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Statement by Hon. Abdirahin H. Abdi,  
Member of the UNISDR Advisory Group for Parliamentarians,  
on behalf of Margareta Wahlstrom, Special Representative  
of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

***Investing in Weather and Climate Services for Development -  
Building the resilience of African nations to climatic hazards***

Your Excellency Honorable Dr Olive Muchena Minister for Transport, Communications and Infrastructural Development, Zimbabwe, Honourable Ministers, Your Excellency Madame Rhoda-Peace Tumusiime, African Union Commissioner of Rural Economy and Agriculture, Mr. Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General of WMO, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As member of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) Advisory Group for Parliamentarians, it is my pleasure to address this Ministerial Session on behalf of the Madame Margareta Wahlstrom, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction.

First of all let me convey my gratitude to the Government of Zimbabwe for hosting this conference and to the organisers for their work. This event is an important step towards linking climate services to the needs of end users, mainly

development actors, disaster risk managers and communities, in order to anticipate disasters and future changing climate. Climate science shall provide evidence and help inform decision makers to adapt to the expected changes and reduce related risks.

### **What is the impact of disasters on countries in Africa?**

Over the last four decades, Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced more than 1,000 disasters and these are a major threat to lives and sustainable development, putting recent development gains at risk. Africa's disaster profile is characterized by extreme hydro-meteorological events which will likely increase in magnitude due to climate change and related extremes. Droughts still affect the largest number of people on the continent and floods occur frequently along the major river systems and in many urban areas. Cyclones mainly affect Madagascar, Mozambique and some of the Indian Ocean islands. Sea level increases, coastal erosion and storm surges are a very real threat for low-lying coastal areas. Other associated impacts include food insecurity and epidemics mainly, cholera, meningitis and malaria, which all are climate related.

Last year 12 million people were affected by drought in the Horn of Africa, while 1.5 million were affected by flood in West Africa this year. We have here a critical need for climate science to engage with disaster risk managers to anticipate risks and take timely measures to avoid loss of lives, protect livelihoods and development gains that could be wiped out by predictable disasters.

### **Why we need to do more to reduce risks of disasters?**

Disasters losses caused by weather and climate hazards negatively impact the socio-economic development of nations and communities. Finances set aside for other development activities are often diverted to disaster emergency response, affecting the government's development plans and strategies. Rainfall performance is closely linked to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). **Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation are central elements of sustainable development.** They share common goals: reduction of the vulnerability of communities. Recognizing and building linkages between them is smart development.

Over the past decade, the economies of the African continent have been the second-fastest-growing in the world. With African economies growing rapidly, there is also an opportunity to optimize investments in sustainable development, addressing poverty, vulnerability, other fundamental drivers of disasters and climate change.

Let me take this occasion to recall the important message from the Rio+20 outcome document "The future we want". This document, with the support of many countries in Africa, calls for accelerating implementation of the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* in the context of sustainable development. Furthermore, the Rio+20 outcome document recognizes that disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation must be integrated into public and private investments.

### **Commitments to reduce risks of disasters in Africa**

At the 2<sup>nd</sup> Africa Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2010, the African continent and its leaders have demonstrated political

commitment by endorsing the **Africa Strategy and Programme of Action for Disaster Risk Reduction**, aligned with the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015* in a partnership approach.

Disaster risk reduction strategies, policies and programmes have been adopted in the **five Sub-Regional Economic Communities**, 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). These are programmes that help identify and monitor hazards and risk, taking into account trans-boundary dimensions and defining protocols to share information and forecast to enhance regional early warning systems.

In Africa, climate science is supporting the disaster risk reduction efforts, such as through the African Centre of Meteorological Application for Development (ACMAD), the IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) and others across the continent. **Climate Outlook Forums** are achieving positive results in making climate information understandable and useable for decision-makers.

**These specialized sub-regional centres and institutions**, who are responding to global and regional challenges through the integration of disaster risk management and climate services, are making a valuable contribution to climate change adaptation, through support from institutions like the African Development Bank and the private sector.

In this context, the Global Framework for Climate Services programme is an important milestone, aiming to advance knowledge and understanding of

extreme weather events which can make the difference between a good crop and a bad one. The Global Framework for Climate Services programme can also help determine a timely evacuation of people to a safe location. Climatic conditions are often a matter of life and death, especially for the rural and urban poor. I have no doubt that this programme will help provide the climate information for disaster risk reduction, which is very much needed for building resilience of nations and communities to disasters.

### **A Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction**

2015 will mark the renewed global effort for reducing disaster risk and building resilience, as an important part of sustainable development. Disaster risk reduction will be addressed not only through the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, but also the Post-2015 Development Framework. To achieve sustainable and resilient development, now is the time to think about and discuss what we would like the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction to strengthen, and perhaps give more focus to.

All stakeholders have been called on to consult around a Post-2015 Framework, including through regional meetings such as this one. At this early stage it is important to focus on the gaps and challenges in promoting and implementing disaster risk reduction and building resilience and what substantive issues need to be reflected in a post-2015 framework. Africa, as a region, has the opportunity to voice our concerns, and provide our inputs and recommendations for a new post-2015 framework.

Some questions I wish to offer you for consideration are:

- Is reducing the risk of disasters well understood at the national level? What is the approach that has made most progress in reducing the risks of disasters? Has the Hyogo Framework for Action had an impact?
- What more can be done to engage and integrate disaster risk reduction and resilience into decision-making bodies (e.g. ministries for environment, planning, and agriculture)?
- What are the significant elements, from an African perspective, that should be addressed in a post-2015 framework?

I encourage you to consider these questions, but also when you return to your country and have national dialogues. Governments' self-reflection on the implementation of the current Hyogo Framework for Action will be important. We are therefore relying on you to host national consultations and to share your key recommendations with us.

Your inputs will be discussed and consolidated at the Africa Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction tentatively planned for the second week of February 2013 in Arusha, Tanzania, and will then feed into the discussions of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction that will take place in Geneva on 18 – 23 May 2013.

In summing up my remarks today, let me take this opportunity to highlight the call on Ministers and leaders: **there is a practical opportunity to give the highest priority to integrating the work of weather and climate services with disaster risk reduction to optimize the impact for the protection of development gains of the Africa continent.**

I look forward to our continued, collaboration towards building resilience, safeguarding lives, protecting economic growth and achieving sustainable development.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you a successful conference.