OPENING STATEMENT
By Mr. John-Mary Kauzya, Chief Governance and Public Administration Branch, on behalf of Mr. Guido Bertucci, Director, Division for Public Administration and Development Management, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Regional Forum on Reinventing Government in Africa:
Building Trust in Government
11-13 December 2006, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

The Representative of the Government of Ethiopia,
African Union Deputy Chairperson, H.E., Mr. Patrick Mazimhaka,
UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA,
Mr Abdoulie Janneh,
Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers for Public Service and for Local Government,
Your Excellencies, Honourable Members and Clerks of National Legislative Assemblies,
The Dean and Members of the Diplomatic Community,
The UN Resident Coordinator,
My Colleagues from the UNDP, other UN agencies, and the African Governance Institute,
Distinguished Participants,
Invited Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, I would like to thank you all for accepting our invitation to participate at this Regional Forum. I feel singularly honored to be here in your midst and to exchange ideas on issues of critical importance to governance and public administration systems the world over. I am particularly delighted to be back in the historic and beautiful city of Addis Ababa.

It was at this same venue nine years ago that I had the privilege of addressing a gathering of notables like this. The occasion was the inauguration of the African Governance Forum series – an initiative that was actively promoted by the United Nations, implemented in collaboration with African Governments, civic organizations, and other partners, and financially supported by the UNDP’s Regional Bureau for Africa then headed by the current ECA Executive Secretary, Mr Abdoulie Janneh.
The Regional Forum on Reinventing Government builds on the achievements of the African Governance Forum. A good number of those present here today are already familiar with the Regional Forum’s underlying philosophy and methodology. For the benefit of those who are participating for the first time, let me quickly trace its antecedents and summarize its objectives.

The Regional Forum takes place in different regions of the world in preparation for a more elaborate event, that is, the Global Forum on Reinventing Government, which the UN General Assembly by its resolution A/RES/57/277 of 2002 mandated the Secretariat to organize after taking into account governance issues of global and contemporary interest. Like the Global Forum which it anticipates, the Regional Forum offers tremendous opportunities for diverse stakeholders – notably, high-ranking Government officials, eminent public administration scholars, business 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 in general, and each region, in particular.

Right from 1999 when the first Global Forum was held in Washington DC, deliberations at plenary sessions and in working groups have consistently revolved around a common theme, “Reinventing Government”. Using this broad theme as a point of departure, succeeding Global Forums have focused on fairly specific topics such as “Democratic States and Governance in the 21st Century” (Brasilia, Brazil 2000); “Fostering Democracy and Development through e-Government” (Naples, Italy, 2001); “Citizens, Businesses, and Governments – Partnership for Development and Democracy” (Marrakech, Morocco in 2002); “Innovation and Quality in 21st Century Government” (Mexico City, Mexico, 2003); and “Towards Participatory and Transparent Governance” (Seoul, Korea, in 2005).

The theme of this year’s Regional Forum is “Building Trust in Government” which is the same as the one for the Global Forum scheduled to be held in Vienna, Austria, in June 2007. It is not by chance that the United Nations and its partners picked this topic out of many. Of all the challenges facing governance and public administration systems worldwide today, none is more dominant, more precipitate, and more daunting than that
of how to strengthen citizen trust in public authority. Whether it is in the mature democracies, or in developing societies as well as the emerging market economies, there is a growing perception that governments and their peoples are not speaking the same language, and that when they do, neither side seems to understand what the other is saying. I have deliberately refrained from prejudging issues that would come up at plenary and breakaway sessions. Still, I am counting on this gathering of eminent practitioners and scholars to spare time to give due consideration to how to repair whatever fissure there is between government, as we know it, and the People, with a capital P.

From the United Nations point of view, it is gratifying to note that serious and sustained efforts are being made by Governments in different African countries to create conditions allowing the People to make their voices heard and to have their concerns addressed by those in authority. While a lot remains to be done to enhance the level of public trust in government, significant efforts are being made to activate and respect the social contract between the rulers and the ruled. By extending the political space to accommodate dissenting views, Governments are building solid foundations for peace and stability within the region. It is the hope of the United Nations that the next generation of governance and public administration reforms would greatly reduce whatever physical, psychological or emotional distance remains between the governments and their publics.

The United Nations stands ready to work with the African Governments as they embark on measures aimed at strengthening or restoring public confidence – particularly, confidence in existing constitutional arrangements, in contemporary electoral systems and practices, in the policies targeted towards social and distributive justice, and in the integrity and the legitimacy of public institutions, including the decisions taken therein. Besides sensitizing the international community to the plight of the poor in different parts of the world, and mobilizing resources for the effective implementation of the MDGs, the United Nations provides, on request from member States, technical advisory services in various areas.

In this regard, I wish to draw this august gathering’s attention to the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, which emphasized the centrality of governance capacity
development in multiple contexts, including the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, the promotion of economic growth and economic development. Like other Departments and Offices in the United Nations, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through its Division for Public Administration and Development Management, has identified a few critical areas in which it hopes to support on-going governance and public administration reform efforts in Africa. Among these are:

(a) Rebuilding public administration institutions and capacities in post-conflict societies (including preparation of project documents to support resource mobilization efforts);

(b) Enhancement of the service delivery capacity of local governance institutions;

(c) Participatory governance (trends, practices, and strategies);

(d) The African Governance Inventory; and

(e) Public administration innovation and e-Government initiatives for improved delivery of services.

I would now like to turn to a few technical details regarding the conduct of this Regional Forum. The objectives of the Forum have been spelt out in the aide memoire transmitted to you earlier, and so do not need to be mentioned. However, I wish to stress that the usefulness of the Forum will be judged largely by the quality of the participants’ inputs. This, in fact, is the rationale for the innovation in this year’s format. Realizing the need to reflect regional concerns in the deliberations of the Global Forum coming up in Vienna next year, it has been decided to integrate in this year’s programme the outcomes or conclusions of high-level meetings organized in different African countries. I refer in particular to the special panels that will be leading the discussions on the following topics:

(i) Building Trust in Government through Enhancing the Capacity for Citizen/Civic Participation in Local Governance (by the Pan African Conference of Ministers for Local Government);
(ii) Improving the Conduct of Public Officials: Implementing the Charter for Public Service in Africa (by the Pan African Conference of Ministers of Public Service);

(iii) Building Trust in Government through Improving the Delivery and Accessibility of Public Services (by the African Association for Public Administration and Management, AAPAM);

(iv) Promoting Public Administration Innovation through e-Government (By UNDESA and UNECA).

Before I conclude my statement, I would like to thank our partners for their efforts and unstinting support. While time will not permit me to mention every one, I wish to acknowledge the support given by the UNDP/BDP, sister UN agencies, the Africa Governance Institute, and our host, the ECA. Allow me also to express appreciation to the following for their substantive preparation of the Discussion Panels for Regional Forum; the Pan African Conference of Ministers of Public Service, the Pan African Conference of Ministers for Local Government, the African Association for Public Administration and Management and the various national Legislative Assemblies represented here. We are also grateful to the Government and People of Ethiopia for the hospitality extended to us since our arrival in the country. Finally, you – the distinguished participants – your presence is highly appreciated. I know that you are all very busy people. That you have spared these days to dedicate to the discussions of the Regional Forum underscores the importance of its substance.

I look forward to days of lively discussions and, above everything else, to a conclusion that we can proudly take to Vienna as Africa’s perspective on how to build trust in government.

I thank you all for your patience and attention.