ADB President welcomes Report of the Commission for Africa, stressing its visionary and practical recommendations

Tunis 18 March 2005. The President of the African Development Bank, Mr. Omar Kabbaj, today met with the Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Tunisia, Mr. Alan Goultry, at which time the Ambassador presented Mr. Kabbaj a copy of the recently released Report of the Commission for Africa. It will be recalled that the Commission was chaired by Prime Minister Tony Blair and included notable personalities from Africa and other regions. Following the meeting, Mr. Kabbaj issued the following statement on the Report.

“The African Development Bank very much welcomes the Report of the Commission for Africa. The Report is being released at a time when the development prospects of African countries are perhaps the brightest in over a decade. Africa’s economic performance in 2004 was the best in eight years, with a GDP growth rate of over 5 percent, the inflation rate at the lowest in over two decade, and many countries enjoying favorable external accounts as a result of higher commodity prices. The improved economic performance, while in part attributable to a favorable external environment, is, nonetheless, also explained by the reforms that African countries have pursued over the last decade. The democratization process in many countries and the abatement of conflicts in most regions of the Continent have also been important factors in the turnaround. In addition, African leaders have shown their determination to assume ownership of their development and provide new leadership, as witnessed by the NEPAD initiative. The Commission’s report thus comes at a very opportune time and has a great potential of helping African countries build on the solid gains of recent years and boost their efforts to reduce poverty, improve the standard of living of their people, and make progress towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.”

Mr. Kabbaj added, “The Commission’s report presents a judicious mix of visionary and practical recommendations to bolster Africa’s economic and social progress. It takes a fresh and positive look at the many development challenges African countries face in a rapidly changing world. The Report is comprehensive and has made a number of important recommendations, addressed to both African counties and their development partners. As the Report recommends, African countries will need to assume greater leadership and ownership of their development, and the international donor community should seek to establish a new partnership with them -- one based on mutual respect and solidarity. In this regard, I welcome the call made by the Commission on African countries to accelerate their reforms, particularly with respect to improving their systems of governance and to making a determined effort at capacity building. I equally welcome the call of the Commission on the international donor community to double its ODA to Africa and to cancel external debts. These actions would enable African countries to make critical investments in education, public health, and infrastructure and thereby accelerate their growth rates. And as the Commission notes, the removal of trade barriers and trade-distorting subsidies by industrial countries in the context of the current Doha Round of WTO negotiations is also crucial for Africa’s development efforts.”
Mr. Kabbaj also welcomed the Commission’s call to strengthen regional institutions such as the ADB. He said, “I welcome the call made by the Report to make the ADB the pre-eminent financing institutions in Africa within ten years. The Bank has over the last decade undertaken a series of major reforms and it has re-gained the confidence of its shareholders, as evidenced by the highly successful outcome of the recent tenth replenishment of the African Development Fund. It is therefore well positioned to assume such a role in the future.” He added, “With respect to some of the specific proposals, I wish to note that the Bank is now in a strong position to host the proposed infrastructure fund for Africa as it has a very long experience in financing infrastructure on the continent, with some 40 percent of the nearly $50 billion loans and grants it has made to its regional member countries going to the sector.” Mr. Kabbaj also noted that at the request of the NEPAD Heads of State Implementation Committee, the Bank has assumed the leadership role in regional infrastructure development, working closely with the regional economic communities, the World Bank, and the European Investment Bank.

Mr. Kabbaj concluded his statement by saying that the Bank intends to organize with the UK authorities a special event on the Commission’s Report at the time of Bank’s Annual Meetings, which will be held in Abuja, Nigeria in May 2005.