

**Opening Speech by H.E. Dr. Kassu Yilala, Minister of
Infrastructure of the Federal Democratic Republic of
Ethiopia on the Meeting of the African Ministers
Responsible for Transport on the MDGs**

(Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 6 April 2005)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honour for me as Minister of Infrastructure to welcome you all, Distinguished Ministers and Delegates, and to participate with you in this extremely important endeavour on which we have to do our best for our continent. I think this conference has an irreplaceable role to play on the issues bearing on the future of transport in Africa, especially its critical role in the Millennium Development Goals. The aim of this conference is well known to all of us. It is to bring transport into its rightful place in the MDGs agenda. Of course, I will not attempt to convince you the importance of having the incorporation of transport into the MDGs. I know you would not be here otherwise.

This meeting has come well ahead of the global United Nations Conference on MDGs in September 2005. The Commission of African Union, SSATP Management and its Board and UNECA deserve our gratitude for taking the initiative on the subject and for organizing this conference. It is truly essential, necessary and timely too. We do appreciate the enormous effort you have put in this short span of time into making this event happen. What else can we say except to thank and congratulate you.

Distinguished Ministers and Delegates!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Efficient, cost effective and accessible transport infrastructure and services are obviously key factors in progressing towards the MDGs. The MDGs lay out challenging and achievable vision for dramatically reducing poverty in all its forms with tremendous benefits for the entire world. If these goals are achieved we all know that millions of lives will undoubtedly enjoy better life, with the greatest proportion of them being in Africa. However, transport as one of the important inputs and precondition for economic development is nowhere explicitly mentioned in the MDGs. It is sidelined for reasons unknown. This serious overlook may clearly affect the capacity to channel adequate resources to the

sector, which in turn would result in detrimental consequences in the attempt to achieving the MDGs themselves.

Transport is vitally important for any country's and region's economic competitiveness and, commercial, economic and cultural integration. Its importance goes beyond these. Here in Ethiopia for instance, we value transport, as it eliminates isolation, essential to enhance, strengthen and consolidate the democratic unity of our people and guarantee peaceful environment essentially conducive to our development. I think this holds true for the rest of the continent too. What we need, therefore, is a determined commitment, that we all share, to bring transport to its rightful place in the MDGs.

Distinguished Ministers and Delegates!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

We all recognize the importance of the role of transport in providing access to external markets, associated with which is the necessary establishment of efficient transit transport systems. The fulfillment of such needs is vital and essential for effective regional integration and international competitiveness. Currently traditional trade barriers and cross- border problems are steadily diminishing and are being harmonized to benefit both landlocked and coastal

countries. Unfortunately, the special needs of many landlocked countries in Africa for transit transport is not yet addressed fully and needs to be considered for incorporation as one of the elements of transport in the MDGs.

In Ethiopia the MDGs are increasingly occupying central place in development planning and resource allocation. As a signatory to the Declaration, the Government of Ethiopia in collaboration with the UN Millenium Project and UN Country Team has undertaken a detailed MDG-based poverty reduction strategy, which will serve as the basis for development assistance. The preparation of the document on Ethiopia's Road Infrastructure Needs Assessment in the context of the MDGs (2005/06-2014/15) is almost completed. We will make use of the inputs of this conference to enrich the document further.

The existence of a direct link between economic development and transportation capacities is an obvious truth and has been stated repeatedly in all fora of development in Africa. In a continent whose transport infrastructure development is at an alarmingly low level, priority must be given to the painful, demanding and a not easy process of building transport infrastructures for they have to be there ahead of all the development goals. For us poverty

alleviation, for its ultimate elimination, is inseparably linked to the availability of affordable, accessible and efficient transport system.

Honourable Ministers and Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

To sum up, I feel I am justified in expressing that the Ministry of Infrastructure of Ethiopia is extremely pleased to be associated with this event and is delighted to have worked together with the SSATP Management and its Board, the AU Commission, the UNECA and others. I hope all of us will deliver what is expected of us to come up with thoughts that will further enhance the justifications for the incorporation of transport in the MDGs.

I am sure this timely conference will be concluded successfully, and it is with great pleasure that I am declaring it open officially. Although short, I wish you a comfortable and enjoyable stay in Addis Ababa.

I thank you.