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THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS AT

ECA Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

03 March 2021

Distinguished Heads of State and Government

Honorable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen

I thank His Excellency President Denis Sassou Nguesso, ably represented by the Vice President and the people of the Republic of Congo for hosting the 2021 Africa Regional Forum for Sustainable Development.

The COVID-19 crisis continues to test every country and region in the world.

It has taken more than 2.5 million lives, pushed hundreds of millions into poverty, threatens decades of development progress and is undermining our collective plans to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Many African countries have advanced a coordinated response that has saved millions of lives.

In doing so, you have demonstrated the increasing strength of Africa's regional cooperation mechanisms and national capacities.

Yet despite these measures, some 100,000 Africans have died from the virus, and today Africa is facing its first recession in 25 years. COVID-19 could set back gender equality considerably, and many of the region's young people are out of school, out of work and uncertain about their future.

In addition, Africa continues to grapple with regional crises, conflict, violence and development deficits in the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin and the Horn of Africa; a recent outbreak of Ebola in Guinea, and numerous climate-related crises, including deadly droughts, cyclones and locust infestations.

Moreover as the Secretary-General has reminded us earlier this year, the crisis is far from over and 2021 is likely to be even more difficult.

Yet there is also hope and opportunity.

The current moment is also an opportunity to leverage all of Africa's capacities and the potential of Africa's 226 million young people to chart a new direction, with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 as our guides.

Now is the time to reignite the Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals.

Excellencies,

Regional discussions such as these are our chance to develop a shared sense of direction and to rally all of Africa's partners.

Allow me to highlight four areas which could inform your deliberations in the coming days.

First, I want to reiterate the call of the Secretary-General for COVID-19 vaccines to be a global public good, available to everyone, everywhere.

The COVAX facility is our vehicle for ensuring equitable access.

COVAX delivered the first million vaccines doses to Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire last week, and another 4 million to Nigeria at the beginning of this week. It is expected to deliver a further 600 million doses to Africa by the end of 2021.

The AU's COVID-19 African Vaccine Acquisition Task Force has secured an additional 270 million doses. This is commendable.

And the continent is taking steps to enhance its own vaccine production capacity – with South Africa leading the way.

This effort is critical to respond to the current pandemic, but also a stepping stone in Africa’s longer-term vaccine production capacity.

But the continent is many months, if not years, away from accessing sufficient doses to achieve adequate coverage.

This will require at least doubling global manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines and fully funding the COVAX facility.

This is a matter of justice; it is a matter of fairness and self-interest; no one is safe until everyone is safe.

Second, most African countries lack the financing to adequately respond to the crisis. The Economic Commission for Africa estimates that Africa needs \$100 billion per year for three years to deal with the health and socio-economic impacts of the crisis.

The Secretary-General continues to appeal for a bold and coordinated international approach on debt relief efforts for African countries; for a meaningful increase in financial support to ensure liquidity; and for an alignment of global finance with the SDGs.

My third point, as we listen to the voices of the world's young people, is that the time has come to make peace with nature.

This means developing a just economic model that embraces renewable energy; green and resilient infrastructure; inclusive digitalization and protects natural resources.

Landmark conferences in the months offer opportunities to advance in that direction, including the High-Level Political Forum in July; the Food System Summit and High-Level Dialogue on Energy in September; and COP15 on biodiversity and COP 26 on climate in the final part of the year.

In September, the Secretary-General will convene the annual SDG Moment. We encourage countries conducting Voluntary National Reviews this year to come to the SDG Moment with plans for leveraging the recovery to get the goals back on track in their countries.

Fourth, in all of this, the repositioning of the regional UN development system – combined with the reform of the African Union – puts us on a much stronger footing to support Member States in their sustainable development efforts.

Our reforms have started to bear fruit and we have seen in 2020 a regional UN development system united in its support for response and recovery efforts. In 2021, we must bring the full potential, know-how, assets and policy expertise of the regional UN development system behind UN country teams in support of a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable future.

Excellencies

The challenges ahead are significant.

But Africa continues to overcome challenges and it is now the region of greatest opportunity and possibility in the world.

With the power of women, young people, cutting-edge technology and innovations, Africans can drive transformative change over the next ten years.

We have to believe it is possible.

And we have to convince others it is so.

The United Nations will remain our steadfast partner at this pivotal moment in building a better future for all.

Thank you.
