ECOWAS COMMISSION
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LAUNCH OF ECOWAS GOLDEN JUBILEE COMMEMORATION

STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION

HE Omar Alieu TOURAY

Accra, Ghana

April 2025

- Your Excellency, John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana
- Your Excellency, Amb. Yusuf Maitama Tuggar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Chair of Council.
- Honourable Minister of foreign Affairs of Ghana
- Your Excellencies Honourable Ministers, Members of the ECOWAS Council
- The Vice President of the Commission & other Heads of Institutions, Honourable Commissioners
- The Representative of the President of UEMOA Commission President of EBID
- Director General of WAMA
- Special Envoy on Counterterrorism
- Staff of ECOWAS Institutions
- Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen

It is an honour and a privilege to address you in this historic city of Accra as we gather to launch the ECOWAS Golden Jubilee Commemoration.

On behalf of the Management and Staff of ECOWAS Institutions, I would like to thank His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, President and Head of State of the Republic of Ghana, the Government and the people of Ghana for hosting this historic event. No doubt Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah would have been proud to see Ghana and Ghanaians hosting the launching event of the 50th anniversary of COWAS, a pillar of the African Unity that Dr Nkrumah worked for, lived for and died for.

I salute their Excellencies Presidents, Heads of State and Honourable Ministers who have taken time from their busy schedules to join us here today. We thank you for your commitment to the integration and prosperity of our people. I would like to pay special tribute to His Excellency Nana AKUFO-ADDO, former President of Ghana, for his leadership not only of Ghana but also of Ecowas during very trying times.

Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen

This event is the beginning of a string of activities that will take place in each member state of ECOWAS as a way of giving concrete expression to the ideal of ECOWAS of the People. In marking the 50th anniversary, our objective is to celebrate, reflect and recalibrate our community.

In the current context, many would be forgiven for asking if there is anything about ECOWAS that should be celebrated. Our response to such cynicism is an emphatic yes for the following reasons:

The most Integrated Community in Africa. In a recent Interview, Alhaji Aliko Dangote lamented that he required visa for over 30 African **countries.** If an entrepreneur of Dangote's calibre can go through such hassles, can you imagine what ordinary people go through to travel within the continent. Thank God no ECOWAS member state is among the countries that require Mr Dangote to have a visa. This is because ECOWAS has adopted a Free-movement protocol that gives each ECOWAS citizen the right to visa free movement, rights of residence and establishment across the region. These freedoms make the ECOWAS Community the most Integrated Regional Economic

Community. This, Excellencies, ladies and Gentlemen is a good reason to celebrate.

Effective Trade Liberalization Scheme: The ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) is ECOWAS preferential trade arrangement. Since the inception of ETLS, more than 15,000 companies have been registered under the scheme and benefit from the preferential treatment within ECOWAS for more than 50,000 products.

The Interconnected System for the Management of Goods in Transit (SIGMAT) has been launched to connect national customs offices in the ECOWAS region to facilitate the regional transit trade and increase the pace and ease of international trade. The system is now fully operational in 7 countries. This too, together with Common External Tariff (CET), is a good reason to celebrate.

Promising Regional Energy and Infrastructure Programme

ECOWAS has developed a 25-year Masterplan (2020-2045) which comprises 201 regional projects covering all member States. These have been estimated to cost about 131 billion USD. The four key sectors covered are Transport, Energy, Telecommunication and Water Resources.

Within this context, key infrastructure projects have been launched. These include the *Lagos-Abidjan Corridor Highway*, *Abidjan-Praia Corridor*, as well as several secondary corridors and joint border posts.

The 1028 km **Lagos-Abidjan Corridor Highway** is one of the largest economic corridors in Africa. About US$42 million has

been successfully mobilized to finance the technical preparatory studies of the project.

The Feasibility and Preliminary Designs Studies, which have been completed, show a significant investment cost of nearly US$15 billion for the whole highway with an average Economic Rate of Return of 15%. The corridor is now ready for investors.

In the same vein, preparations are under way for the development of the **Abidjan-Praia Corridor** that will consist of

i) a Maritime & Shipping Line from Praia in Cabo Verde to Dakar in Senegal and
ii) a 6-lane highway from Dakar in Senegal to Abidjan in Cote d'Ivoire through Banjul, Bissau, Freetown, and Monrovia.

The Technical and Preparation Studies for this project have commenced and are expected to be completed shortly.

In addition to these major corridors, the Community's infrastructure programme along transport corridors include

- Nigeria-Cameroon Highways and Transport Facilitation Programme
- Mano River Union (MRU) Multinational Highway and Transport Facilitation Project

All these initiatives are a source of hope; and so are the **The Joint Border Posts that seek** to limit the duplication of procedures and paperwork at border crossings.

In the energy sector, ECOWAS and international partners have embarked upon several generation and interconnection projects within the region. These include electrification projects in The

Gambia, Guinea Bissau, and Mali through the ECOWAS-Regional Electricity Access Project (ECOREAP).

Similarly, electricity interconnection has been established with all 14 continental countries of the region. It is hoped that the completion of the Information and Coordination Centre of the West African Power Pool (WAPP) will enable member states to buy and sell electricity within the region. In this regard, the ECOWAS Regional Electricity Sector Regulatory Authority (ERERA) has been established here in Ghana with a mandate to regulate cross-border electricity exchanges between ECOWAS member states.

These efforts are being complimented by The **Regional Off-Grid Electricity Access Project (ROGEAP),** launched by ECOWAS Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE). The project (that has an estimated cost of USD 340 Million) seeks to facilitate access to off-grid electricity for households, businesses, and public institutions.

Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen

I can go on to cite several other regional initiatives and programmes that give us reasons to celebrate. These include the Western Africa Regional Digital Integration Program, regional regulatory framework on roaming, ECOWAS competition and Investment regimes, ECOWAS Intervention through WAHO on Ebola, Covid, mpox, as well as the initiatives in the area of Education including vocational education, Regional Food Reserves and humanitarian initiatives, the ECOWAS Rice Offensive and climate smart agricultural projects.

All these programmes and initiatives give us hope and therefore constitute a reason to celebrate.

Admirable Peace Support Track Record

But Excellencies, nothing is worth celebrating more than ECOWAS role in peace and security in the region. Here Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire, The Gambia and Guinea Bissau come to mind. It was the valiant ECOWAS peace keepers and several rounds of peace talks that brought peace to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote D'Ivoire. And it was ECOWAS that ensured that the will of the people of Gambia prevailed in 2016.

These are accomplishments worth celebrating, and so are efforts geared towards the fight against organized crime including piracy. The establishment of maritime security zones in the region and the strong partnerships built around maritime security have contributed to the decline in incidences of piracy in our region, with zero piracy incident recorded in 2024.

Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen

The celebrations of ECOWAS 50th Anniversary must go hand-in-hand with reflections with a view to recalibration.

One area that requires reflection is the low level of intra-community trade. Despite being a customs union, intra-community trade stands at 12%. This is considerably low compared to the EU and ASEAN countries. To resolve this, we must continue to address the infrastructure and energy deficit as well as non-tariff barriers. But most significantly, we must address supply-side constraints by raising productivity. To raise productivity we must be able to attract investment both from

within and from outside the region. Our market of 400 million people is a potential magnet to investors. This once again underlines the importance of regional integration as few meaningful investors are attracted by the small size of our individual domestic markets.

We must also invest in peace and security. The terrorist menace that constitute a key driver of insecurity in the region knows no borders. This makes security collaboration within the region imperative. In this regard, I would like to salute efforts being deployed by President Mahama, President Faure Gnassingbe and President Bassirou Diomaye Faye and indeed the Chair of ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government aimed at bringing about reconciliation and fostering collaboration between ECOWAS and the Alliance for Sahelian States (AES) in various area. Despite the challenges, I remain optimistic that we will collectively preserve and build on the gains of regional integration for our people who are united by blood.

Long live ECOWAS, long live West Africa, long live Africa.