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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
25 March 2012

Honourable Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning and welcome to this ECOSOC Regional Preparatory Meeting for Africa.

At the outset, I thank ~~the~~ ~~United Nations~~ ~~Economic Commission~~ ~~for Africa (ECA)~~ ~~and the International Labour Organization (ILO)~~ ~~for their support in~~ ~~convening this important dialogue.~~ I especially thank YOU honourable Ministers and other distinguished delegates for making the journey to attend and taking the time to participate in spite of your busy schedules.

Ladies and Gentlemen, why are we here?

Our talks will centre on a very specific topic: the role small and medium-sized enterprises play in the development of the African continent.

focus on productivity, growth and employment could not be more important without them, our goals of raising living standards and creating more and better opportunities for our people, especially our youth, is surely unattainable.

Encouragingly, here in Africa there is much to celebrate... because evidence points to a continent on the move...

A continent witnessing transformative economic growth rates, showing noticeable commercial vibrancy, and offering tremendous opportunities in the horizon.

A continent more integrated in the world economy through partnerships more diverse than ever before.

Over the past decade, six of the world's ten fastest-growing countries were African. In eight of those past 10 years, Africa as a whole grew faster than even East Asia. And despite a slowdown among rich economies this year, Africa is expected to continue to grow by at least 5% in 2012, again similar to Asia.

Banking, retailing, telecommunications and construction are booming. Private investment inflows are also on the rise. The Annual flow of foreign direct investment to the continent increased from 9 billion US dollars in 2000 to more than 65 billion in 2008.

In the last ten years GNI per capita growth in Sub-Saharan Africa reached around 60%, compared to only 17% in the previous decade.

This is just a snapshot of Africa's recent achievements ... but it tells a story of undeniable success.

Still, of course, there is also plenty to fret about.

Despite the emergence of a new middle class, for many Africans living below the poverty line the majority of the continent's one billion people disease and hunger remain a major challenge. Economic growth is clearly trickling down, but not fast enough

slow and uneven. Take child mortality: for every 1,000 children, 118 will die before their fifth birthday. Two decades ago, the figure was 165, not much higher.

Clearly, our work remains anything but finished. Scaling-up progress will also require far more and far better international coordination. The United Nations is a good place to start.

As Vice-President of the UN Economic and Social Council proudly representing Africa, I would like to briefly tell you something about the Council's role in this regard and how today's meeting will feed into the Council's work.

For over 60 years, ECOSOC has served as the principle global forum where nations assemble to collectively address global development challenges. Its strength has always been its broad representation – a place for countries large and small alike to voice their concerns and seek solutions to common problems. Since 2007, ECOSOC's substantive session has featured the Annual Ministerial Review, and the Development Cooperation



development among women, young people and other marginalized groups in the region?