ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES

TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE
COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

OUAGADOUGOU, 25 - 27 JUNE, 1989.

"A TIME FOR IMPLEMENTATION"

NOTE OF PRESENTATION ON THE 1988/89
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

D R. ABASS BUNDU

OUAGADOUGOU, JUNE 25, 1989

Honourable Host Minister of Finance of Burkina Faso,

Honourable Chairman of Council,

Honourable Ministers,

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Mr. Secretary-General of CEAO,

Mr. Managing Director of ECOWAS Fund,

Mr. Secretary-General of CILSS

Esteemed Invited Guests,

Distinguished Delegates,

My Colleagues in the Service of the Institutions of our Community,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with great joy that I add my voice to those of the Honourable Chairman of Council and our host Minister, to welcome Members of Council and their delegations to this Twenty-fifth Session of the Council of Ministers. On my own behalf and on behalf of my colleagues in the service of the Community, as well as on behalf of everyone arriving here for the 1989 ECOWAS Annual Meetings, I should like to express our deepest gratitude to His Excellency Captain Blaise COMPAORE, Chairman of the Popular Front, Head of State and Head of Government, and to the Burkinabé Government and People for accepting so readily to host these Statutory Meetings. We are all very appreciative of the warm and fraternal welcome as well as the generous hospitality of our gracious hosts. The excellent facilities provided by the Burkinabe Government are contributing immensely to our preparations for the 1989 ECOWAS Summit of the Heads of State and Government.

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I feel deeply honoured and privileged to be able to present this Annual Report on the activities of our Community to the Twenty-fifth session of the Council of Ministers. With an abiding sense of gratitude, I wish to seize this opportunity to specially acknowledge the honour conferred on me by His Excellency, Major-General Dr. Joseph Saidu MOMOH, Président of the Republic of Sierra Leone and his Government in nominating me to serve as the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS.

In the same vein, I would like to express my humble appreciation to the current Chairman of the Authority, His Excellency, Alhaji Dawda Kairaba JAWARA, President of the Republic of The Gambia and a founding father of the Community for appointing me to this exalted office and for initiating me into ECOWAS with much fatherly advice and guidance. Here, I should also like to make a public acknowledgement of the privilege and honour accorded me by all the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government during my official visits to their capitals. Their Excellencies warmly received me in audience, expressing their approbation for my appointment. I am particularly grateful to Their Excellencies, General Ibrahim Badamasi BABANGIDA, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, General Gnassingbe EYADEMA, President of the Togolese Republic and Mr. Abdou DIOUF, President of the Republic of Senegal for facilitating my visits to capitals by graciously making available to me the use of their presidential aircraft.

May I also take this opportunity to thank all Ministers responsible for ECOWAS Affairs in Member States for making my country visits the success it was, and for their advice and kind words of encouragement. Permit me, Honourable Members of Council, to single out for special mention, the invaluable assistance of your Chairman, the Honourable Mbemba JATTA, the Minister of Economic Planning and Industrial Development of The Gambia. The Honourable

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Minister has truly merged his functions as Chairman of Council with his normal ministerial duties, and has successfully and diligently attended to all ECOWAS matters in a most admirable manner. All this has helped me tremendously in my first few months in office.

Honourable Ministers,

The Annual Report for the period 1988/89 which had been circulated to capitals and is now before Council, begins with a review of economic conditions in the West African sub-region. Following this, there is a detailed account of the performance of the Institutions of the Community. The Report then goes on to indicate what the focus of the Community's Work Programme would be for the months ahead. The Report ends with some concluding remarks and observations.

Instead of touching upon each point raised in the Report, my intention in this Note of Presentation is to highlight only a few, but key, issues to which I wish to invite the special attention of this session of Council.

Honourable Ministers,

The economic situation in the sub-region continues to be a source of great concern. The depressed or sluggish commodity prices, the excruciating debt service burden, obsolete technology, and the protectionist practices of industrial countries, to name just a few, have combined to curtail most severely our ability to implement our national adjustment and reform programmes, finance critical imports, rehabilitate existing infrastructure, not to speak of new development projects so vital for recovery and growth. Thus, in spite of all the effort and sacrifice we are making, West Africa is yet to overcome the economic crisis.

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There is a remarkable convergence of opinion among our Member States that there are indeed structural weaknesses in our economies and these must be addressed and reformed. And they are already doing so, whether the reform programme is autochthonous or externally influenced and financed. There may be differences of opinion on the pace and scope of reform and on its success to date. The fact of the matter is that the reforming process is going on in every one of our Member countries, and evidence abounds, testifying to the zeal and determination of our Governments to succeed.

So, therefore, we must first of all publicly acclaim the courage and commitment of the Member States in undertaking such a difficult task. We wish them every success, for we, at Community level, have a real stake in the measures each Member State is taking to reverse its domestic economic decline; for the success or otherwise of these measures are bound to impact heavily upon the integration process in our sub-region.

Having said that, permit me, Honourable Chairman, to draw attention to at least three issues. First, considering the persistence of the economic crisis in the face of the mounting social cost of the current reform programmes, and the severe strains they have put on development and sub-regional integration, is it not legitimate to ask if addressing ourselves primarily to macro-economic issues was the best we could have attempted?

Secondly, as the social repercussions of the current recovery or adjustment programmes continue to pose serious problems to Member States, is there not a need to take urgent steps to alleviate the social cost of these reform and adjustment policies and give them a "human face"? We say this, because economies exist to serve the populace and

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not the other way around; and that without a populace there will be no economy. It is well to keep in focus that the acquiescence of the populace who have so far borne the privations of adjustment with admirable equanimity, has come about mainly because of the promises offered of a brighter and better future. It is most vital that such promises are fulfilled if future difficulties are to be averted. We strongly advocate, therefore, that as fiscal reforms are put into place, as market forces reign supreme and welfare programmes are on the retreat, so should equal attention be given to the social consequences of reform policies and to the public investment programmes as the engines of growth and equity.

Thirdly, the evidence so far suggests the urgency of the problems facing national governments in the sub-region have tended to lead to the adoption of uncoordinated short-term defensive measures, aimed mainly at insulating the national economy from the ravages of external forces and influences. This is so, to the extent that even where a machinery for joint consultation exists, among regional partners, no effective use has been made of it. Indeed, there is abundant evidence to suggest that older reform programmes, especially those influenced by the multilateral financial institutions, did not give sufficient weight to regional integration; some actually down-played it. The net effect has been that these traditional models of recovery or adjustment programmes have deprived countries in the sub-region of the advantages they could have derived from a regional approach to the economic crisis.

It was against this backdrop that the ECOWAS Ministers of Planning met in Dakar in April this year to review the implementation of the ECOWAS Economic Recovery Programme. Their report is before this Council for consideration. The Planning Ministers have called for closer

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consultation among national policy-makers, for an objective review of national recovery programmes and a more regionally-oriented approach to the economic problems facing Member States.

I invite Council to give the report its closest attention.

Moreover, whichever way we look at our problems, it is obvious that West Africa cannot make any meaningful headway unless there is a significant improvement in the international environment. We stand in great need of a substantial net inflow of development resources on highly concessionary terms. This is why Council is also being invited to initiate a special resolution to be adopted by the Authority on the ninth replenishment of IDA (IDA-9). The IDA-9 resolution of the Authority should urge for ready and generous participation by all countries, especially the most industrialised countries, the Group of Seven and to at least maintain Africa's share of those resources at 50%, as under IDA-8, in order to help sustain the reform programmes presently being implemented in the Member States.

The improvement in the international climate includes substantial absolute debt reduction and other forms of debt relief. The international community should pass from the consideration of proposals as contained in the Toronto Declaration and the Brady Statement to concrete action like the debt cancellation package recently announced by the French President, Mr. François MITTERAND. We ought to applaud the French President for this bold initiative and urge other major creditor nations which have not yet done so to follow this shining example. However, within the ECOWAS sub-region, the two so-called middle-income countries have economic structures and problems not different from, and no less severe than what obtains in the other fourteen Member States. Within the West African sub-region, one debtor is like any other and the favourable treatment being demanded should be

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extended to every ECOWAS country. A debtor country remains a debtor country no matter its classification. What is needed, and needed urgently, in our sub-region is substantial debt forgiveness whatever the shibboleth used to describe it.

Having said all this, let me end this part of my presentation by calling on all concerned, governments and populace alike, to appreciate the urgent priority of reform programmes for correcting the ills of our various economies. It is certainly not a time to show "adjustment fatigue"; nor is it a time for despair. Adjustment is painstaking, difficult and long-term. But we cannot afford to relent and the struggle must simply continue for there is really no credible alternative.

Honourable Ministers,

If I may now turn to the performance of the Community itself. It will be seen from the Report before Council that the Institutions of the Community have spent the last few months fulfilling the directives given by Council at its last session at Banjul, in December, 1988. From the account given in Chapter III of the Report it will be appreciated that the Institutions covered a wider ground than the Banjul directives. Indeed, I have gained the distinct impression, upon a preliminary study of the wide scope of cooperation activity of the Community, that there is a definite need for a certain amount of prioritisation and reorientation, in order to give a sharper focus to the West African integration process. To date, it seems to me that the Community has been spreading itself too thinly across a variety of cooperation programmes within the constraints of a limited resource base. Prospects of this resource base improving substantially in the near future remain problematic. It, therefore, becomes necessary that some prioritisation of Community activities be undertaken, and this I am already doing, in-house.

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This suggestion is also being made against the backdrop of the unrelenting socio-economic conditions in Member States, the difficulties encountered with contributions to the operational budget of the Secretariat and the other thirty-odd sub-regional inter-governmental organisations (IGO's), and also against the backdrop of continuing reform and restructuring programmes of Member States. If economic cooperation and integration are to make the expected contribution to the development of the sub-region, the rationalisation that our Heads of State and Government gave voice to in 1983 will have to be approached with utmost seriousness, and with the necessary degree. of conviction and commitment. As has just been so aptly urged by the Chairman of Council, Honourable Ministers should impress upon our Heads of State the urgency for an unequivocal pronouncement on this political matter. Structural adjustment should not just stop at national frontiers; it should be extended also to the large number of IGOs in the sub-region which are making continuous demands on the limited financial resources of our sub-region.

I am deeply encouraged by the new readiness of the decision-making organs of our Community to take a very close look into this matter. Ministers will recall that in 1984 the Authority took a decision to authorise ECOWAS to manage the resources allocated to West Africa under the Regional Cooperation Chapter of the Third ACP/EEC Convention for and on behalf of the sixteen Member States of our Community. The Authority further directed the Executive Secretary to work closely, with the Commission of the European Communities, to ensure the effective implementation of that decision. That decision was taken some five years ago. To date, nothing has happened, and it is not for want of effort on the part of the Executive Secretariat. What we have found is that this mandate was not exclusive to ECOWAS; similar mandates were given to other IGOs in the sub-region each of whom proceeded to tender their

mandate to the EEC. Confronted with this situation, it is understandable why the EEC has shown great reluctance to treat the vast majority of the IGOs with seriousness in terms of the granting of access to its Regional Fund.

Against this background, it is most important that this issue be given serious attention by Council. We would recommend that the Executive Secretariat of ECOWAS should be given the role of coordinating the requests of all the IGOs in the sub-region for access to the EEC Regional Fund; secondly that a substantial share of the regional funds allocated to West Africa should go to ECOWAS for the purpose of promoting regional integration; and thirdly that the ECOWAS Ambassadors in Brussels should be mandated, in collaboration with the ECOWAS, to negotiate effectively with a view to ensuring a direct access by IGOs to the EEC Regional Fund under the Lome IV Convention, now being negotiated, as well as ensuring that a substantial part of the Regional Fund is allocated to West Africa.

There can be no doubt that we need to rationalise and re-orientate our integration activities within the sub-region. Meanwhile I propose that we begin within ECOWAS itself this important exercise aimed at re-orientating, prioritising and streamlining the areas of sub-regional cooperation. In this context, I wish to propose that we put the promotion of intra-Community trade uppermost on the agenda of priorities in the sub-region in the years immediately ahead, including also the necessary supportive measures in related trade-development sub-sectors. I shall now proceed to indicate what the Community is already doing in these priority areas.

The topmost priority cooperation programme in this new order is the single sub-regional trade liberalisation scheme. In line with the concerns expressed by the Authority at its 1987 Summit, everything has been done to facilitate the take-off of the scheme. It is expected that the new take-off date of January 1, 1990 will be formally announced by

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the Authority, and Council is therefore urged to make the relevant recommendation to the Authority. I should like to emphasise that the effective take-off of the scheme is, however, dependent upon the full payment of Member States' contributions to the compensatory budget before December 31, 1989 . The Executive Secretariat has already notified all the Member States concerned, and I have personally taken the opportunity to reinforcing this notice during my recent visits to Member States; Since there are only six months to go, Council is being called upon to make an urgent appeal by resolution to the Member States to take the necessary steps to meet this particular financial obligation on schedule.

In recognition of the dire need to develop and facilitate intra-Community trade, a number of other cooperation programmes have been adopted and are being implemented. The Annual Report touches on progress registered with respect to the ASYCUDA System, programming and harmonisation of trade fairs held within the sub-region, and the improvement of the quality and presentation of West African products.

With respect to the Community programme on the promotion of commerce-oriented production and trade re-orientation, I wish to invite Council to take special note of the big boost this programme has received during the period under review. The government of Italy has generously provided a grant of 2.7 million dollars in support of the project jointly prepared by the Executive Secretariat and the International Trade Centre (ITC) in Geneva. This project is most vital to the West African integration process as a catalyst for overcoming the strongly-entrenched trade practices existing between individual ECOWAS Member States and overseas metropolitan countries.

Honourable Ministers,

One of the important cooperation programmes that ought to receive equal attention as a support measure for the development and expansion of intra-Community trade is the free

movement of persons. The meeting of ECOWAS Ministers responsible for Internal Affairs at Banjul earlier this year reviewed the implementation of the Community's immigration protocols. Some of the findings are most disquieting. Clearly, a stronger commitment to the principle of free movement of Community citizens across national borders is needed. If ECOWAS is about the integration of the economies of the sub-region, then, by definition, we must start with the integration of our citizens. We must commit ourselves irrevocably and unequivocably to the actualityof freedom of movement, for it is the sine qua non of the very survival, and much more, of the progress and development of the Community. I trust that Council will give its full support to the important recommendations submitted by the Ministers of Internal Affairs, proposing remedial action at both Community and national levels;

Another important support measure is the Community Monetary Cooperation Programme. It must be admitted that progress on this matter has been rather disappointing, especially if one recalls the strong desire the Authority expressed for monetary integration during the Conakry Summit of 1983. We need to accelerate the pace. It is important that all Member States make known to the Governors of their Central Banks the political commitment of the Community's leadership to this programme.

The regular production integration programmes in the fields of industry and agriculture would also have to be re-oriented to boost intra-Community trade in the short to medium-term . This concern will be taken into account in the formulation of the general industrialisation programme, and more especially, in the design of the sub-regional industrial master plan. In furtherance of the general objective of production integration, the Community will concentrate on the promotion of regional projects in such vital areas as fertilizers, pesticides, seed multiplication and cattle breeding.

One of the main issues considered at the Twenty-third meeting of the Board of Directors was the Study on "Enhancing the Financial Resources of the ECOWAS Fund - an examination of further issues". Discussions on this issue led the Board to recommend the setting up of a Ministerial Committee to assist the Community pursue the matter further.

A six-member Committee has been proposed to Council specifically to take account of the needs as well as the constraints of Member States for amore effective integration of the objectives of the enhanced Fund within the sub-regional environment, in order to provide development financing. This integration will have to reflect the need for a more effective rationalisation of West African inter-governmental organisations in general and those responsible for development financing in particular. The Committee will also be required to propose mechanisms for maximum resources mobilisation in collaboration with the partner non-regional members. We look forward to the success of the Committee's efforts in this regard, as I am confident it will.

I salute the foresight of our leaders for placing so much importance on the physical integration of the sub-region. For, at an early stage of the West African integration process, the Authority adopted sub-regional transport and communications development programmes. ECOWAS can now point with justifiable pride to the substantial progress made in this field. The indications are that our partners in development will continue to support these programmes and, on behalf of the Institutions of the Community, I pledge our readiness to explore every available avenue to mobilise the resources needed for the implementation of these infra-structural programmes.

Honourable Ministers,

ECOWAS could do with more of such encouraging developments; this is one of the reasons why I am advocating that renewed efforts be concentrated on a few key areas and activities with the promise of early positive results. Unless some cheerful news comes our way, I am afraid the demoralising effect of the persistent economic crisis may spread and do irreparable damage to the sub-regional integration drive. And we can ill-afford this. If anything, we need to rekindle and revitalise regional cooperation. The whole future of our economies and, therefore, of our peoples, depends on a virile integration movement. Recent developments within the international community have accentuated the marginalisation of the development problems of the Third World, and confirm the need for greater cohesion and collective self-reliance among developing countries.

The prospect of an integrated European market in 1992, is of great moment and significance to us in West Africa. Europe 1992 is Fortress Europe, with a single external tariff; with goods, services, and capital moving freely within it. Already, European investors are divesting from Africa as fast as they reinvesting in a new Europe with the promise of greater prosperity in 1992 and beyond. So the trend is beginning to emerge. A single European market of 320 million people is producing a magnetic force which even the best of Africa's friends are finding too strong to resist. The development must surely hold serious forebodings for all of us. As if that is not enough, we see America and Canada forging new co-operation trade links, spelling more uncertainties for our own future. Similar developments are also taking place between Japan and the Pacific and Asia. Peretroiska and a democratising Eastern Europe are bringing new rays of hope to that par of the world. So then the international landscape is being dominated by economic regionalism.

Equally important is the growing development of hi-tech within the frame work of a Second Industrial Revolution in the the industrialised world while we in Africa are still learning

to cope with the intricacies of the First Industrial Revolution; Against this backdrop what should we do in our sub-region? There can be only answer. If ever there was a time West Africa needed to revitalise and re-energise itself to accelerate its own process of integration, that time is now.

If we temporise and wait until 1992 is upon us before we begin to grope for solutions, if we believe that better times might be with us soon, not only will this be a subterfuge for in-action, we would actually have condemned our generation and future generations to perpetual doom. I believe we must act, and act now. To facilitate a better understanding of the issue at stake and how best the sub-region can promote or defend its interest, we have sought permission through the Ministers of Economic Planning to undertake an indepth study of Europe 1992 and its effects on West Africa. Their report is before Council for consideration. One cannot over-emphasise the need for such a study: in these difficult and uncertain times it will be in the interest of none of our Member States to sit back and wait for the consequences of Europe 1992 to unfold before groping for solutions.

Unfortunately, Honourable Ministers, Member States cannot completely escape the indictment that on many Community cooperation matters, they have been sitting back a lot. ECOWAS has an impressive array of adopted Community Acts and Decisions

to its credit. But what has become of these Acts and Decisions, and what impact have they had on the integration development processes for which they were adopted? The answer to both questions is, precious little. The main problem in ECOWAS lies in non-ratification and non-implementation. All the beautiful programmes adopted by the Community and all plans for the future of West African integration will come to nought, if Member States do not resolve anew to implement these plans and programmes.

I should like to suggest a long pause in the adoption of new Protocols. Rather, we should embark on consolidating the gains we have achieved since 1975, by the Community launching an effective attack and concentrating its efforts on the problems of ratification, financial contribution and implementation. For the immediate future, therefore, decisions taken by the Community must be ones designed mostly to facilitate the implementation of extant programmes and decisions. In this context, I implore Honourable Ministers to recommend to the Authority that a target date of 31 December, 1989 be fixed for all outstanding Protocols and Conventions to be ratified by the Member States which have not yet done so.

I am certain that such a strategy will yield better results, because, already, the Executive Secretariat has begun to receive positive responses to my call, during my official visits to member States, for a quicker pace of ratification of protocols. Indeed, I am happy to inform Council that, between January and June this year, the situation has improved dramatically and no fewer than 7 Member States have ratified at least 16 Protocols, with Ghana topping the list with 22 followed by Sierra Leone with 21 ratifications, with only two States which

had ratified 19 Protocols when I assumed office a little over 4 months ago.

Similarly, the Secretariat is making a humble appeal to all Member States to commit themselves to a new pledge: to liquidate as quickly as possible all the outstanding arrears of contributions without further delay. For those unable to do so immediately, I would like to suggest they pay in quarterly instalments over a maximum period of twelve (12) months commencing from 1st July 1989. During this session of Council a draft resolution will be presented for your consideration on this all important matter as well as on the question of the ratification of Protocols and Conventions.

Here again, I do not think this will be an exercise in futility, if our experience in the last four months is anything to go by. Since I took office and set about chasing after outstanding contributions the response has been very encouraging. Between the 1st February this year and yesterday, June 24, 1989 the Executive Secretariat has either received in its accounts or been notified of firm commitments of fund transfers through the banning system to the tune of over six million, three hundred and forty-six thousand, seven hundred and ninety-one US dollars (US$6,346,791) from thirteen (13) Member States. This morning, I was informed by the delegation of Nigeria that the sum of about US$2.2 million has been paid into our account. This amount added, we have to date collected over $8.5 million since February this year.

Honourable Ministers,

The hard truth is that West Africa has to wake up and bestir itself. We have to rekindle the spirit of ECOWAS and revitalise regional integration. Our sub-region possesses the potential to meet all the socio-economic aspirations of its peoples, and in the few areas where we have focussed attention in the past, we have shown proof that ECOWAS can achieve results.

It is this desire to breathe new life into our organisation and to be at the forefront always that certain proposals have been put forward by the Institutions of the Community for the consideration of Council. One the issue of environmental protection, for example the international community has failed to agreed

on a satisfactory convention on toxic waste dumpting. ECOWAS assumed a leadership role in this area when it took the enviable initiative of adoption a resolution in 1988 declaring West Africa a waste-free zone. This lead should be maintained, as suggested in the Annual Report, by working towards the adoption of an ECOWAS Convention on the prevention of dumping of nuclear and industrial waste in West Africa.

I am sure Council would feel relived to know that Guinea and Nigeria, where industrial wastes had been dumped before the 1988 ECOWAS Summit, demanded the removal of such wastes and applied severe sanctions against the perpetrators of these criminal acts. Already, four Member States - Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Nigeria and Togo - have enacted environmental protection laws, prohibiting the dumping of nuclear and industrial wastes. Only three other Member States, namely Ghana, Senegal and Sierra Leone, have notified the Executive Secretariat of concrete steps being taken to enact the requisite legislation, in compliance with the terms of the ECOWAS Resolution. I hope the remaining Member States would do likewise.

Finally, Honourable Ministers, it is felt that the problem of implementation of Community decisions and programmes at the national level could be facilitated considerably through the involvement of some key ministers to assist the efforts of the Minister responsible for ECOWAS Affairs. It is suggested here that Member States which have not already done so, should proceed for form a Ministerial Committee, comprising the Ministers of Finance, Planning, Trade, Internal Affairs, Industry and Transport to assist the Minister responsible for ECOWAS Affairs, if different, to monitor and give the necessary political direction to the implementation of Community programmes, and also ensure the effective participation of each Membear State in the sub-regional integration process.

Honourable Ministers,

ECOWAS is well-known and firmly established at the levels of the summit, ministerial and official meetings. However, it is comparatively less well-known at the grass-root level in the Community. Yet the importance of taking ECOWAS to the people cannot be gainsaid; it is therefore proposed that an appropriate mechanism be established, without further delay, to close this yawning information gap in the interest of the Community in general and member Governments in particular.

At the Community level, it is proposed that an Information Division be established within the Executive Secretariat with adequate and specialised staff to facilitate the propagation of general information for the enlightenment of national officials and Community citizens alike, in particular their rights and obligations under the Community's conventions and protocols, and the dissemination of relevant technical information for the promotion of Community programmes in such vital areas as agriculture, trade and industry. Indeed, as far back as May, 1980, the Authority had decided that an Information Service Centre should be set up "for the harmonisation of market conditions within ECOWAS for the purpose of developing trade in current and future agricultural surpluses". Moreover specifically, the Authority decided that the "role of this Centre shall be the supply of information on the markets of shortages or surpluses in the sub-region, the dissemination of the prices of Community food-stuffs and other market information on the import and export neds within ECOWAS".

This role can easily be combined with that of disseminating general information as was being done through the CONTACT Magazine and other Community publications. It is proposed to revive the public of CONTACT, giving it a broader but sharper focus consistent with the prioritisation of the Community's activities, and providing for a much wider circulation than was hitherto possible.

provide us with another. The harsh reality of our times is that West Africa is experiencing a crisis of unprecedented proportions and the only viable option lies in the revitalisation and intensification of sub-regional economic development and integration. We must embark on this revitalisation urgently because any further delay, any further temporising - in effect, any further failure to recognize and confront the issues of integration head-on - will condemn our sub-region to a period of unimaginable misery and anguish. We must not allow that to happen and I am fully confident that all Member States will rise triumphantly to these challenges. Our consciences and commitments must be reawakened and let it be said that we inaugurated that process here in Ouagadougou.

Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
I wish Council every success in its deliberations and
I thank you all for your kind attention.

Honourable Ministers,

The Annual Report informs the Community about an unfortunate development within the sub-region. I am referring to the violent inter-communal strife between the citizens of Mauritania and Senegal. When the first news of this sad event reached us at the Executive Secretariat, I despatched identical messages to the two Presidents, on behalf of the entire Community, deploring the violence, expressing support for the ongoing consultations between the two Governments, and offering any ECOWAS assistance both Governments might consider necessary. Later, the Chairman of the Authority sent me as his special envoy to convey a peace initiative to the two Heads of State concerned. We all deeply regret this sad event which left its costs in heavy loss of human life and property.

Honourable Ministers,

I should like to end this presentation by informing Council of the efforts made over the past three months to form a Lagos Committee of ECOWAS Ambassadors. I personally find the Committee a very effective body that can, in its own right, contribute to the integration process, and also act as an additonal channel of communication between the Institutions of the Community and Member States. It is, therefore, being requested that due recognition be given to this Committee as well as to the Brussels Committee of ECOWAS Ambassadors which has maintained a strong ECOWAS presence within the councils of the ACP Group.

Honourable Ministers,

I hope I have managed in these brief remarks to convey to Council the may challenges facing our sub-region which are calling for urgent solutions in the months ahead. Permit me to call upon each Member State to rise to these challenges. But we must always remember that what we all have before us is the opportunity of only a few years rather than of a decade, and certainly not of a generation. If we miss it, history may not