

Opening Statement



by **Mr. Mario Amano**

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Meeting of the Sahel and West Africa Club's Strategy and Policy Group (SPG)

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Dear Colleagues,

I am very pleased to participate in this important meeting to exchange views on the development of the Sahel and West Africa Club's 2008-2012 Work Plan. I have read with interest the documentation to which Mr. Goerens has referred and it will serve as a basis for our open and direct discussions.

Let me thank all of you for being here with us today. This attests to the importance you attach to West Africa and the role played by the Sahel and West Africa Club. I am pleased to welcome Mr. Ousseini Salifou, Commissioner for Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources of the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS), who will address this meeting following my introductory remarks.

This morning I would like to say few words on the following topics:

- Africa's importance with regard to the OECD
- The OECD and the Sahel and West Africa Club
- The SWAC's way forward

1. Africa's importance with regard to the OECD

With the majority of the least developed African countries located in West Africa, the international community must give high priority to this part of the world, not only for a better future for the region but also for greater security for all.

OECD co-operation with Africa has steadily increased and intensified over the years as you can see from looking at our "OECD and Africa" brochure which is available in this room.

We were honoured to be asked by the African Partnership Forum to host its Support Unit which we established in early 2006. The African Economic Outlook, published by the Development Centre in co-operation with the AfDB [and ECA] is now a leading source of information and advice on the African economy, while the Mutual Reviews of Development Effectiveness, jointly carried out by ECA and the OECD are playing a key role in the promotion of mutual accountability with the range of partners supporting Africa's development.

Furthermore, our co-operation with Africa now extends far beyond the cluster of OECD Committees and Directorates directly involved in development issues. Many OECD policy communities are actively involved in this co-operation, from taxation to investment and financial markets, as well as from governance to education to environment and Agriculture. A further sign of the importance that *the* OECD attaches to Africa can be found in the decision of our Ministerial Council in May 2007 to invite South Africa, together with four other major global actors, to become our partner in Enhanced Engagement, with a view to possible membership.

I am pleased to report that these initiatives are bearing concrete results. First, they have led to an increasing awareness of Africa's challenges and opportunities with regard to OECD policy makers in various areas, thereby contributing very concretely to our broader objective of promoting policy coherence for development. Second, we see more and more examples of the benefits that African countries can derive from having direct access to OECD tools, benchmarks and instruments that contribute to a more evidence-based and consensus-based policy design and an improved monitoring of progress.

I am also very pleased to report that the Sahel and West Africa Club is actively involved in this network of initiatives. I wish to underline in particular the unique role that the SWAC is playing in demonstrating the critical importance of regional approaches in the pursuit of the broader, continent-wide goals that African countries have set for themselves.

Let me conclude my remarks on Africa by saying that we fully recognise that while international development assistance is necessary, it is however insufficient. Indeed, trade, investment, debt-related issues, mobilisation of national and local human and financial resources are also of critical importance. In this context, as a strategic framework for concrete action in Africa, the NEPAD has an important role to play in conjunction with efforts made at the local, national, regional and continental levels. The various TICAD meetings reaffirm the key role of trade and investment for development as well as the role of South-South co-operation.

2. The OECD and the Sahel and West Africa Club

The SWAC has always strived to clarify its specific role, its operational and methodological approaches and its partnerships within and outside the region as well as within and outside the OECD. The SWAC attaches high priority to amplifying the voices and opinions of Africans so that they can effectively be heard. The SWAC has also strengthened its partnership with the OECD Directorates. I would like to highlight the dynamic role played by the SWAC as a member of the OECD Development Cluster for which I am responsible. The SWAC is committed to co-ordination and results-based partnerships with other OECD Directorates.

I am also very pleased to see that the SWAC has intensified its co-operation with other partners such as the African Development Bank, African Union, the CILSS, ECOWAS, ENDA Diapol, ROPPA, UEMOA, UNECA, UNOWA and many others. More information on this important topic will be provided during the meeting.

I believe that the Sahel and West Africa Club has played a crucial role in providing a more balanced reading of West Africa. The SWAC along with its African development partners has developed a prospective vision of West Africa which focuses on the identification of the dynamics of change as well as the drivers of change while at the same time taking into account the problems and challenges of the region. Indeed, this region should not be perceived as stagnant, but rather as a region in constant evolution capable of significant adaptation and progress. This region should be recognised by the international community as a significant strategic partner. The documentation before you provides detailed information on this very important issue.

The regional integration process to which the African Union, the CILSS, ECOWAS, UEMOA, and many others are dedicated is an important challenge. With an ever increasing population, this process will become increasingly more crucial in addressing issues such as governance, employment and migration, investment, trade, poverty reduction, the prospects for the youth and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. The joint work carried out with ECOWAS, the SWAC and other partners on food security, cross-border cooperation, peace and security attests to the SWAC's specificity and its value added within the region

You will have an opportunity during this meeting to exchange views on the results achieved by the SWAC during 2005-2007 and on the 2008-2012 orientations for the SWAC's work.

3. The SWAC's Way Forward

The SWAC is aware of its obligation to be results-oriented and to respond efficiently to the most pressing needs of its development partners. Accordingly, while developing partnerships with various institutional and civil society actors, the SWAC has not diluted its action but rather has had a structuring impact by involving various partners in joint initiatives.

With regard to communications to which you attach high priority, the SWAC has made great strides and is determined to intensify its action in this very important area. You will have the opportunity to discuss this issue during this meeting and agree on ways forward.

As you know, for the time being, the SWAC's major concern and that of its staff is sustainable funding in order to carry out its proposed 2008-2012 Work Plan beginning in 2008. The international community's contributions to the SWAC are of critical importance so as to allow it to play a significant role in support of West Africa's development. I sincerely hope that this SPG meeting will review thoroughly this very important issue and reach an action-oriented strategic action plan to ensure the sustainability of the Club.

The document before you raises many other questions. I invite you to discuss them and any other issues so as to ensure that the SWAC can play an even greater and more effective role in the future to benefit the region's populations and support the international community's commitment to West Africa.

I wish you full success in your deliberations. Thank you !