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**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES, SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY**

Opening remarks to the
Conference for African Ministers of Finance and of Education

(Organised by ADEA the African Development Bank and the World
Bank)

By

H.E. Prof. Jean-Pierre Ezin

Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology

15th to 17th July
Tunis

Thank you Chairperson, Madame Obiageli Ezekwesili, Vice President of

**Your Excellency, Minister of Education of the Republic of Tunisia,
Excellencies, African Ministers responsible for Education;
Excellencies, African Ministers responsible for Finance;
Excellency Mr. Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Minister of Finance of Singapore
Excellencies: Mr. Donald Kaberuka, Chairperson of the African Development Bank;
Mr. Juma Mwapachu, Secretary General of East African Community;
Mr. Dzingai Mutumbuka, Chairperson of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)
Senior government officials, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen**

On behalf of the Commission of the African Union, I have great pleasure in making a few remarks at this auspicious conference organized for African Ministers of Education and of Finance by the ADEA, African Development Bank, and the World Bank, at this crucial time of a precarious global economy. Thank you for the invitation extended to my organization.

The Africa Union is convinced that education is a key to attainment of its collective vision for Africa, including social and economic development.

This is attested to by the decision by African Union Summit of Heads of State and Government to launch the Second Decade of Education for Africa, with seven areas of focus, identified by African Ministers of Education, in their COMEDAF meeting in 2006, namely:

- Gender and Culture
- Education Management Information Systems
- Teacher Development
- Higher Education
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- Curriculum and Teaching and Learning Materials
- Quality in all its ramifications

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;

There has been much commendable effort in education in Africa over the last few decades. But it is also a fact that access to secondary education is barely at 50%; tertiary education enrolment in Africa lags all regions of the world; girls and women are generally under-represented at all levels of education; teachers are still a big issue, with severely inadequate numbers and limited qualifications.

At the same time, Africa's other challenges, whose solutions ought to be churned out from our education systems, continue. Many of them are very basic and include issues with health and nutrition, agricultural productivity, food security, infrastructure development and communication.

This calls for increased strategic development of, and investment in education, especially higher education and research.

At the Commission of the African Union we are working for enhanced support to higher education, while requiring revitalization of higher education systems and institutions; building and entrenching quality; promoting networking and mobility among Higher Education Institutions within Africa.

We note that insufficiency of quality of our higher education institutions induces persistent preference for linkages with institutions in the north, often at the expense of intra-African collaboration.

This, in many cases, has led to systematic and global undermining of an appreciation of African institutions among students, parents and staff. The same phenomenon has also contributed to a misconstruction of relevance in our education processes and products, with two critical end results, as institutions seek external recognition and acceptance.

The critical negative results are, namely:

1. A mismatch between curricula on one hand, and industry and the labour market on the other;

2. Insufficient attention paid to the major local challenges, thus undercutting our Nepad philosophy of 'Africa-led solutions to African challenges'

Increased and strategic resource allocation is necessary to address this challenge.

In collaboration with efficient strategic partners, we in the department of Human Resources, Science and Technology have therefore embarked on some projects based on the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa; as well as the Consolidated Plan of Action for Science and Technology in Africa. The projects aim to enhance the quality and attractiveness and effectiveness of African higher education, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training or TVET.

These are, namely:

- 1. Development and implementation of the African Quality Rating Mechanism for Higher Education**

- 2. Technical and Vocational Education and Training**
With initial focus on countries in post-conflict circumstances

- 3. Mwalimu Nyerere African Union Scholarship Scheme**
For African students to study in African institutions

- 4. Pan African University programme**
It will consist of differentiated, regional, University networks, co-ordinated around five nodes or hubs, identified from among existing institutions of higher education, training and research in five thematic areas.

Allow me, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, to conclude with an observation on partnerships:

Strategic partnerships among key stakeholders are essential to succeeding in education in Africa. Parallel initiatives that do not add value to one another serve largely to diminish the cumulative positive impacts of efforts in the sector. Africa will move faster if development agencies harmonise their support to Africa as called for by the AU summit of heads of state and government, in January 2008.

For these reasons, my department is pleased to be associated with this conference for African Ministers of Education and - 5 - Ministers of Finance, organized jointly by ADEA, the ADB and the World Bank.

We believe that this conference will help ensure that the recognition and appreciation of the indispensable role of education in social and economic development, is translated into continued and enhanced allocation of significant resources to this sector.

I therefore look forward to the discussions and conclusions of this important conference, and the expected positive outcomes.

I thank you.