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**Opening Statement at the Regional Meeting for Africa  
for the 2012 ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review**

Dar es Salaam, 14 March 2013

Honourable Ministers,  
Ambassador Nestor Osorio, President of ECOSOC,  
Director-General Francis Gurry (if present)  
Executive Secretary Carlos Lopes (if present),  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address this important meeting on behalf of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. I extend heartfelt gratitude to the Government of Tanzania for their warm hospitality in hosting this meeting. The Government of Japan has been a long-time partner of the UN and Africa, and in supporting these deliberations.

I am also grateful to our colleagues in WIPO for their excellent support, and all participants for making today's event possible. I would also like to acknowledge the work of other UN partners, including UNESCO, UNIDO and ITU.

With the MDG deadline approaching, and work on a post-2015 development agenda well underway, innovation is a very timely topic.

Innovation is needed to meet our common development goals. It is important in the final push for the MDGs and in unleashing the potential for sustainable development.

Our collective history is closely intertwined with the history of innovation. And, as with any social progress, innovation must be supported and steered by public policies.

At DESA, we help to build the capacities that shape public policy towards innovation.

Here in Africa, our support also comes through the work of capacity development. We do this in close cooperation with other stakeholders. Our partnerships with UN entities are also critical to channelling support to Governments, as is our continuing support to ECOSOC.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Innovations help break down barriers and bridge gaps. Take the cell phone as an example. The impact of mobile technologies in Africa goes far beyond the use of phones in the traditional sense. It alters the way business is done, land is cultivated and health care is provided.

Today, there are more Africans with a mobile phone than electrical sockets to charge it. Broadband penetration is on the rise, especially through increased access to undersea cables.

While the effects of broadband on economic growth are still being measured, the World Bank estimates that a 10 percent increase in broadband penetration can lead to a 1.4 per cent boost in per capita GDP.

However, the infrastructure is not evenly distributed. Because of this, the poor and those living in rural areas lack important access to modern information and communication technologies. More must be done to increase their access to this infrastructure. The mobile phone of today can benefit in so many ways, serving as health advisor, bank teller, weather forecaster, and many more. In fact, in my first trip to Addis Ababa, I had a chance to discuss with ECA Executive Secretary Carlos the use of mobile technologies for data collection – I am sure you will hear more from Mr. Carlos on this application.

Technological progress is certainly an important factor in achieving development goals, including the MDGs. And sustainable development relies on a balanced interface between policy and science, technology and innovation.

Green technologies are essential to providing sustainable energy. Yet, for Energy for All to become a reality, we must find a way to utilize the extensive wind, water, solar and geothermal potential of the continent.

Innovations in the health sector – from the development of new medicines to enhanced patterns of health service delivery – are key to ensure that no illness remains untreated.

Food security is another very important area. Successfully feeding a fast growing population, while at the same time economizing on land, water, fertilizer, and pesticides, poses enormous challenges. Among others, it requires major gains in agricultural productivity. Innovation, on an unprecedented scale, is the only avenue to that basic goal, which so far has eluded us.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

What does it take to encourage innovation?

What does it take to expand the benefits of innovation and new technologies?  
How can innovation be rooted in the local context of peoples' lives?

These are some of the questions we wish to address today.

Indeed, there are no easy answers. But we can learn from the many success stories that are found here, in Africa.

Let's start with education.. Success in expanding access to universal primary education across Africa is crucial to the absorption of technology. The huge potential of bottom-up innovation can be eventually tapped.

Advancing digital literacy should now become an objective of every national education strategy.

Equally, science education should be an integral part of primary, secondary and tertiary curricula.

But governments must and can do more.

For example, by establishing a comprehensive policy framework for innovation that take into account the lifecycle of developing, financing and marketing innovation.

Funding for research and development is a crucial element but is usually a major constraint in Africa.

Lack of human capital, likewise critical, is also lacking in Africa. Too often, we see a lack of venture capital or human capabilities for bringing worthwhile innovations to the market.

Therefore it is important to view innovation as a system, with global, regional, national and sub-national dimensions, cutting across a range of policy areas.

Designing policies that integrate these dimensions and are tailored to the specificities of national and local contexts should become our main focus.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Access to technologies is essential for sustainable development. We must find a way to nurture innovation, especially for young entrepreneurs from developing countries. All of this requires active collaboration at the global level.

The Economic and Social Council provides a platform for such discussions. The Annual Ministerial Review in July in Geneva will focus on global collaboration for achieving results at the regional and national levels.

A strong message from today's meeting – and your active engagement in these processes – will certainly help in achieving concrete results at the AMR. Your messages will also contribute to the discussions on the post-2015 development framework.

I look forward to your ideas and concrete recommendations. I wish you successful deliberations.

Thank you.

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