

**The sixth special session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment
(AMCEN)**

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Remarks by

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Honorable Ministers, Colleagues, Friends

It's my great pleasure to be back at AMCEN.

Last year, 2015 may, one day, be remembered as a defining year for humanity. The SDGs and Paris Climate Agreement have the potential to be a new start for our planet and its peoples. I would like to congratulate, you, the Ministers who have played a central role to make those historic agreements happen.

In my view, the most important message from the SDGs and the Climate Agreement is that there is now a clear recognition that the health of our planet, from the climate system, biodiversity, health of soil, water, oceans, and chemicals, is essential for sustainable development.

For so long, we humans have taken those global environmental commons for granted, and pushed them to their limit. Now is the time to change course.

It is not a coincidence that it is you, the Ministers of Environment who were a key driving force behind these historic agreements.

You understand that we need a new way of dealing with natural capital. It is exactly what you are discussing at this conference, and it goes to show that you, the ministers from the African continent are much ahead of the curve.

2016 is the year when we need to accelerate implementation. I understand that many of you are already beginning to combine your NDC—your commitment to climate change—with your national development plan to achieve the broader SDG agenda.

This is a vital task, and it is absolutely critical for all of us to jump-start implementation, so that we do not lose momentum or hard won confidence.

Many of you, I understand, are flying to New York for the signing of the Climate Agreement later this week. It is a good occasion to get together and reconfirm the momentum. In November this year we have COP22 in Marrakesh. The COP is again back on the African continent, after the successful Durban COP. Marrakesh

will be an important opportunity for us all to report what progress we have made.

Today, I want to touch on three issues that have been high on your agenda here in Cairo and where GEF can propose concrete collaboration with you: renewable energy, resilience, and illegal trade in wildlife.

Renewable Energy

Power up Africa, or Light up Africa, remains a critical agenda for Africa's sustainable development. Renewable energy, in particular, is good for growth and job creation, poverty reduction and good for the global environment.

The GEF has consistently supported renewable energy in Africa. For example, we were one of the early supporters of solar energy in Morocco, and in the development of geothermal energy in Kenya. I have had the opportunity to visit both sites and I am very proud that we helped promote these technologies in Africa in close collaboration with the Moroccan and Kenyan governments.

Recently we have worked with the African Development Bank to leverage pension funds to finance small scale renewable energy in Africa and we have worked with DBSA to remove barriers for independent power producers to supply renewable energy to the

South African grid. There are tremendous opportunities for Africa if you can bring policy, technology and finance together.

In this regard, I am excited with the commitment announced in Paris on the global alliance to mobilize \$1 trillion in solar investment and with the launch of AREI (the Africa Renewable Energy Initiative). Just last Saturday I met the President of AfDB, Akin Adesina, and discussed if and how the GEF can support this initiative. Our hope is that by working together we will effectively accelerate and scale up the development of Africa's renewable energy potential.

Building Resilience

Building resilience remains a priority for Africa. We are pleased that the Paris Agreement highly recognized its importance. I am deeply impressed that Africa demonstrated its desire to deliver tangible timely implementable actions by launching the African Adaptation Initiative. It should help galvanize the support needed to significantly scale up adaptation actions in the continent.

At the GEF, we are interested to see how we can best support this effort. Since 2001, the GEF has provided US\$1.3 billion in grant for adaptation in 129 countries, out of which US\$ 760 million is for Africa. During COP21 in Paris, another US\$ 250 million was added to the pot. That was welcome news, but much more needs to be done.

Our support for adaptation is very much linked with your emphasis on natural capital. Let me give you two examples.

First, we support the Great Green Wall Initiative in 12 West African and Sahel countries. The project will increase resilience of the regions' ecosystems and human livelihoods and is good for global environment.

Second, as I announced last year here at AMCEN, we have launched a Food security in Africa program in 12 African countries. The program will focus specifically on safeguarding the natural resources—land, water, soils, trees and genetic resources—that underpin food and nutrition security.

It brings a holistic perspective to the management of these resources in African agriculture. It aims to strengthen soil health, improve access to drought-tolerant seeds, adjust planting periods and cropping portfolios, and enhance on-farm agro-biodiversity for the benefit of smallholder farmers, both men and women.

Bringing together US\$ 900 million from a variety of sources, the program aims to enhance long-term sustainability and resilience of food production by reducing land degradation and biodiversity loss, recovering natural vegetation and increasing soil carbon.

Wildlife trafficking

Now I want to move to my last point, illegal wildlife trafficking.

Wildlife is under ever increasing threat.

Poaching and illegal wildlife trafficking are reaching unprecedented levels, threatening the long-term survival of populations of numerous keystone species. It will have long-term negative impacts on local communities. This equates to a significant loss of the natural capital that can help African countries' sustainable development.

The issue of illegal wildlife trade has received enormous attention in recent years. The Brazzaville Declaration laid down the foundations for the African Union's "Strategy on Combating Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in Africa".

In response, the GEF has launched a major international effort to help tackle the supply, trade and demand for wildlife products. This new program includes 18 countries in Africa and Asia and will have a total budget of US\$ 130 million from the GEF with another US\$ 700 million mobilized from other sources

Importantly, the project is not only about stopping the slaughter of animals in the forests and savannas of Africa; it also aims at

reducing the demand in South-east Asia. In this regard, it is very encouraging to see that Vietnam, one of the participating countries in the program, decided to host the third International Wildlife Trade Conference (IWTC) in Hanoi this November.

I'm convinced that with your help we can put an end to this trade that has no place in the 21st Century!

Ministers, we are at a defining moment for the future of our planet and its people.

Ministers, it is my real honor to work with you and help you continue to implement your vision at this important time.

We stand ready to work with you!

Thank you