

Statement from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
Geneva, 17 February 2006

By Makane Faye

I thank you Mr. Chairman for convening this important forum, which is fully inclusive and for giving to ECA the opportunity to address this gathering of distinguished stakeholders, as member of the UN Regional Commission's group.

Mr. Chairman,

We have been talking about Internet Governance during the last 3 years because of the growing importance of the social, economic, cultural and political role of the Internet. Moreover at the global level, key ICT decisions are being made at various international meetings and in global institutions that directly or indirectly have implications on the development, deployment and the exploitation of ICTs in a number of developing countries, including Africa. Some of these global policy decisions are also having an impact on and shaping the direction and the nature of ICT for Development policies and programmes in these countries. These issues have been discussed in length in Africa in several fora including discussion lists on Internet Governance to gather African input for the WSIS process, face to face meetings during the African Regional Preparatory Conferences on the WSIS, preparing research papers¹ (in cooperation with the UN ICT Task Force) However despite all these efforts, African participation in global IG is still hampered by several factors including:

- The limited bargaining power and leverage of African countries as compared to other countries and regional blocs;
- The absence of consistent positions by African countries on major global Internet governance issues;

¹ The Internet Governance Space: Exploring the Core Issues from Africa's Perspective; by ECA and the UNICT Task Force, April 2005

- The lack of expertise and capacity in relevant Internet governance issues, including IG policy, standards and technical issues;
- The absence of effective cooperation amongst African countries on how to engage in collective negotiation on relevant Internet governance issues for their mutual benefit
- The effect of some of the extra-regional bloc alliances that some Africa countries enter into, which in some cases makes it difficult for African countries to act as a group to present a common front on Internet governance issues.
- The lack of the necessary financial resources to meet the cost of attending the meetings of the relevant IG organizations.

These factors have increased the acute dependency of African countries on a Governance system for which they have little or no influence. Hence in line with the WSIS outcomes, we recommend the Internet Governance Forum to address ICT related development issues, as a priority including the following:

- Capacity building
 - Affordable and equitable access
 - National Infrastructure development
 - Interconnection costs and development of Exchange points
 - Cultural and linguistic diversity
 - Cyber security and data protection to prevent unlawful access, use of the Internet to perpetrate crimes and frauds, unsolicited mail and Spam
 - Intellectual property rights to protect creators and prevent digital piracy
 - Free and Open Source Software to bring digital inclusion
 - Development of sectoral applications, including e-commerce, e-government, e-education, etc. to create digital opportunities and enable achievement of the MDGs.
- In this context, ECA and Industry Canada are launching an African e-Trade Forum and an African Public Key Infrastructure Forum with the support of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF).

Mr Chairman,

On the structure and its composition, we believe the IGF should have a multi-stakeholder Steering Committee, at both the regional and international levels composed of Governments, public and private sector, existing Internet bodies and civil society, international organizations, and operate under the supervision of the UN Secretary-General.

In order to make the process inclusive and take into account views of stakeholders at the national and continental levels, the IGF annual meetings should be preceded by regional meetings, which may be organized as often as necessary. This would allow regions prepare common positions as well as unified input and come up with a common understanding before moving to the global level. These regional meetings may be held together with the implementation and evaluation workshops to be organized by the UN Regional Commissions in accordance to the WSIS action lines. This may lead to more efficient annual meetings. In addition, use of on-line resources and on-line meetings as well as video conferencing facilities should be encouraged at both regional and global levels.

Concerning the output of the IGF, we believe it would not be enough to exchange views and information only but also to have the IGF influence decisions and processes to be taken in the IG arena.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman I am pleased to inform you that, as capacity building is one of the biggest obstacles to Africa's participation in the IG process, ECA is working with UN DESA and the other UN Regional Commissions in developing training material and organizing on-site and on-line courses on Internet Governance for policymakers. With the support of Industry Canada and participation of other partners such as OIF, ICANN and the Diplo Foundation, Africa will held its first course in May 2006 in Kigali (Rwanda). The online course will be made available at ECA's African Virtual Learning Academy: www.uneca.org/itca/vlac.

Thank you.