Honourable Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Minister of Public Service of South Africa,
Honourable Young-Kyo OH, Minister of Government Administration and Home Affairs of the Republic of Korea,
Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa, UNDP
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Participants at the Regional Forum,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, I would like to thank you all for accommodating this event in your tight schedules. As you are all aware, the Regional Forum is an integral part of the Global Forum that, in accordance with the UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/57/277/ of 2002, is held every two years. The Forum is a bridge on which governance principles and practices meet, and on which global initiatives interact with regional and local priorities. The Forum offers tremendous opportunities for diverse stakeholders – notably, high-ranking Government officials, eminent public administration scholars, corporate leaders, representatives of international organizations, donor agencies, and non-governmental organizations - to exchange ideas on approaches to critical public policy and management challenges facing the world as a whole, and its constituent regions.

Ever since 1999, when the first Global Forum was held in Washington DC, deliberations at plenary sessions and in working groups have consistently revolved around one overarching theme, “Reinventing Government”. In both ordinary and natural usage, the term “reinventing government” covers a very wide field, and includes measures such as
the re-engineering of existing constitutional as well as political arrangements, reform of administrative systems and processes, forging public-private partnerships, and active engagements of the civil society. There is an emerging global consensus that these and related measures to reinvent government lead to the improvement of service delivery and access, to the empowerment of civic groups, to strong accountability of state functionaries, to the introduction of modern information and communication technologies that add public value and increase the effectiveness and impact of government initiated programmes.

The eclectic nature of the reinvention theme is reflected in the topics engaging the attention of participants at succeeding Global Forums. Thus, when the second Forum took place in Brasilia, Brazil in 2000, discussions focused on “Democratic States and Governance in the 21st Century”. The Third Forum held in Naples, Italy, in 2001 deliberated on the topic, “Fostering Democracy and Development through e-Government”, while the Fourth Forum, held in Marrakech, Morocco in 2002, discussed “Citizens, Businesses, and Governments – Partnership for Development and Democracy”. The most recent, that is, the Fifth Global Forum held in Mexico City in 2003, reflected on challenges of, and approaches to, “Innovation and Quality in 21st Century Government”. The theme of the Sixth Forum scheduled to take place in Seoul, Korea, in May 2005 is “Towards a Participatory and Transparent Governance”.

With the contemporary global reinvention thrusts as its point of departure, and against the backdrop of the challenges facing the Africa region, the Regional Forum that is about to commence addresses the question of how to galvanize governance and public administration systems and enhance their capacity to attain the strategic as well as the tactical objectives of the New Partnership for African Development. The Forum’s specific objectives are to:

- highlight and discuss the role of visionary leadership, good governance and effective public administration in responding to the challenges of NEPAD and sustainable development and poverty reduction in Africa;
• assess the efforts made within and across countries to reform governance and public service practices, spearhead public administration innovation, and reposition the public service for the NEPAD challenges;
• examine critical factors accounting for success or failure of programmes to re-invent government within the Africa region;
• suggest modalities for the establishment of knowledge networks (including institutional arrangements which would enable think-tanks, universities, training and research institutions, and representatives of the government to share knowledge and experiences); and
• identify areas of common concern and a framework for regional and national cooperation on the implementation of NEPAD and the APRM.

The United Nations is delighted to note that NEPAD is not only a home-grown initiative, but also a vision that is linked in more ways than one to the Millennium Declaration. The New Partnership’s objectives for poverty eradication, infrastructure development, sustainable development, peace building, good governance and capacity building, for instance, find natural allies in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and in the Secretary-General’s Road Map towards the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. While dwelling on the affinity between NEPAD and the MDGs, I wish to call the attention of this distinguished gathering to General Assembly resolution A/56/326 of 6 September 2001. Besides outlining strategies for achieving the MDG targets, the resolution proposes measures to consolidate the gains of contemporary governance and market reforms. Specifically, and in order to respond to the continent’s special needs, the resolution proposes, among other things, that the international community support:

(a) the political and institutional structures of emerging democracies (and of the growing number of democratically elected governments in Africa);
(b) regional and sub-regional mechanisms for conflict prevention and peace building (including timely release of resources for peace keeping operations, and the creation of conditions for durable peace);
(c) efforts at addressing the challenges of poverty eradication and sustainable development (including debt cancellation, improved market access, enhanced official development assistance and increased flow of foreign direct investment, as well as transfer of technology);

(d) programmes designed to build capacity to tackle the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other infectious diseases.

The question may be asked why governmental reinvention should engage our attention. From the African standpoint, the importance of effective, accountable and civically engaged governance and public administration institutions cannot be over-emphasized. Indeed, if the Africa region is to respond adequately to the complex and momentous challenges on the socio-economic and political fronts, and if the continent is to become a force to reckon with in this era of rapid globalization, it is essential that governance and public administration institutions be held to the litmus tests of professionalism, accountability, impact, and citizen-responsiveness. Without a sound foundation of governance and public administration, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to attain the NEPAD objectives and the MDGs.

As an arm of the United Nations Secretariat, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, has placed emphasis on efforts aimed at backstopping the Africa region’s efforts at reinventing government and at responding to the multiple challenges of poverty eradication, sustainable development and democratization. Inspired by the vision and encouraged by the commitment of African leaders, the Department has worked with a number of institutions within the continent on the design and implementation of a variety of institution renewal programmes. Examples are the Charter for the Public Service in Africa which was adopted by the Pan African Conference of Public Service Ministers in Windhoek, Namibia, in February 2001; the NEPAD Programme of on Governance and Public Administration approved the Pan African Conference in Stellenbosch, South Africa in 2003; and the African Leadership Capacity Building Programme that was commissioned by a high-level ministerial conference held in Kampala, Uganda, in January 2004. I must take this opportunity to commend the African Public Service
Ministers for their foresight and prevision, and to thank them for associating UNDESA with their noble and worthy causes. It goes without saying the above-mentioned initiatives and the broad thrusts of this Regional Forum are closely linked – linked in the sense that they are all geared towards placing the Africa continent on a trajectory of growth, development, and enhanced global competitiveness.

Before I conclude my speech, I would like to express the gratitude of the United Nations Secretariat to the Government and People of South Africa for agreeing to host this Regional Forum and for the hospitality extended to all the delegates since their arrival in this dynamic country. A particular thanks goes to Minister Fraser-Moleketi personally and to her very efficient team for having organized this meeting. Ms. Moleketi, as a member of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration of ECOSOC, brings the African perspective to the global discussion on reinventing government.

I would also like to thank the Africa Union and the NEPAD Secretariat for collaborating with the United Nations on the organization of this important event. A key partner whose support deserves special mention is the United Nations Development Programme. Besides providing a sizeable proportion of the resources needed to make this Forum happen, the UNDP has consistently responded to our call to work with our African partners; and I wish to thank personally Mr. Abdoulie Janneh for his constant support.

Finally, I wish to express our appreciation to the African states represented at this Forum. It is my hope that the Forum will live up to their expectations and lead the way to their successful participation in the Sixth Global Forum in Seoul. The presence of Minister Oh of the Republic of Korea, whose office is responsible for the organization of the Forum, testifies to the interest of the Korean government for inputs from the African continent.

In thanking you for your attention, I wish you successful deliberations.