objectives set out in the Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which listed "Leave no one behind" as one of its five major transformative shifts. The universality of the CRVS system enables it to serve as an instrument through which the Government can reach out to each individual and deliver its services to those on the very margins of society. The identity records and documents derived from the system further allow every individual to prove with certainty the facts relating to their existence, identity and personal family situation, and to claim their human and civic rights.

14.    Having credible data that is timely and representative of all is a critical requirement for good governance. The statistics generated from a CRVS system help Governments to develop and implement programmes at all levels, including the lowest administrative levels, and monitor their progress on a regular basis. In addition, birth and death data from civil registration systems can be used to determine population estimates in the interim years between population censuses, as well as for population projections. The common African position on the post-2015 development agenda, developed through a consultative process with 53 African countries, includes a key commitment to "invest in and strengthen national statistical capacities and geospatial information systems for the collection, analysis, production and dissemination of disaggregated data to measure and evaluate policy effectiveness and promote a culture of evidence-based decision-making".[6] It is also recognized that progress towards the African integration agenda would be accelerated through efforts to strengthen national CRVS systems.

15.    While recognizing the role that CRVS systems play in the realization of good governance, attention must also be paid to the need for a good governance approach in attaining efficient and reliable CRVS systems. When implementing a good governance approach to CRVS, key issues of performance, cost-effectiveness, public accountability and transparency can be addressed. A good governance approach is also paramount to identifying and eliminating the inconsistencies and discriminatory practices that still exist in many country-level CRVS laws, policies and operational practices and which lead to further marginalization of vulnerable individuals and groups. The introduction of greater public accountability in CRVS systems can lead to optimized service delivery and a more effective use of public funds.

16.    The Conference will discuss CRVS and good governance under three main dimensions, namely human rights, service delivery and data for development.

## V.    Discussion topics and issues

### A.    Towards complete CRVS systems in Africa: where we stand

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[6] Common African position on the post-2015 development agenda, African Union, March 2014. Available from: www.un.cv/files/CAP_Post2015.pdf.

17.	Despite the critical role that they play in a country's development process, CRVS remained on the margins of government policies and programmes until recently. This has created huge institutional, infrastructural and human capacity deficits, which are hard to overcome in a short period of time despite the overwhelming political support and commitment that the Programme has received in past four years. The pace of progress is being seriously challenged by long years of stagnation. Therefore, the ambitious targets set under the Programme cannot be met through a business-as-usual approach. Innovative and high-impact policy and programmatic guidance will be needed to achieve the ambitious targets and to establish a CRVS system that delivers a whole range of products and services in an efficient manner.

18.	The previous two Conferences amply demonstrated that CRVS are a development imperative for Africa. The Conferences helped to mobilize the support of ministers, which facilitated the rallying of political support and leadership in the management and governance of APAI-CRVS. With the leadership and political support of the Conferences, and the harmonized and systemic framework provided by APAI-CRVS, there are now mechanisms in place for identifying specific as well as generic deficiencies or weaknesses in current national CRVS systems. Country-led comprehensive assessment processes have begun to identify and systematize an analysis of causes for these deficiencies and have guided the development of national CRVS improvement plans. In-country high-level coordination mechanisms and technical working groups are steering the improvement process in countries with the support of a coordinated United Nations country team.

19.	The regional CRVS core group led by ECA is continuing to provide technical assistance and guidance to countries in their efforts to improve CRVS systems. A large number of officials and other stakeholders are receiving training on CRVS across Africa as a part of the comprehensive assessment process. These processes have created new so-called CRVS champions who will be able to lead their respective countries in their mission towards sustained improvement of CRVS systems. The primacy given to country-led processes, the high-level political support received at country and regional levels, work undertaken on sustainable system strengthening, and the support of the international community and donors have sparked interest in other parts of the world, which are now following Africa's lead and initiating similar processes.

20.	Despite this progress, a lot has yet to be achieved at the country and regional levels in fulfilling the commitments made by ministers at the previous two Conferences. The action plans developed (and those to be developed) by countries based on the comprehensive assessments are expected to lay down a clear, time-bound road map towards achieving complete and efficient CRVS systems. Although such plans normally span a specific period of time and require resources for implementing the activities set out therein, there are certain key activities that could be implemented or initiated by the countries without any significant investment and that could make a real impact in terms of increasing registration coverage. During the implementation of the plan, African countries are likely to require guidance and technical assistance on various specialized technical and operational aspects of CRVS.

21.	The next challenge that countries will face is that of financing the plans. Ideally, the Governments themselves should provide the budgetary support required to implement the plans. There is an increased interest among donors and development partners in supporting such initiatives throughout the region. The World Bank has developed a Global CRVS

Scaling up Plan Invest Plan for 2015-2024, with a view to strengthening CRVS at the national level, providing international support for CRVS, and sharing knowledge and building the evidence base. The criteria for assessing the readiness of countries for international support will include completed comprehensive assessments and multi-sectoral costed CRVS plans, including an indication of the level of resources that will be committed by the Government, existing support from developments partners and the private sector, and the financing gap. The African Development Bank is also likely to finance a few aspects of CRVS improvement plans through their statistical capacity development scheme.

22.    Increased sustainable capacity-building efforts will be required at the continental and country levels to ensure that the initiatives taken by the countries do not lose momentum. At the Second Conference, ministers highlighted the need to create a knowledge hub at the regional level (housed in the secretariat) to serve as a repository of public goods, such as manuals, handbooks and guidelines, best practices from various countries, research outputs, training materials and so forth, which countries could access easily. A pool of African experts that the regional core group had successfully developed to support countries in conducting the comprehensive assessments needs to be revitalized, nurtured and expanded so as to maintain technical support to countries even during the implementation phase. Creating a critical mass of CRVS champions, both at the continental and country level, equipped with the necessary knowledge on the subject will be crucial for sustainable improvement of CRVS systems.

23.    The secretariat of APAI-CRVS, housed in ECA, should guide and support countries in their endeavours to improve CRVS. The limited human capacity of the secretariat is posing a risk to the programme, and this needs to be mitigated as quickly as possible with the support of partners.

24.    In short, the Third Conference is charged with huge responsibilities in providing pragmatic policy and programmatic directives for the regional programme over its next phase of implementation.

25.    Specifically, the participants at the Conference will:

(a)    Discuss the strategies and programmatic measures that need to be taken to achieve the targets set in the medium-term plan;

(b)    Provide guidance for a sustainable capacity development programme to improve CRVS in the region;

(c)    Address financing mechanisms for CRVS country action plans;

(d)    Provide policy guidance to countries on strategies for accelerated implementation of national CRVS plans;

(e)    Provide a platform for countries to present some of their key achievements from the past four years in their endeavours to improve CRVS and also to highlight some of the challenges faced.

**B.    Thematic areas of focus: priorities for the region**

**(a)    Role of the health sector in CRVS systems**

26. The past two Conferences have established the role of the health sector in improving CRVS systems and vice versa. In many African countries, it has been a story of missed opportunities. For example, a significant proportion of births and deaths occurring in health institutions are not registered. Similarly, child immunization sessions are not used to facilitate the registration of births. At the previous Conference, ministers clearly articulated the need to improve the accessibility of registration services by devolving services to local levels through existing structures and service networks, in particular the health sector.

27. Apart from potentially being a key provider to CRVS systems, as described above, the health sector is a major user of CRVS. In an ideal situation, the basic information obtained from registration records such as births, deaths and causes of death can be effectively used in delivering health services on a day-to-day basis at various administrative levels. One of the major challenges in tackling the Ebola epidemic in the three most affected western African countries has been the absence of an information system that provides data about who is dying of what disease and where. A fully functional system of death registration and recoding of causes of death in these countries could help to fight the crisis in a much more coordinated and systematic manner.

28. The health sector is the biggest beneficiary of vital statistics obtained from CRVS systems. Fertility and mortality data (including data on causes of death) are key to planning, implementing and monitoring appropriate health interventions at various levels. There are only a few countries in Africa that generate vital statistics on a regular basis. For example, there are only a few countries in sub-Saharan Africa that report death registration data and therefore it is not possible to generate data on even the most basic mortality indicators, such as crude mortality rate. The situation is even worse when it comes to cause-of-death statistics – only three countries in Africa produce good quality data on causes of death. In Africa, most deaths occur at home and unattended by medical personnel, and this makes it difficult to implement the standard methods and formats that are recommended by WHO for institutional settings. The verbal autopsy method recommended for assigning cause-of-death for non-institutional deaths are being implemented only in a few countries and then only in research settings. The data obtained from such sources are not nationally representative and therefore have limited use. This gap has resulted in the proliferation of alternative sources such as sample registration systems, data obtained from surveillance sites, censuses and other surveys, none of which have contributed to the development of CRVS systems, and may even have diverted funds and attention away from the latter. WHO recently published a guidance document for country strategies and partner support to improve mortality statistics through CRVS systems. This will help in developing specific strategies for improvement of mortality statistics through CRVS, bearing in mind the reality on the ground in the region.

**(b)    Children's rights and CRVS**

29. The role played by civil registration in proving, establishing, implementing and realizing many of the human rights embodied in international declarations and conventions is one of its most important contributions to the normal functioning of society. CRVS systems provide the basic infrastructure for the protection of human rights, from the early and most vulnerable years of life through to adulthood. Essentially, two groups of rights can be identified in that respect: (a) rights that require States to ensure that vital events are

registered (for example, the right to be registered and named, as per article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child) and (b) rights that may depend on the vital events having been registered (for example, the right to vote, as per article 21(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).[7]

30.     It is worth noting that Africa is the only continent with a region-specific child rights instrument. In Africa the above-mentioned rights are enshrined in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Article 6 of the Charter states that every child shall have the right from birth to a name and the right to be registered immediately after birth. However, despite the wide-scale ratification of the Charter by member States, the continent has the highest proportion of unregistered births, with the lowest levels of birth registration in sub-Saharan Africa (44 per cent). The registration of infant and child deaths, including cause-of-death information, is also in a deplorable state and requires urgent attention.

31.     Following a decision of its twentieth session, held from 12 to 16 November 2012, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child developed a General Comment on article 6 of the Charter, with a view to strengthening its implementation, primarily by giving the meaning and scope of the three rights embodied in the Charter and secondly explaining the corresponding obligations of the States parties to the Charter for their implementation. The Committee will launch the General Comment report during this ministerial Conference.

### (c)     Information and communications technology and CRVS

32.     New and rapid advancements in information and communications technology (ICT) in recent years in Africa have opened up new opportunities for Governments to establish modern and inclusive governance mechanisms to provide speedy and transparent services to their citizens. The rapid proliferation of computing technology, the Internet and mobile technology has presented new opportunities for improving operational efficiencies of CRVS systems, including bringing registration services closer to the general public. A fully digitalized CRVS system could help to establish efficient inter-operability and integration with other systems such as health and national identity and could also provide vital statistics on a real-time basis, which in themselves are crucial for the development of CRVS systems.

33.     However, the opportunities presented by the technological revolution could fail to yield the desired result if not properly conceptualized and contextualized, and could even prove to be counter-productive. Many of the technology-based pilots for CRVS systems in African countries have failed to be scalable, sustainable and address specific problems. Technology has largely been perceived as "the solution", without a proper understanding of the problem it is intended to address. In many cases, technology solutions and business process design have been driven by private companies and donors, without due consideration to issues of scalability and sustainability. The scaling challenge gets magnified because most pilot initiatives are donor-funded and not State-owned, and tend to wither away once external donor attention and funds are withdrawn.

34.     The guidelines provided by the United Nations Statistics Division are now critically out of date due to the rapid technological advances of recent years. The regional core group is now

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[7] Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, April 2003, United Nations Statistics Division.

producing a handbook on ICT in CRVS, the outline for which will be presented for review during the expert meeting.

**(d)     CRVS and national identity management systems**

35.     African countries are in various stages of revamping or implementing new national identity management systems. With very few exceptions, these processes have no organic connection with civil registration systems. An organic link between civil registration and national identity systems and voter registration would ensure that both entry into the latter at the appropriate age for those eligible and exit for those who those who have died would take place automatically, greatly enhancing the value for all these systems. Universal birth and death registration is the foundation for the identification systems that underpin public sector policies and programmes. An appropriately designed national identity system can serve as a comprehensive tool for governance that can greatly enhance delivery of government services (such as social grants, health services), conduct fair and free elections through the generation of complete electoral lists, ensure better tax collection, etc. It can help reducing pilferage in social protection programmes through better targeting. The costs of ID-issuance and repeated voter registration are far higher than the registration of vital events. By using the civil register as the source of "breeder documents", countries (and donors) can save substantial amounts in investment while ensuring population information and the identity documents issued are always up-to-date, reliable and verifiable. Given the above, there is a need to frame appropriate policy and laws to ensure that civil registration and the national identity management systems are subsystems of an umbrella system that provides legal identity. One of the first steps in this direction is to strengthen and facilitate greater coordination between national identity and civil registration authorities and other key stakeholders. The First International Identity Management Conference, held in Seoul in September 2014, made a number of policy recommendations on ensuring interoperability between national identity and civil registration systems.

**(e)     CRVS in situations of conflict and emergencies**

36.     Civil registration as a continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of vital events is faced with severe constraints in conflict and emergency settings. Government service delivery may be interrupted or cease, with births not being registered and deaths and cause-of-death information remaining unrecorded. Where services are in place, they may be inaccessible, particularly for refugees and internally displaced people, leading to undesirable consequences for both States and individuals, such as statelessness. The cross-border nature of many emergencies exacerbates existing problems and further hinders access to registration services. With mass movements of people, individual documents may get lost, while conflicts can result in vital records being destroyed. Maintaining basic civil registration systems and services in emergency settings is a necessity, however, to ensure citizens' legal identity and the recording and identification of deaths. Effective adaptation of existing CRVS systems and the development of flexible procedures to address rapidly changing contexts is the key to ensuring that registration of vital events goes uninterrupted.

**(f)     Gender and CRVS**

37.     In a bid to advance inclusive development and address inequalities, women empowerment and gender equality will continue to be one of the most critical development imperatives

across the globe in the coming years. However, there are significant challenges faced in the efforts to address and eradicate these gender issues. Central among these is the lack of timely and comprehensive data on populations, disaggregated by gender, that would allow for the measurement and monitoring of existing interventions. For example, despite the unacceptably high maternal mortality rates in most developing countries, to date no regular data are available on the levels and trends of maternal mortality. The estimates that are produced using indirect methods are high-level aggregates which cannot be used for monitoring interventions or programmes.

38. Besides being reliable sources of gender data, civil registration systems are the basis for establishing a legal and administrative information system that safeguards the rights and privileges of women. The legal identity document created from civil registration systems serves as the basis for proof of identity, and has numerous implications for gender relations, including protection from discrimination and facilitating access to resources. For instance, birth certificates are a form of legally recognized proof of identity that can prove crucial in judicial matters (e.g. sexual crimes, female genital mutilation, child marriage and trafficking). Marriage certificates are proof of marital status and therefore allow women to enjoy legal protection and the benefits they are entitled to, while divorce certificates are important for spousal support, child custody, child support, claims of property and fair division of debt, of which women are often victims.

39. The Conference will:

(a) Provide policy guidance on role of health systems in improving CRVS systems and vice versa;

(b) Deliberate on specific interventions that countries should adopt to address and improve gender data gaps on the continent through CRVS systems;

(c) Deliberate on the technical requirements and protocols that countries should follow before adopting specific IT solutions for their CRVS systems;

(d) Study the resolutions of the First International Identity Management Conference and propose strategies for implementation of specific resolution points;

(e) Deliberate on strategies for the management of civil registration records in situations of conflict and emergencies;

(f) Advocate for the importance of interoperability between civil registration and national identity management and electoral database management systems.

## VI. Partnership

40. The Conference is being organized under the auspices of the African Union Commission, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank and the Government of Côte d'Ivoire. The Conference is also supported by the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Health Organization, Plan International, INDEPTH

Network and Statistics South Africa, as the secretariat for the Africa Symposium on Statistical Development.

## VII. Participants

41.     The Conference will bring together a large number of participants, including ministers responsible for civil registration, ministers responsible for health, directors of civil registration offices, directors of national statistics offices, civil registration and vital statistics experts from African member States, development partners, specialized agencies of the United Nations system, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, academics, practitioners, civil society organizations, the private sector, eminent policy and opinion leaders and other concerned stakeholders.

## VIII. Format and programme of work

42.     The Conference will be conducted in two distinct segments, namely the experts segment and the ministerial segment. Discussions and dialogue during the Conference will take place in the form of:

(a)     Plenary sessions for setting the scene and reaching agreement on a consensus statement and indicative plan of action;

(b)     Parallel breakout sessions, facilitated by keynote presentations and moderated interactive discussions.

43.     The Conference activities will take place as follows:

(a)     Experts segment (days 1-2), entailing plenary sessions and breakaway sessions;

(b)     Briefing of ministers by country experts (day 3);

(c)     Ministerial segment (days 4-5), entailing plenary sessions;

(d)     Exhibitions and side events (days 1-5).