*Yaounde, 06 December 2011 (ECA, ITU)*

About a hundred telecommunications experts, legal specialists, parliamentarians, members of security forces and other stakeholders in the cyber-security sector in Central Africa have recommended that member states of ECCAS and CEMAC continue to formulate and implement national policies and strategies for a transition to a sustainable and inclusive knowledge society by creating safe and trustworthy environment for the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and to make proposals on the African Union’s draft Convention on the implementation of a legal framework to build confidence in e-transactions on the continent.

This is the major outcome of a workshop to develop and validate a harmonized legal framework to build confidence in Central Africa’s digital economy, jointly organized by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in partnership with the General Secretariat of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC). The workshop took place from 28 November to 2 December in Libreville, Gabon.

Experts at the workshop also asked member states of CEMAC and ECCAS to conduct a broad regional and national consultation process involving all stakeholders (government, parliament, the private sector and civil society) to pave the way for the adoption of ECCAS model laws as well as CEMAC guidelines and the AU Convention on cyber security.

Opening the workshop, the Minister of the Relations with Parliament, Constitutional Bodies, Regional Integration and NEPAD, in charge of Human Rights of the Republic of Gabon H.E. Mr. Aurélien Ntoutoume called on the participating experts to propose a vision and referral community texts against cybercrime in the sub region that can serve within the national legal framework of member states. He was representing the country’s Minister of Communication, Post and the Digital Economy, H.E. Mr. Paul Ndong Nguema.

On his part, the Secretary General of ECCAS, H.E. General Louis Sylvain-Goma said it would be illusory to undertake e-governance initiatives, e-commerce initiatives and e-health projects if the legal, organizational, human and technological aspects of the security of such networks were not well thought-out.

Taking the floor, the Director of the ECA’s Sub Regional Office for Central Africa (ECA/SRO-CA), Mr Emile Ahohe, said cybercrime generates a negative image of the countries in which it is orchestrated, turning off potential investors and wealth and job creators. This, he said, calls for interstate police and judicial cooperation to be given absolute priority, given the absence of physical boundaries in the cyberspace.

In the view of the ITU’s Representative for Central Africa and Madagascar, Mr Jean-Jacques Massima-Landji, a harmonized and effective legal framework on cybersecurity functional in all countries concerned would provide a sound and coherent response for a reliable cyberspace in the region that would ensure the creation of an inclusive and just Information Society to enable everyone benefit from all its advantages in total security.

According to the African Union Commission’s (AUC) Representative to the workshop, Mr. Moctar Yedaly, the African Union Convention should serve as an indispensable and referral tool to its member states and its law makers on issues of cybercrime and the protection of personal data.

Speaking on behalf of the President of the CEMAC Commission, Mr Isidore Ebola said as vehicles of economic, social and cultural development, ICTs should be given particular attention.

The Libreville workshop was a follow up of recommendations made by ECCAS Ministers of Telecommunications and ICTs after their meeting of 22 April 2010 in N’Djamena, in which they asked the Board of ECCAS Ministers to submit four policy documents including one on national harmonized policies and regulations as well as an action plan for the development of ICTs in Central Africa for the attention and approval or the ECCAS Heads of State and Government Conference. A similar demand had been made in by the CEMAC Council of Ministers in 2008. Meanwhile, participants at this recent workshop have proposed a follow-up workshop to validate model laws that would be examined by a meeting of ministers in charge of ITCs in Central Africa scheduled for March 2012.