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ADDIS ABABA HOSTS FIRST SESSION OF THE AU CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF SPORT

ADDIS ABABA 4 June 2007 - As part of the activities of building up towards the 2010 FIFA World Cup to be hosted by South Africa, an Experts Meeting ahead of the First Session of the African Union Conference of Ministers of Sport scheduled for June 7-8, opened today, Monday 4 June 2007, at the headquarters of the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, under the chairmanship of the AU Commissioner for Social Affairs, Adv. Bience Gawanas.

In her opening speech, Commissioner Gawanas called on the participants to be objective in their deliberations given that, the outcome of the meeting will bring into focus the contribution of sport towards the achievement of regional integration, greater African unity and solidarity between the peoples and countries of Africa as well as job creation and peace building. "Sport goes beyond winning or losing a game, it helps shape lives and livelihoods" she said, adding that, "sports is an integral part of the broader social development programme under the Regional Integration axis of the AU including reduction of poverty and promotion of good health".

The Commissioner of Social Affairs further pointed out the different areas of action the AU has been mandated to carry out. They are: to develop a sport policy for Africa – including the elaboration of an anti-doping policy in sports; Restructure and revitalize the Supreme Council of Sport in Africa (SCSA); Advocate for sports infrastructure at school and community level; and Collaborate with the African Nations Football Cup and other sport codes to promote sport as an embodiment of peace, reconciliation and solidarity.

Holding under the themes: "***The Mission and Vision of the AU Commission with regard to Sport***", "***The 2010 FIFA World Cup Africa Legacy Program***", the AU Conference of Ministers of Sport, is aimed at mobilising Governments and African Sport Movement towards the achievement of the overall objectives of the International Year of African Football (IYoAF). These include:

- Promoting the idea of "Sport for All" within the African Union and among Member States as a means of creating health awareness, strengthening the spirit of achievement among the youth, promoting African solidarity, entrenching social cohesion;
- Promoting sport as a tool to contribute towards achieving the AU NEPAD development goals, including the UN Millennium Development Goals;

- Promoting African solidarity and commitment to integration of the continent as envisaged in the Vision and Mission of the African Union;
- Promoting sport as a viable engine for employment creation;
- Promoting sport, as a means for integrated social development; and
- Strengthening national, regional and continental partnerships between all actors, including family, school, clubs/leagues, local communities, youth sports associations and decision makers as well as the public and private sectors, in order to ensure complementarities and to make sport and physical education available to everyone.

Participants at the Conference shall brainstorm on issues such as the Program of Activities of the International Year of African Football 2007; the Afro-Asian Games scheduled in Algiers, Algeria in July/August 2007; and the Relations between Governments and National Sports Movements, and International Sports Organisations; amongst others.

Participants at today's meeting included: the Ethiopian Ministers of Youth and Sport, some Ambassadors of AU Member States, Representatives of UN Agencies, International Organisations, Civil Society, and Representatives of the African Movements as well as the Regional Economic Communities.

The Experts Meeting, which is being held ahead of the First Session of the African Union Conference of Ministers of Sport ends on Wednesday June 6, 2007 to be followed by the Ministerial Conference from 7-8 June.