

AFRICAN UNION

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OPENING REMARKS

BY

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ENVIRONMENT**

AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

**8TH SESSION OF AFRICA REGIONAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**

KIGALI RWANDA

3 MARCH 2022

H.E. Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda;

H.E. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations;

Dr. Vera Songwe, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ECA;

Collen Kelapile, the President of the Economic and Social Council;

Excellences- Ministers Present;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

All Protocols Duly Observed.

On behalf of the H.E. Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal and the newly elected Chairperson of the African Union, and H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AU Commission who requested me to represent the Commission at this meeting due to his pressing official commitments, it is my privilege and honour to welcome your Excellences and other invited guests to the 8th Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development jointly organised by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the Government of Rwanda in a hybrid format in this beautiful City of Kigali, Rwanda on a very important theme- *“Building forward better: a green, inclusive and resilient Africa poised to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”*.

This event could not have come at a better time as Africa is still reeling from the impact of COVID-19 on our economies and we need to catalyze actions both to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by United Nations Member States in September 2015 as well as Africa Agenda 2063 Goals- the Africa we Want.

Records from Africa CDC COVID-19 dashboard indicates as of 27 February 2022, Africa has recorded **11,130,181** cases representing about **3%** of total cases reported globally and **247,341** deaths which accounts for **4.2%** of deaths reported globally. Two years on, African countries have managed to keep the COVID-19 virus coronavirus under control with relatively low number of cases and deaths contrary to earlier predictions, thanks to our leaders that rose up to the challenge and good luck perhaps.

Despite the low numbers of infections and deaths, the second order effects of the pandemic have been significant and daunting, exacerbated the multitude of already existing crises including unsustainable debts and hunger. The economic impacts of the disease have been devastating, as the global economy halted and Africa's growing, largely informal, service-based economy was forcibly shut down to pre-empt the disease's spread.

Africa witnessed a decline in GDP growth of 2.1% in 2020, its lowest in twenty years, pushing the region into its first recession in 25 years. Over 30 million jobs were lost and over 26 million people fell into extreme poverty.

In what smacks of vaccine inequity, only **12.3%** of the African population has been fully vaccinated while most developed countries have vaccinated most of their population even with booster shots.

Excellences, it must be noted, however, that COVID-19 only exacerbated Africa's development challenges, some of which are deep-rooted. Climate change is devastating Africa despite being responsible for about 4 per cent of global green gas emissions while Military Coups are also beginning to rear their ugly head.

At the same time, the recovery efforts from the COVID-19 pandemic presents an unprecedented opportunity for African countries to reset their economies and build back stronger and greener, taking advantage of new developments such as the newly minted African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) that commenced trading on 1 January 2021 and Africa COP 27 (the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC) to be hosted by Egypt in Sharm El-Sheikh this year.

On our part, the Africa Union Commission is already doing a lot to ensure that Africa builds back better and greener. In order to reduce the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Africa's food systems, the AUC and FAO convened a meeting of Ministers for Agriculture of AU Member States on 16 April 2020 to share experiences and identify actions to be undertaken. A Task Force composing all major players in African Agriculture (AUC FAO, European Union, AfDB, World Bank, IFAD, WFP and AUDA-NEPAD) was put in place to oversee the implementation of the actions identified by the Ministers in the Declaration and they have been working ever since to minimize the impact of the Pandemic on Africa's food systems.

In collaboration with the UK Government and other partners, we developed the AU Green Recovery Action Plan (AU GRAP) which was adopted by the

just concluded AU Summit of Heads of States and Government. The GRAP has five complementary pillars:

- a) Climate finance, including increasing flows, efficiency, and impact of funding.
- b) Supporting renewable energy, energy efficiency and national Just Transition programs.
- c) Nature-based solutions and focus on biodiversity through work on sustainable land management, forestry, oceans and ecotourism.
- d) Resilient agriculture, by focusing on inclusive economic development and green jobs; and;
- e) Green and resilient cities, including a focus on water (flooding and water resources).

As we prepare for COP 27, we look forward to collaborating with Kenya in its capacity as the CAHOSSC Coordinator and Egypt, the COP 27 President along with relevant stakeholders and partners to ensure that Africa's priorities are considered. The Commission is also working closely with the African Group of Negotiators on Biodiversity as they prepare the African Position for the Post 2020 Framework for Biodiversity in the lead up to COP 15 and are also preparing to support the implementation of the framework once adopted.

The year 2022 is poised to be a 'super year' for our oceans, seas and waters, considering the high-level World Water Forum and the UN oceans conference being held, alongside other multilateral meetings. The AUC has embarked on the implementation of the Africa Blue Economy Strategy which entails a range of initiatives including establishing a network of Centres of Excellence in Fisheries and Aquaculture, incubating ocean-based SMEs and

innovation, and deploying tools to protect fragile ecosystems while promoting resilience, *inter alia*.

Climate hazards, epidemics, pests and diseases and other anthropogenic factors heightened vulnerability across the continent. In response to the rising risk, the AU Commission has recently developed Africa Multi-Hazard Hazard Early Warning and Early Action System (AMHEWAS) Programme and established interconnected situation rooms at continental, regional and national levels. The Continental Situation Room has been established at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia while two more situation rooms have been established for IGAD and ACMAD in Nairobi and Niamey respectively.

I have no doubt that this 8th Session will come up with actionable recommendations that will set Africa on a path of recovery and the attainment of the United Nations 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. The Africa Union Commission stand ready to work with UNECA and other partners to implement the recommendations.

I wish you successful deliberations and I thank you for your attention.

Obrigada!!! Merci beaucoup!!! Shukran !!! Muchias Gracias !!!