Remarks by Omar Kabbaj, President of the African Development Bank, at the Signing Ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the African Development Bank, Paris, April 1

Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF),

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you on this occasion of the renewal of the long-standing Memorandum of Understanding between UNICEF and the African Development Bank.

Our two institutions have now had close collaboration for nearly twenty years and we have undertaken many important programs and projects together. To cite a few examples, we have worked closely with a number of emergency programs such as the Guinea Bissau Emergency Humanitarian Program, the Somalia Emergency Support to the Health Sector, and the Rwanda Emergency Program. We have also collaborated on other important projects such as the First Senegal Health Project, the provision of Training in Reproductive Health in Guinea, and the Togo Women in Development Program.

The new MOU that we are signing today, and which is a second amendment to our 1988 Cooperation Agreement, will enable our two institutions to enhance and deepen our cooperation. I am delighted to note that the MOU would reinforce our collaboration in areas that are central to our common development agenda in Africa. It will also enable us to continue our collaboration in responding to humanitarian crises and post-conflict situations.

In particular, the MOU would enable us to work together in the following important areas:

Education, focusing on girls’ education;
Health, in particular immunization programs and maternal health;
HIV/AIDS, with a particular focus on its impact on families and children;
Child protection; and
Water and Sanitation

With respect to water and sanitation, I would like to take this opportunity to express to you my deep appreciation for the support that UNICEF has extended to our Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Initiative, including the assigning of your staff to work with us in the preparation of today’s International Conference. We do indeed look forward to working closely with your Institution in this important sector.

With regards to operationalizing the newly signed MOU, I am pleased to note that preliminary discussions have already taken place between the technical staff of our two institutions to identify concrete activities in humanitarian crisis and post-conflict
situations, advocacy initiatives, and capacity building work in selected countries. We would also welcome further consultations with your technical staff to develop a joint work program with measurable results indicators.

In this regard, I am pleased to inform you that the Bank has recently adopted an accelerated decentralization strategy that aims at opening 16 more country offices in the next two years, in addition to the nine existing ones, bringing the total to 25. The country offices will be given a greater role in policy dialogue and greater authority in matters of project implementation. I am therefore confident that the new offices will deepen field-level collaboration between our two institutions.

Before I conclude, let me take this opportunity to congratulate you on the many achievements of UNICEF under your able leadership this last ten years. UNICEF has made immense strides in its efforts to immunize every child against diseases; provide basic education to children, with a special emphasis on girls; help countries fight the spread of HIV/AIDS pandemic, particularly limiting its impact on young people; protect children from violence and exploitation; and introduce early childhood programs.

Let me also take this opportunity to extend to you my best wishes on your new assignment.

I thank you for your attention.