

**15th Ordinary session of the African Ministerial Conference on the
Environment (AMCEN)**

***“Managing Africa’s Natural Capital for Sustainable Development and Poverty
Eradication”***

Statement by the Director, UNEP Regional Office for Africa

Your Excellency Dr Khaled Fahmy, Minister of State for Environmental Affairs

The Representative of the African Union Commission

The Representative of the President of AMCEN

Your Excellency Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure and honour to address you all here at the 15th Ordinary session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) aptly themed: "Managing Africa’s Natural Capital for Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication".

Allow me first and foremost to thank the Government and the people of the Arab Republic of Egypt for this opportunity given to us to convene this workshop and for all the great assistance provided for the successful deliberations of our sessions. We are deeply grateful to Egypt as this country convened our very first meeting of AMCEN here in Cairo thirty years ago , and we have come back to Cairo this year.

A lot has changed in those 30 years. Back then, there were only around 500million people in Africa - today there are more than 1billion. Back then, growth was slow,

progress sluggish and since the first AMCEN, Africa's GDP has tripled. In the last 5 years 7 of the 10 fastest growing economies were in Africa.

The central theme of the AMCEN 15 the Session is 'Managing Natural Capital for poverty eradication and sustainable development'. Africa is endowed with immense natural capital and these invaluable assets needs to be used in the best way possible to foster economic growth, social welfare and sustainable livelihoods. The natural capital potential for the continent is indeed huge. Africa is endowed of 40% of the biodiversity of the world and 60% of the uncultivated arable land. Renewable energy is immense as Africa is using less than 7 % of its hydroelectricity and less than 2 % of what geothermal energy can offer. The majority of the African countries receive an average of 325 days/year of bright sunlight and more than 80 % of the landscape is receiving more than 2000 KW/h per square meter and per year. Wind power is available and still insufficiently tapped. Economic growth is expected to remain strong (among the highest in the world).

We are now preparing for the Post 2015 era. Africa is set for strong future growth, both in terms of its population, and its economy. By 2050, we are expected to be over 2bn people – double today number, with more than half who will leave in cities. The majority of the population is composed of youth and this will remain for the decades to come. This population increase will drive energy demand, food consumption and transport requirements, demand for jobs and social services, increased investments in infrastructure.

The growth we want, needs to continue to be robust, inclusive and we want it to be sustainable. We are however still grappling with intractable challenges: climate change is threatening the development gains of the continent. We have not been successful in reducing poverty significantly and inequality is widening. Eight (8) out of the 10 most food insecure countries are in Africa .

Another environmental asset not well managed is the air we breathe (10 000 liters/day). According to the recent assessment of WHO, air pollution is fast becoming one of the leading causes of illness and death in developing countries,

and leads to more than 700,000 deaths annually in Africa (from outdoor and indoor air pollution).

While the continent is characterized by remarkable biodiversity, the diversity is declining. In 2014, a total number of 6,419 animals and 3,148 plants in Africa were recorded as threatened with extinction. Illegal trade of wildlife is part of the constraints to development as it contributes to weaken the economy and serve also terrorist groups in some parts of the continent. In one African country, Rhino poaching increases by 7,700% between 2007 and 2013. This illicit trade of wildlife is contributing also to the illicit financial flow that is crippling our economies. It is estimated that Africa loses in excess of USD50billion annually from IFFs including illegal trade of fauna and flora.

Then we cannot continue business as usual. Research by WWF identifies that the Ecological Footprint of all African countries increased by 240% between 1961 and 2008. Worldwide we are pushing the planetary boundaries to their extreme limits. Resource exploitation exceeds the earth biological capacity by more than 25%. Humanity has increased the global ecological footprint: 0.5 Earth in 1950 to more than 1'25 Earth today. We may soon need 2 or more planets to satisfy our needs unless we curb the trends of resource depletion. But we have only one planet, one Africa. There is no plan B.

It is gratifying and encouraging to note the great effort made by African countries in engaging in a sustainable development path. Transitioning to green economy provides an opportunity for Africa to harness the full potential of its rich natural resource endowments for domestic revenue sourcing to compliment global support in financing sustainable development.

The Post 2015 agenda and SDGs will offer great opportunity for a green growth scenario in the continent. I would like to take this opportunity to laud the effort of the African Union and NEPAD in providing leadership in this area and to thank African Development Bank, ECA, WWF, UNIDO, ILO, UNDP, IUCN , our partners from the North and the South and many others for the great cooperation in support to Africa in its effort to transition to green economy.

In light of the foregoing, 2015 is set to be a strategic year for Africa. This year marks a crucial shift in the way the world and Africa will deal with their own development, with three decisive conferences: the 70th UN GA on post 2015 agenda in September, the financing for development in July , and climate change in December that should create a more conducive setting for sustainable development.

Environment is an important component of these agendas. It has to be adequately taken into account alongside the economic and social dimension. At the International level but also at the regional, national and local level let's work together with a sense of renewed commitment for effective sustainable development that will create the conditions for the 'Africa we want', the Africa that provides peace and prosperity for all in sound managed environment.

I thank you