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Statement by Her Excellency Rhoda Peace Tumusiime

Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture,

African Union Commission

on the occasion of the

Special Session of the African Ministerial Council on Environment

28-29 May 2009, Nairobi, Kenya

- **Excellencies, Honourable Ministers**
- The Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme
- UNEP Director, Regional Office for Africa
- Distinguished representatives of the Government of the Republic of Kenya

Distinguished Delegates Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first of all express my personal gratitude and that of the African Union Commission to the AU Member States, the Bureau of AMCEN and UNEP for convening this Special Session to refine and consolidate a global strategy for Africa as it relates to the climate change debates leading to COP15 in December 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark. I would also like to register appreciation to the Government and people of the Republic of Kenya for their hospitality which we have been enjoying since we came here.

The African Union Commission appreciates our bilateral and multilateral partners' support to our preparatory process for the negotiations and I will be engaging with them with a view to securing a steady flow of funding in a more effectively coordinated and predictable way to reduce fragmentation and disruption of the process. I am sure that you will agree with me that harmonisation of various sources of funding to promote Africa's climate change agenda will serve us better.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Here, I would like to first talk about the Decision on Climate Change, issued by the 12th Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union held on 1-4 February 2009 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. By the said Decision, the Heads of State approved that the Algiers Declaration on Climate Change serves as the platform of the Common African Position in the negotiation process for the new global climate change regime for the period 2012; they also underscored the need for Africa to be represented by one delegation which is empowered to negotiate on behalf of all AU Member States. By the same decision, the Heads of State mandated the African Union Commission to work out modalities of such representation. They further directed that the African delegation to CoP 15 ensures that resource flow to Africa is not reduced but it is made adequate, accessible and sustainable. The Heads of State asked the Commission to submit a progress report to the next Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, which as you may be aware is scheduled for 1-3 July 2009 in Sirte, Libya.

Therefore, the urgency attached to this Decision is a recognition by the Heads of State of the serious challenges posed by climate change in Africa and the necessity to ensure that Africa obtains what it rightfully deserves from the global climate change negotiations during COP15 in Copenhagen and beyond. This Special Session of AMCEN is, therefore, an opportune moment for us to collectively contribute to the process of implementing the directives given by our Heads of States to ensure that Africa effectively champions its interests and as a whole emerges as a winner out of the global climate change negotiations.

As Ministers representing the AU Member States, it is within your purview to ensure that Africa goes to COP15 with a single voice promoting and defending our continent's common position. Africa cannot afford to be divided nor lag behind at the forthcoming Conference of Parties considering the clearly manifested adverse impacts of climate change on the continent and the livelihoods of its people.

There is, indeed, need for quick and concerted action at national, regional and international level to address the situation. National Governments, the private sector, development partners and donors must work together to develop strategies and mobilize the resources needed to mitigate the effects, particularly for the low-income food importing countries. National and international policies must be streamlined, harmonized and better coordinated.

Honourable Ministers, your pivotal role over the years under the framework of AMCEN was recognised and appreciated by our Heads of State. Also the role of the Group of African Negotiators, under your able guidance, is also acknowledged. You have, indeed, built the foundation upon which the Decision of the Heads of State can be anchored and taken forward.

Distinguish Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

Based on the mandates I have just highlighted, the Commission of the African Union has been working with the Bureau of AMCEN, UNEP, UNECA, AfDB and other strategic partners to lead the process of arriving at Africa's common position. A series of consultations have been carried out with the relevant stakeholders as well as bilateral and multilateral partners to look at the evolving issues and processes at the national and regional levels, with a global perspective.

We are happy to note that significant progress has been registered in the elaboration of the mechanisms for constituting a single African delegation to COP15. For this purpose, the African Union Commission has designed a three-tier approach comprising Negotiators, Ministers and selected Heads of State, based on equitable geographical distribution and also supported by eminent personalities, taking into consideration the diverse eco-systems of Africa. These are the guiding principles. Through consultations

with partners and our African negotiators, the criteria for the selection of negotiators followed your own established criteria based on not only geographical representation but also on competence, consistency in the negotiation process and contribution to thematic areas of their respective engagement.

Members of the other tiers were also selected through a consultative process. That is as far as the negotiating structure is concerned. Now let me turn to some of the substantive issues.

Ladies and gentlemen

On the issue of carbon trading mechanisms that are expected to emerge from the international climate change negotiations, the Decision of the Heads of State emphasizes that Africa must be given opportunities to demand and receive compensation – which has been echoed by the Honourable Minister responsible for Environment of Kenya -not only for the damage done to its economy by global warming but also for its significant contribution in curbing global warming through carbon sequestration in its forest and water masses. It is noteworthy that the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism allows industrialised countries to set up carbon offset projects in Africa and other developing regions. It is, however, disheartening to note that Africa presently accounts for less than 10 percent of the international carbon trading. This is despite the fact that Africa, through its forest and rivers sequesters tremendous amounts of carbon. Scientific findings have confirmed that Africa's forests are second only to those of South America in locking away carbon that would otherwise stay in the atmosphere and disrupt the global climate. It is estimated that Africa's forests remove 1.2 billion tonnes of carbon every year from the atmosphere. The numerous rivers, lakes, ponds and wetlands of Africa are incontestable carbon sinks too. Therefore, this is a point that the Heads of State wish to see highlighted in negotiations for compensation to Africa.

Madam President, Ladies and Gentlemen, the other premises for Africa's demand for compensation is the severe damage by climate change to its economy, environment and livelihoods through global warming to which Africa has contributed very minimally i.e 3.8%. Africa is already experiencing the effects of climate change through extreme variations in weather patterns and changing ecosystems. Increased severity and frequency of droughts, floods, storms and tornadoes; water stress, erosion of coastal areas, higher incidence of vector-borne diseases, among others, are having a drastic effect on African economies and livelihoods; and the Heads of State are concerned. It is estimated that 30 per cent of Africa's coastal infrastructure and settlement will be inundated if the current trends in global warming persist. Subsistence and cash crop-production as you are aware, and also the food crisis on the continent , which have been exacerbated by climate change and are undermining our pursuit of Millennium Development Goals.

Madam Chair, as you are all aware, Africa contains about one-fifth of all known species of plants, mammals, and birds, as well as one-sixth of amphibians and reptiles. It is estimated that between 25 and 40 per cent of these species will disappear if current trends in global warming continue. These species constitute some of the world's most diverse and biologically critical ecosystems such as savannahs, tropical forests, coral reef marine and freshwater habitats, wetlands and montane ecosystems. These globally important ecosystems provide the economic foundation that many African countries rely on by providing water, food, and shelter. However, because of climate change, these ecosystems are getting degraded and actually the livelihoods that depend on them are appallingly threatened.

Among the consequences of this is climate-induced mass migration of the African population across national and international borders. This has a devastating impact on socio-economic development of the continent. It undermines the peace and stability of the continent. The brain drain and the stagnating rural economies due the huge exodus of the youths would have a long-lasting impact for Africa's sustainable development.

Madam President, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen, these are among the compelling cases for Africa's moral right to demand for compensation from those countries that contribute most to the problem of global warming. It is grossly unfair for Africa to suffer from a problem for which it has contributed minimally.

Compensation would be meaningless if the same polluters continue to pollute as usual. Africa should make it very clear that compensation by the industrialized countries must be concomitantly done with concrete measures and targets to cut emissions. It is gratifying to note that already the Group of African negotiators have been pushing for no less than 40% of emissions reductions from the industrialized world 1990 levels, adequate financing mechanisms to benefit the continent, access to clean technology, establishment of viable and accessible adaptation funds, restructuring of the CDM mechanism so that it would be beneficial to Africans. At the same time, we should use our forests which are used as carbon sinks and even our land fills which are sources of emissions to come up with projects that could be funded under the CDM mechanism.

As I conclude, I wish to ascertain that you note that the Heads of State were concerned that while a number of countries on other continents have benefited from financing facilities, Africa has hardly gained from the same and yet we need, deserve and must have this support. The Heads of State were further concerned that though there are multiple stakeholders and processes on the continent dealing with climate change, their outputs do not seem to be properly coordinated and consolidated. The Heads of State wanted the African Union Commission to ensure the collation and consolidation of outputs from all the relevant processes which go on on the continent by various stakeholders and partners. And again, while appreciating and endorsing the idea of building and strengthening alliances with other blocks on the globe to jointly champion shared interests, the Heads of State were concerned that the tendency has been for Africa to be relegated to the tail-end or side-lines rather than being actively at the

forefront of these alliances. They want to see Africa take a robust leadership role on climate change issues.

Another key relevant decision which was taken during the AU January-February 2009 Summit was on the establishment of the African Permanent Secretariat for Sustainable Development and the African Fund for Development. In this connection, following the successful 6th World Forum on Sustainable Development which was held in Congo Brazzaville in October last year, the Republic of Burkina Faso is also scheduled to host the 7th World Forum on Sustainable Development that will take forward progress in this regard.

May I also refer to the 2nd Africa Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction which was held in Nairobi from 5-7 May 2009 which reviewed progress made in Africa in the implementation of the Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Hyogo Framework for Action, and proposed extension of the "Programme of Action for the Implementation of the Africa Regional Strategy 2006-2010" to cover the period until 2015. Integrating disaster risk reduction into climate change adaptation and long-term sustainable development was one of the key recommendations during the 2nd Africa Regional Platform, which we need to take this on board.

Having said that, I believe that the proposals put forward by the Commission on the three-tier representation and negotiating structure, the modalities for negotiating for compensation and other thematic areas as well as recognition of the valuable contribution of our eco-systems, in follow up of the Decision of the Heads of State, will enrich the process buttressed by AMCEN and the Group of African negotiators. I therefore, look forward to your ideas to enhance this and I have the hope that the outcome of this Special Session will considerably input into the AUC Report which I will be presenting to the next Summit of the AU Heads of State in July 2009.

On this note, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would thank you for your attention.