

**Statement for the 14<sup>th</sup> session of the Africa Ministerial Conference on Environment  
by Ms. Margareta Wahlstrom, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for  
Disaster Risk Reduction, 12-15 September, Arusha**

**Madame President of AMCEN, Hon Terezya Huvisa, Minister of State, Excellencies,  
Honorable Ministers, Colleagues.**

It is my pleasure to be here at the closing session of this important occasion to highlight the importance of disaster risk reduction and climate risk management in Africa.

Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation are central elements of sustainable development. They share common root causes and goals: reduction of the vulnerability and exposure of communities and nations. Recognizing and building linkages between them is effective and efficient development.

Last December in Durban at COP 17, world leaders, again the burden of impact of climate change on Africa and developing nations and resolved, to ensure that development, climate change and disaster risk reduction remain at the forefront in negotiations - not least on financing.

Government negotiations at Durban also provided set the stage for significant outcomes on climate change adaptation and sustainable development issues, including oceans, food security, energy, water and disaster risk management at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, in June 2012. As noted by the UN Secretary-General in the closing when he said: **‘The outcome document provides a firm foundation for social, economic and environmental well-being. Our responsibility is to build on it. Now the work begins’.**

Rio+20 gave a strong endorsement to take further the integration of disaster risk reduction into the sustainable development agenda at regional and national levels.

In particular on **disaster risk reduction, Rio+20 called upon governments**

1. To accelerate implementation of the Hyogo Framework in sustainable development

2. **To integrate Disaster Reduction into policies, plans, programmes and budgets**
3. To apportion adequate, timely and predictable resources for Disaster Reduction
4. **To integrate DRR and climate change adaptation into public and private investments; and**
5. **To undertake comprehensive risk assessments and strengthen Disaster Reduction instruments**

The Sustainable Development Conference in Johannesburg in 2002 already set the direction. Rio has provided further guidance. The policy base is strong. **What is needed now is more focused technical work at the senior level of governments and institutions.** You have taken a lead in committing to implement the Rio outcome and in this conference made specific decisions: ‘how is Africa going to process Rio outcomes.’ Now, how can we support our African partners to make best use of the opportunities provided by Rio+20?

In taking up these challenges it is important to use existing frameworks to adapt to climate change. The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) is the global roadmap to build resilience to disasters as part of sustainable development.

The African continent and its leaders already have shown political commitment by endorsing the Programme of Action to implement the Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, aligned with the Hyogo Framework. Now political commitment to implementation of the Plan is a priority for disaster risk reduction in a changing climate. In your previous AMCEN meeting you included disaster risk reduction as an important issue for African development.

Over the past decade, continental Africa has been the second-fastest-growing region in the world. **With African economies on the move now is an opportune moment optimize commitment to sustainable development.**

To further open up political and development space, Africa has got to use its existing mechanisms, **especially the African Programme for Action for Disaster Risk Reduction** to advance technology, learning and applications in climate risk management. Disaster reduction and climate change adaptation financing should be guided by the knowledge that effective development investments reduce disaster risk.

**The IPCC Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation (SREX)** produced evidence that climate extremes are now a fact for many least developed countries whose carbon

emissions are almost non-existent but where poverty is deeply entrenched along with other indicators of vulnerability.

Disaster risk reduction frameworks, policies and strategies in Africa based on the priorities of the Hyogo Framework have been generally endorsed in the five Sub-Regional Economic Communities (RECs), namely (: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), East African Community (EAC), Southern African Development Community (SADC), and Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD).)

In Africa, climate science and disaster risk reduction already have joined forces. Across four regions, south, west, central and the Horn, **Climate Outlook Forums** are achieving positive results in making climate information understandable and useable for decision-makers.

Specialized sub-regional climate service institutions<sup>1</sup>, are forging strong linkages between climate change and risk management for national climate decisions. These institutions deserve recognition, supported by financial institutions.

At the international level, a promising dialogue in support of climate services as a tool for risk reduction has led to recommendations to link WMO's **Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS) and UNISDR coordination mechanisms**: regional and global platforms.

Access to information on natural hazards, monitoring and early warning systems along with sound vulnerability assessment are prerequisites to climate change adaptation planning and adaptive action.

Evidences have shown that investing in disaster risk reduction have tangible benefits. African leaders should consider increasing investments to reduce disaster risk.

National Disaster Loss databases are being established in Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia. In 2011, national monitoring reports, based on the HFA priorities, were

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<sup>1</sup> IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC), Climate Services Centre (SADC), Agro Meteorology and Operational Hydrology and their Application (AGRHYMET), Regional Disaster Management Centre of Excellence (RDMOE).ACMAD is another important partner for climate change adaptation and climate risk management and provides support to sub-regional centres for improved disaster risk management programmes.

received from 24 countries<sup>2</sup>. Over 30 African countries have established DRR National Platforms or Coordinating Mechanisms.

The above examples attest to the fact that disaster risk reduction in Africa is an effective tool for climate change adaptation. The challenge and opportunity for the UN in Africa is to positively support current progress to achieve results. The Africa Regional Coordination mechanism to support the AU and NEPAD programme is a good example of the UN 'working as one' on sustainable development and climate risk management.

**In summing up my remarks today**, let me take this opportunity to encourage all the excellencies and ministers here today to take forward the promise of Rio+20 in Africa through support and commitment for the following actions:

- Disaster risk reduction is acknowledged as the first line of defense against the negative impacts of climate change;
- Access to information on natural hazards, monitoring and early warning systems along with sound vulnerability assessment are prerequisite to climate change adaptation planning; and
- Climate change adaptation financing should be guided by development investment knowledge that reduces disaster risk.

You may wish to consider including some of these ideas into your final Arusha Declaration.

Finally, the economic cost of disasters in Africa continues to rise. Investment with climate risk focused is an investment in a sustainable development future.

Asante sana!

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<sup>2</sup> Algeria, Botswana, Burnkan Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Comoros, Cote d'ivoire, Egypt, Gabon, Guinea Bissau, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sengal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo and Zambia.