

AFRICAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT

Keynote address by Minister Buyelwa Sonjica, South African Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, at the opening of the AMCEN Special Session on Climate change, Nairobi, 25 - 29 May 2009.

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On behalf of South Africa, I am delighted to welcome you to this Special Session on Climate Change, of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment. It is indeed no coincidence that this session is held in the week in which the world is celebrating Africa Day, to reflect on how Africa is responding to the challenge of climate change. In particular, we are here to prepare ourselves, as Africa, for the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

As the world population increases so too do the demands for water, energy and food resources. These pressures are exacerbated by natural disasters, extreme poverty and resource deprivation, as well as human induced-climate change. These trends, as evidenced by the sobering daily newspaper reports about droughts, escalating food and oil prices, and human tragedy, all place new demands on the way we manage the environment, and in particular on the way in which we respond to the impacts of climate change.

Our task as Environment Ministers is to provide the leadership that will be required to convert public will into political will, and political will into action and implementation as we respond to the climate change challenge, and seek to change challenges into opportunities.

Africa is one of the regions that is least responsible for climate change, most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and least able to afford the costs of responding to and addressing climate change. In a scenario in which no action is taken, the global average temperature will increase far beyond 2 Degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. This is, without doubt, a dangerous scenario for the people of our continent. While the projected impacts sound alarming at face value, the deeper implications are dismal and distressing. The IPCC has confirmed that the number of people exposed to water stress will multiply, and productive land area will decrease significantly in Africa. Infrastructure, production, income-generating activities and human livelihoods are likely to be significantly affected. If no action is taken, vector borne diseases such as malaria could, and indeed, in some areas have already expanded their range, with considerable associated costs. Between 20 and 30% of species will be at increasingly high risk of extinction if temperatures rise between 1.5 and 2.5 above 2000 levels. In parts of Africa, observations show that such impacts are already underway. In our continent, biodiversity underpins economic activity and human livelihoods directly, and the ecosystem services they provide nurture environmental quality.

We have much yet to learn of our vulnerability and adaptive capacity, but in the face of these risks, the debate on climate change in the African continent is clearly one on national, economic and environmental security. Those least able to adapt are likely to be the poor, and thus an emerging theme at the heart of the climate change debate is that this is also a poverty issue.

As Africans, we must therefore take decisive action. We cannot place our long term development, competitiveness and survival on the altar, in the face of the additional climate change burden, by not taking action in the short and medium term.

In Bali, 18 months ago, the international community opened the door for negotiating a strengthened international climate regime. In Poznan, we agreed to move into full negotiating mode to ensure that we conclude negotiations in Copenhagen in December this year, a mere 7 months away. For Africa, a successful outcome of negotiations in Copenhagen is a matter of survival, and it must be an outcome that is inclusive, fair and effective; that has a balance between adaptation and mitigation; and a balance between development and climate imperatives. The climate regime must be based on the recognition that solving the climate problem will only be possible if it is undertaken with development priorities at its heart.

This means that an agreement in Copenhagen will not be complete or politically feasible without a deal on adaptation that provides the necessary finance, technology and capacity building for implementation of adaptation programmes, at local, national, sub-regional and regional level. In essence, this means that a comprehensive international programme on adaptation, with massively upscaled finance, technology and capacity building, must be established to reduce vulnerability and build resilience of African countries to immediate and future impacts. And I would like to emphasise that immediate impacts includes the increasing numbers of extreme events that we are already experiencing in Africa, and that we anticipate will worsen in future.

Turning now to mitigation, Africa expects developed countries to take the lead with deep and ambitious mitigation commitments. This includes, firstly, more ambitious, quantified and legally binding emission reduction commitments for developed countries under the Kyoto Protocol. Secondly, it requires re-engagement of the USA in the full multilateral process with comparable, binding emission reduction commitments and robust compliance. By the end of 2009 in Copenhagen, in accordance with the science, we expect the developed world to adopt, in aggregate, targets of at least 40% below 1990 levels by 2020, and at least 95% domestically below 1990 levels by 2050.

For their part, developing countries are already taking mitigation action, and are willing to do more. The message from a developing country perspective is clear: We take our responsibilities seriously. We are already making a meaningful contribution within our respective capabilities. We are willing to do more, and need financial technology and capacity building support to make a meaningful contribution.

Creating a more empowering technology and financing framework will be a precondition for mitigation action in developing countries. Predictable financial, technology and capacity building flows are essential for African countries to build more resilient economies and societies as well as to "leapfrog" to low carbon growth and development.

Funding must be matched with technology at various stage of its life-cycle. A suite of funding mechanisms, investment structures and policy tools is required to overcome barriers associated with the various types and stages of technology development. Capacity building and institutional strengthening are key elements of the means of implementation. Climate change is challenging us

at the most fundamental level, and in order to respond, we must move into a new institutional and technological paradigm. This requires strong and dynamic institutional capacity at all levels.

In conclusion, a successful outcome at Copenhagen is a livelihood matter for Africa. If the world does not grasp and respond to the challenge of climate change, we in Africa are faced with dire consequences to development and poverty eradication in our continent. In addition, we will not be able to turn this challenge, and crisis, into the potential for opportunity and change.

I thank you.