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MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ADOPTS INTEGRATED AFRICAN STRATEGY FOR METEOROLOGY

Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe 19 October 2012 – An integrated African strategy for meteorology to meet challenges such as climate change and extreme weather hazards has been adopted by a ministerial-level conference in Zimbabwe.

The Second Session of the African Ministerial Conference on Meteorology 12-15 October 2012 also focused on how to improve weather and climate services for sustainable development, particularly for priority sectors such as agriculture, water, health, disaster risk reduction and transport.

The ministerial conference, organised by the World Meteorological Organization, the African Union Commission and the Government of Zimbabwe, welcomed the general improvement in the capacity and capabilities of African meteorological services over the past decade. But it also noted that many National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) in the region operate with poor infrastructure and limited capability. Their climate services are generally poorly developed and in a number of countries basic climate services are only available from external sources.

“We need to develop our own meteorological products, strengthen our human capacities and use our own financial resources,” said Zimbabwe Vice President, H.E Joyce. Mujuru. She called for the development of an African Meteorology Space Programme to improve the continent’s ability to monitor extreme weather and climate events, saying timely meteorological early warning services and forecasts would save the continent “billions of dollars every year.”

According to the Integrated African Strategy on Meteorology (Weather and Climate Services), NMHSs “can contribute to underpinning economic growth and sustainable development in the African continent.”

“The weather and climate services provided by NMHSs significantly contribute to the safety and well-being of the African people and communities and support key economic areas including agriculture, aviation, forestry, fishing, water resources, energy industries, transportation and tourism. In addition, these services are crucial to enhancing resilience to and reducing vulnerability from, natural hazards and the effects of climate variability and climate change,” it said.

The strategy identifies five key pillars for action:

- Increase political support and recognition of National Meteorological and Hydrological Services and related Regional Climate Centres
- Enhance weather and climate service delivery for sustainable development
- Improve access to meteorological services for in particular for Marine and Aviation Sectors
- Support the provision of weather and climate services for climate change adaptation and mitigation

- Strengthen partnerships with relevant institutions and funding mechanisms

The strategy should enhance the cooperation between African countries and to ensure that NMHSs have the capacity to fulfil their responsibilities including in the implementation of the Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS), which is being developed by WMO and its partners in the United Nations to improve climate services, especially for the most vulnerable.

“The implementation of the GFCS will enable better management of the risks of climate variability and change and adaptation to climate change, through the development and incorporation of science-based climate information and prediction into planning, policy and practice on the global, regional and national scales,” said WMO Secretary-General Michel Jarraud.

“It is high time for our continent to find long term solutions to the effects of the recurrent drought which undermine the development efforts in the Sahara, Sahel, Kalahari deserts and in the Horn of Africa,” said Ms Tumusiime Rhoda Peace, AU Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture. “The same applies to devastating floods such as those being witnessed in West Africa, for example, Nigeria and others. The natural disasters are on the increase and most of them are related to meteorology and hydrology.”

Meteorological services in Africa fall under the responsibility of various ministries, such as Transport, Equipment, Agriculture and Environment. This makes it all the more important to strengthen the institutional framework of weather, climate and hydrological services to meet the many challenges facing the continent.

Africa covers one fifth of the world’s total land area but has the least developed observation network of the world. It amounts to only one eighth of the minimum density required by WMO. Moreover most meteorological services have insufficient human and financial capacity.

The meeting in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, followed on from the inaugural 2010 First Ministerial Conference of Ministers Responsible for Meteorology in Africa, which adopted the Nairobi Declaration calling for the strengthening of National Meteorological and Hydrological Services

The World Meteorological Organization is the United Nations System’s authoritative voice on Weather, Climate and Water

For more information, please contact:

Clare Nullis, Press Officer, Communications and Public Affairs, Tel: +(41 22) 730 8478; 41-79) 7091397 (cell), e-mail: cnullis(at) wmo.int .
WMO website: www.wmo.int

Wynne Musabayana, Deputy Head, Division of Communication and Information, AUC, Tel: +251 115517700, email: MUSABAYANAW@africa-union.org