



**Meeting of the Strategy and Policy Group
The Sahel and West Africa Club**

18 June 2009

**Opening Statement
Mr. Mario Amano
Deputy Secretary-General to the OECD**

Dear Colleagues,

I am very pleased to participate in this important meeting to exchange views on a number of issues of interest to West Africa, OECD, the developed countries and the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) attached to OECD.

I wish to thank you all for being here with us today. This attests to the importance you attach to West Africa and to the role played by the Sahel and West Africa Club.

Today I would like to address three main issues:

1. The global financial crisis and its impact on West Africa
2. The OECD position vis-à-vis the SWAC and other structures working on Africa
3. The SWAC's future and its way forward.

The Global Financial Crisis

The OECD has reacted quickly to the financial and economic crisis and is helping governments chart a way through the crisis with a strategic response designed to create a stronger, cleaner and fairer global economy for the future. This will be the main thrust of the discussions at the meeting of the OECD Council at Ministerial level next week.

Development is amongst the key priorities of the OECD Strategic Response and the Organisation has lead in taking early steps to limit the risk of the financial crisis becoming an aid crisis: at the joint initiative of the OECD Secretary-General and DAC Chair an "*Aid Pledge*" was agreed by DAC members in which they reaffirm their aid commitments and agree to maintain aid flows in line with these commitments.

The various facets of OECD work on Development have been reviewed during a recent meeting of the Council, last month. On this occasion, a high priority has been given by our member states to strengthening further policy coherence, the co-ordination of our efforts on the ground, and the implementation of the Paris Declaration and of the Accra Action Plan. The discussion also highlighted the importance of the regional dimensions of development and aid effectiveness to complement what is

being done at the local, national and international levels. Whether we talk about the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), environment, climate change, food security, trade, the development of the private sector, prospects for the youth, migration, peace and security we have to make sure that regional co-operation between the countries we are working with is given an important priority. Indeed, the issues that I have mentioned are cross-border and they have to be tackled through joint and complementary efforts.

I think it is useful to keep this broader context in mind in the course of today's discussions, because I feel strongly that at a time when we need rapid, focused and well co-ordinated reactions, responsive organisations like the SWAC, with its wealth of experience and connections should be called by development partners to play an ever more important role.

The OECD position vis-à-vis the SWAC and other structures working on Africa

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 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. For example, the SWAC Secretariat played a driving role in the building of the new OECD and Africa website which will be presented to you today in the afternoon. This Africa platform has the added value of harnessing all information related to OECD's work on Africa and thus facilitating the sharing of information across the various OECD Directorates in an effort to contribute to the co-ordination of horizontal activities. This and many other examples illustrate that 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 the African Development Bank, the African Union, the CILSS, ECOWAS, ENDA Diapol, ROPPA, UEMOA, UNECA ,UNOWA, as well as civil society, the private sector and many others. More information on these important initiatives taken in this regard will be provided during the meeting.

The Sahel and West Africa Club is playing a crucial role in providing a more balanced reading of West Africa. The SWAC along with its African development partners is promoting 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 more fully recognised by the international community as a significant strategic partner.

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, moving ahead with regional integration in a more focused, results oriented manner, becomes every day more necessary to address issues such as governance, employment and migration, investment, trade, poverty reduction as well as 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 co-operation, peace and security attests to SWAC's specificity and its value added in support of the efforts of both donors and development partners in West Africa. The Sahel and West Africa Club has been very active in several areas including the promotion of a regional approach to the development of the region, the affirmation in various fora, based on sound analysis, that the regional dimension is an important tool to ensure aid effectiveness and complement work which is being done at the local and national levels.

This includes the revision of the food charter -- a landmark initiative in which the SWAC is playing a leading role and that could set an example for other regions -- and the analysis of the migration situation in West Africa, which illustrates clearly the useful role of the SWAC as an interface between the North and the South, including on difficult issues. Other activities are the production of various Atlas chapters in support of the regional integration process, the promotion of peace and security within the region and the production of regular information Notes, helping to guide the reflection and action of donors and partners on priority issues.

The SWAC has finalized the first issue of the West Africa Report on the available resources to be mobilised in West Africa, such as human, financial, natural and cultural. I must underline that the SWAC, notably since Accra, has continued to play a leading role within the OECD to promote the regional dimension of development in the context of our ongoing efforts towards improving aid efficiency. You will have an opportunity during this meeting to exchange views on the results achieved by the SWAC in 2008 and on what the SWAC intends to do in 2009. We look forward to your active guidance and advice in ensuring the Club's continuing relevance to your own development priorities and concerns.

The future of the Club and its way forward

Like anyone today, we are all, the SWAC as well as the OECD itself, constantly challenged by the need to adjust our products, approaches and working methods to a rapidly -- and sometimes brutally -- changing global environment.

The SWAC is aware of its continuing obligation to be results-oriented and to respond efficiently to the most pressing needs of its members and development partners. Accordingly, the SWAC has made renewed efforts to strengthen its partnerships with various institutional and civil society actors, while opening new avenues through joint, focused initiatives with partners from the North and the South.

With regard to communications to which you attach high priority, I hope that you will concur with my assessment that the SWAC has made significant progress. It is determined to intensify further its action in this key area.

As you know, for the time being, a major concern of the SWAC and its Secretariat and of the management of the OECD itself, is to secure sustainable funding in order to continue to deliver concrete results that benefit the region and its population. Your timely and sustained contributions to the SWAC are of critical importance so as to allow it to play its important role in support of West Africa's development. I sincerely hope that this SPG meeting will review thoroughly this issue and agree on a strategic action plan to ensure the sustainability of the SWAC in a medium-term perspective. My colleagues from the SWAC Secretariat will also explain how they are adapting their working methods and products in order to increase their efficiency and the value added of their outputs, and ensure their continuing relevance to your needs and aspirations. We look forward to your full support to these efforts.

I wish you full success in your discussions.

Thank you.