

Opening Remarks by Mr. Oliver Chinganya, Officer in-Charge, Climate Change and Natural Resources Division, Economic Commission of Africa

Occasion: Opening of the Regional preparatory workshop for Africa voluntary national review countries

Date and Venue: 16 April 2019, Toukbal Hall, Palmeraie Palace Conference Centre, Marrakech, Morocco

Excellences,

Distinguished participants,

Colleagues from the UN system,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of Ms. Vera Songwe, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), it is my pleasure to welcome you all to this Regional preparatory workshop for African Voluntary National Review countries at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July this year.

I would like to seize this opportunity to sincerely thank the Government and people of the Kingdom Morocco for hosting the fifth Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. This workshop forms an integral part of the Forum. Our planning and engagement with the Government of Morocco over the last few months has been productive and have set the ground for a very productive and successful session of our Regional Forum.

Let me also express ECA's appreciation to our long-standing partners, the African Union Commission, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the Special Advisor on Africa with whom we have had productive collaboration in many areas, including convening this workshop.

Congratulations to the voluntary national review countries. We thank you for turning up in this workshop to share your experience, good practices and lessons learned that will contribute to ensuring that together, the participating countries can have credible and transformative national reviews in July.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Midway through the first 10-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063 and four years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, indications are that Goals of the two Agendas are unlikely to be achieved in our region within the set time frame. This is because the current pace and scale of implementation are not commensurate with the ambitions of the two agendas. This is a serious cause of concern because Africa is a region that can ill afford not to meet the Goals in a timely manner.

A delay in achieving the Goals will extend and intensify the suffering of millions of people in Africa. For instance, falling short of achieving the Goals would leave about 377 million people in the region haunted by poverty in 2030. Failure to achieve the Goals would also mean that many will be exposed to devastating effects of climate change such as Tropical cyclone Idai that recently wreaked havoc including killing more than 500 of our people in the affected countries in southern Africa. It also implies that Africa will not fully exploit the demographic

dividend as many of the more than 10 million young people joining the labour force each year will remain jobless.

Delaying the achievement of Goals is therefore not an option for Africa, but rather we need to drastically step up the pace and scale of implementation, with a renewed sense of urgency.

I therefore strongly believe that in this workshop we should address ourselves to the question: ***How can voluntary national reviews serve as powerful tools for boosting action to deliver the goals in the set time frame?***

Let me offer three perspectives on this question:

Firstly: A step-change in implementation requires us to revisit policies and programmes aimed at implementing the two agenda. So today, as we prepare for this year's review, let us ensure that the voluntary national reviews are objective, evidence-based and provide bold and actionable proposals. Such proposals are essential to recrafting and alignment of policies and programmes to accelerate the pace and drastically expand the scale of implementation of the two Agendas.

Secondly: It is crucial that all countries undertake action-oriented national reviews so as to learn lesson essential to devising strategies that will render greater impetus to the implementation of the two Agendas. Without such reviews, countries risk pursuing ill-informed pathways in implementing the Agendas. I wish therefore to call upon the countries, particularly the 18 African countries that yet to do so, to offer themselves for the voluntary national reviews.

Thirdly: Countries need strong and coherent support not only to carry out the voluntary national reviews, but equally important, to follow-up and translate the outcomes of the reviews into policies and actionable measures to achieve concrete on-the-ground results. ECA is keenly aware of the need and importance of such support. That is why the Commission has embarked on elaborating a Strategic Plan for ECA's support to Strengthening the Preparation, Reporting and Follow-up on VNRs. The Strategic framework in the making will contribute to deepening ECA's partnership with the AU, Regional Economic Communities and UN entities including the R-UNSDG in supporting member States' efforts to conduct voluntary national reviews and to integrate the SDGs and Agenda 2063 Goals in national development plans.

Taken together therefore, objective, evidence-based and bold voluntary national reviews by all countries; and that are accompanied by effective follow-up and support, will indeed be an important part of the solution to the current sluggish pace of implementation.

Let me conclude by emphasising that ECA is committed and ready to work with AUC, other Regional Organisations and sister UN entities to ensure and scale up integrated implementation, follow-up and reporting on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you a productive workshop.