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The World Hydropower Congress Kicks off in Addis Ababa, as Africa Seeks Energy Security

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, May 9, 2017- Hydropower provides significant opportunities for Africa, particularly with the abundance of the resource on the continent and further, the maturity of the technology which indicates hydropower's crucial role in expanding electricity access to the African citizenry, says African Union Commission Deputy Chairperson Ambassador Kwesi Quartey. Speaking at the opening of the sixth World Hydropower Congress (WHC) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Ambassador Kwesi observed that Africa accounts for about 12% of the World's technically feasible hydropower potential, likely to generate over 1,800 Terra Watts-hours of electricity. "Currently, less than 10% of the hydropower potential in Africa is exploited making hydropower an ample opportunity for Africa to develop both large and small-scale energy infrastructure at the regional, national and local levels," stated the Deputy Chairperson.

Ambassador Kwesi highlighted the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), which he noted, has given great focus on hydropower plants in the planned capacity in additions to the energy sector in Africa. "Developing this resource at the continental and regional levels will enhance economic cooperation and trade as well as create integrated markets amongst Member States," he stated. The African Union is working with the Government of Democratic Republic of Congo to develop the Inga hydropower project, as one of its Flagship programmes under the AU Agenda 2063. The Democratic Republic of Congo alone, accounts for about 42% of the hydropower potential on the continent

While officially opening the conference, Ethiopian Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn noted that development in Africa requires investment in reliable energy, adding that hydropower is the pillar for Africa's energy security. Without universal access to electricity, Prime Minister Desalegn indicated Africa would not be able to achieve the sustainable development. He called for global collaboration in finding solutions to reliable and sustainable energy development for transformation of African economies. "I would like to reiterate the need for collective efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change," he added.

Acting UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Executive Secretary, Abdalla Hamdok while addressing the meeting, noted that clear vision and strong coherent action in the implementation of policies to promote faster and more inclusive growth, provides Africa with the potential to take the lead in innovation, technology and business models that utilize hydropower optimally and efficiently. He underscored the need for African to leverage its growing urban population for future economic diversification stating that Africa's urban population is projected to reach about 50% by 2035 with increasing demands for employment, services and infrastructure, including energy;

Mr. Hamdok, however cautioned against the over-reliance on hydropower, noting its likely negative environmental and social impact highlighting recent evidence in countries such as Zambia and Mozambique. "This is mostly linked to growing concerns regarding hydropower sustainability, including the over-reliance on hydropower, which could possibly compromise energy security in many countries, especially in the context of drought," he stated.

On his part, the chairman of the Global Energy Interconnection Development and Cooperation Organization (GEIDCO) Liu Zhenya, underscored the need for states and stakeholders to accelerate the green and low-carbon transition by employing the "Global Energy Interconnection' (GEI) concept. Which emphasizes the relevance of effecting a new energy supply system prioritized by clean energy development and power supply, with large-scale optimal allocation of the GEI platform.

As part of the implementation of African Union's Agenda 2063 and UN's Agenda 2030, the African Union, the UNECA and key stakeholders are collaborating on the rolling out of various initiatives aimed at promoting low carbon energy development and clean energy infrastructure projects. Over 600 million people in Africa live without access to electricity and many households rely on traditional biomass for cooking. Hydropower produces more than three-quarters of the world's renewable energy output annually.

The convening of the World Hydropower Congress is part of efforts to accelerate efforts to achieve sustainable energy for all by 2030. The meeting examines how initiatives by senior government officials and experts from various parts of the world, civil society and private sector representatives, and colleagues from the African Union, international organizations, United Nations Agencies and development partners can advance sustainable energy development.

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