

ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF
WEST AFRICAN STATES



COMMUNAUTE ECONOMIQUE
DES ETATS DE L'AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST

ECOWAS HIGH LEVEL VISIT TO SICHUAN
GOVERNMENT

Sichuan, the PRC

22 - 23 June, 2011

STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT
ECOWAS COMMISSION

H.E. JAMES VICTOR GBEHO

Protocols

H.E. The Vice Governor of Sichuan Provincial Government,

On behalf of the government and people of the 15 Member States of ECOWAS, and on behalf of the current delegation of ECOWAS to the PRC, which includes Ministers from the Republic of Ghana and Sierra Leone, I wish to thank the Government and people of the People's Republic of China, the Sichuan Provincial People's Government and in particular the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) first, for facilitating our visit to the PRC and giving us such a warm welcome since our arrival in Beijing and now Sichuan. Secondly, I am grateful to them for working so hard to make this meeting a reality, and thereby continue to strengthen our strategic economic and trade partnership which, as you will recall, began with the September 2008 1st China – ECOWAS Economic and Trade Forum, following the success of the Sino – Africa summit of 2006.

I want to especially thank the Government of Sichuan for their warm reception and in particular for fully sponsoring our stay here in the beautiful city of Chengdu.

This meeting is part of the activities to implement the existing cooperation framework between ECOWAS and China, and, in that regard, it is very unique and strategic. Our visit is therefore to further deepen the relationship to deliver win-win benefits to both ECOWAS and the PRC.

INTRODUCTION OF ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a 15 member state regional economic community covering the whole of West Africa except the republic of Mauritania. You may wish to know that it is also one of the 8 Regional Economic Communities (RECs) recognized by the African Union.

The ECOWAS region occupies a land area of 5.1 million km², which accounts for 17% of the total area of the

African continent. Its population, which has been estimated at 280 million (2007) is increasing at an average rate of 2.9% per annum.

A REGION OF PEACE AND STABILITY

The ECOWAS region is a peaceful place to live and do business. Civil conflict in some of our countries in the past created an image of an unstable region which undoubtedly discouraged investment. However, we have since restored relative peace across the region, and full democratic rule is in place in all member States.

Since 1999, the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS has put in place mechanisms and protocols to monitor and ensure peace, democracy and good governance in the region as well as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). These instruments have been very effective in delivering their mandates. Besides, all member states have undertaken to adopt good governance, democratic and inclusive principles in political

management to create the enabling environment for sustainable peace and development.

STRONG MACRO-ECONOMIC FUNDAMENTALS

Within ECOWAS, a collective approach to sound economic management is being pursued with determination through the multilateral surveillance of the macroeconomic policies of the fifteen countries. The ECOWAS economic governance is in conformity with the NEPAD codes and principles of best practices of sound monetary and financial policies, fiscal and budgetary transparency, public debt management, accounting and auditing standards, strict banking supervision, and good corporate governance. It also seeks to establish a single currency in the region.

A REGION OF IMMENSE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTORS

West Africa is a region of immense opportunities for investors. Every country of ECOWAS has substantial

untapped opportunities in every economic sector, be it primary (agriculture, mining, fishing, livestock, etc); secondary (manufacturing, processing, assembly, etc) or tertiary (education, construction, tourism, financial services, etc). This is backed by a large market (almost 300million people) cheap labor and an improving business climate.

We have adopted as priority, efforts to build institutions in the private sector such as the Federation of West African Chambers of Commerce (FEWACC), the Federation of West African Manufacturers Association (FEWAMA), Federation of Business Women and Women Entrepreneurs (ECOWAS - FBWWE), etc. and to partner with government in creating a favorable investment climate in the region. We have promoted and facilitated the establishment of ECOBANK Transnational Incorporated which currently operates in 30 countries in West, Central, Eastern and Southern Africa. This Bank also has a presence here in 7 countries outside Africa: China, France, etc.

INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT - A PRIORITY

We are aware that speedy and punctual delivery of manufactured goods of the right quality and condition is a major parameter in global competition, and that a well developed infrastructure – for producing and moving goods from factories to ports and for rapid international communication – significantly reduces export costs and improves competitive edge.

In this regard, infrastructural development is being pursued particularly in the areas of transport (sea, road, rail, air) telecoms and energy. We are looking forward to strong and particular Chinese investment in this sector, preferably under Public - Private Partnership (PPP) frameworks.

FREE MOVEMENT OF PERSONS

ECOWAS has facilitated the free movement of persons, goods and services and right of residence in the quest to create a viable business environment in the region. This

involves the elimination of visa requirement for community citizens traveling within the region, adoption of a common passport and harmonized immigration policies, freedom of entry and residence in any member state and freedom to work or set up a business. It is therefore noteworthy that ECOWAS is the only regional community in the continent to have achieved this status of free movement.

AGRICULTURE/LIVESTOCK/FISHERIES BUSINESS

Over half of the 5.1 km² of land area of ECOWAS is arable and well watered by several river basins backed by several streams, springs and abundant rainfall. According to UN-FAO data, arable land per capita in Africa doubles that of Asia and due to the varied climatic conditions from the rain forest in the coast, through the Sahel belt/middle zone, root crops, flowers, trees and tree products, livestock, fishery, etc can be cultivated naturally in the coastal and forest zones while grains, livestock and livestock products are best suited to the northern region. Only a little over 4%

of the cropped land is irrigated compared to 35-40% in Asia. Clearly, more can be done.

ECOWAS governments are willing to promote collaborations in this area to unlock the huge untapped potentials and are hereby extending an invitation to Chinese Private Sector investors to invest in commercial farming and agro-processing.

AGRO-PROCESSING AND MANUFACTURING

Agro-processing and manufacturing particularly holds substantial promise for investors in the region to process raw materials such as fruit, cocoa, rubber, palm oil and coffee into high value products through the establishment of allied industries in the region to meet Regional, Chinese and world market demand. In addition, demand for manufactured products like cement, iron and steel, vehicles, aluminum products, plastics, jewellery, ICT hardware and software, cables, paper, textiles, etc are increasing daily and investment opportunities exist in these

areas for Entrepreneurs from China and the rest of the world.

OIL/MINING-BENEFICIATION

As has been noted earlier in respect of natural resources, West Africa is one of the most endowed regions of the world. Gold, diamonds, bauxite, iron ore, copper, uranium, petroleum, phosphates, aluminum, salt, rutile, etc abound in commercial quantities all over the region and statistics indicate that only about 10% of the landmass has been prospected. Chinese investors are therefore welcome especially to this sector to invest in exploratory activities particularly in non-traditional minerals.

TOURISM

Another sector with substantial untapped potential for private investment in the region is Tourism. The rich natural and cultural diversity of the region holds immense attraction for tourists and opportunities for tourism

investors. The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates that Travel and Tourism in Sub Saharan Africa will grow from US\$ 75.3 billion in 2006 to US\$ 154.8 billion by 2016 based on an annual forecast growth rate of 4,7 % in real terms. We are inviting investments into this sector as well.

CONCLUSION

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen;

During this visit to the PRC, and to the Sichuan Province in particular, we have come to seek investors in projects from the sectors I have outlined above. It is our ardent hope that our friends here in Sichuan and the PRC in general, will help to promote these investment opportunities to existing and potential investors

I thank you for your attention.