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STATEMENT

DELIVERED BY

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AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

AT THE

OPENING CEREMONY

OF THE

**STAKEHOLDERS' WORKSHOP OF THE PARTNERSHIP FOR AFLATOXIN
CONTROL IN AFRICA (PACA)**

HELD AT

DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA

10 APRIL 2013

- Honorable Minister of Health, Republic of Tanzania
- Representatives of other African Member States
- Representatives of other Pan African Institutions
- Our development partners
- Members of the Consular and Diplomatic Corps
- Other invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me first of all present to you all the warm compliments of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H. E. Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and her best wishes for the progressive efforts on the institutionalization of the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA) in the African farming systems. .

I bring you warm greetings from HE Commissioner Tumusiime Rhoda Peace who has continued to provide the leadership and strategic guidance that the continent requires at this time on agriculture and food security.

It is with a great sense of appreciation that I on behalf of the PACA welcome you all to the very warm and peaceful ambience of the city of Dar Es Salaam great. In particular we present our warm compliments and appreciation to HE President Jakaya Kikwete, his government and the people of Tanzania for granting the hosting rights and the enabling environment to conduct our business since our arrival in Tanzania a few days ago.

Honourable Minister, distinguished guests, the opportunity presented to hold this important workshop places Tanzania in a primus intra pares position in which it has become the reference city where the continent-wide strategy on aflatoxin control was elaborated. Our appreciation to the Government and people of Tanzania for the warm

reception and hospitality accorded the participants and the delegation of the African Union since our arrival in this city beautiful country. We would like to commend the efforts of TFDA, N Mandel Institute of Technology and the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture for co hosting this epoch-making event.

I will also like to recognize the presence and support of our key donors from the BMGF (Orin Hasson), USAID (Jeff Hill) and DfID in encouraging the efforts towards the control of aflatoxicosis and the continent-wide initiatives as they continue to contribute to heart of Africa's Economic growth and Food Security.

I salute the courage of the farming communities and the agriculture sector as a whole and all our technical and financial partners that are contributing towards addressing the challenges of hunger, food insecurity and poverty in Africa.

Honorable Minister, Ladies And Gentlemen

Aflatoxin is a highly toxic substance caused by fungi especially of the ***Aspergillus spp.*** The toxin is linked to cancer, immune-system suppression, growth retardation, liver disease, and death in both humans and domestic animals. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 25% of world food crops are affected, and tropical countries are most at risk. Over 5 billion people in developing countries are at risk of chronic aflatoxin exposure. Aflatoxin thus poses a threat to international trade, health, food security and many other international development efforts. Control of aflatoxin is needed to achieve greater agricultural

development, food security and improve health, particularly in Africa where contamination is widespread and often acute.

In our quest of attaining the laudable goal of a food-secure Africa, the political leadership of the continent endorsed the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme I am particularly happy to note that there is a lot of progress in Africa.

The next decade will be very crucial with very heavy demands on the food sector. Population increases are expected in the most challenged regions of our continent which is currently the most food-insecure continent and with a rising food import bill approaching 40bn USD, it is imperative that we need to apply ourselves even more to be able reduce the import bill to sustainable levels. I am convinced that this goal is achievable and with the usual support of our partners, I see a food-secure Africa within the decade.

I would like to seize this opportunity to assure you that at the continental level, a lot of effort has been placed on the CAADP agenda since 2003. Within the last decade, Africa has chosen to take its common destiny in its own hands with a reaffirmation of commitment to increase agricultural production, productivity, food and nutrition security thereby combating hunger, malnutrition and poverty, and, indeed, contributing to the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGS).

We are equally mindful of the fact that for this transformation to happen, we need to adopt new ways of doing business in Agriculture. The investment portfolio in the

agriculture sector will have to increase significantly before any meaningful transformation can occur. The private sector engagement and the full participation of non-state actors in the sector is a pre-requisite for a sustainable production base.

Where we are today is the celebration of the wisdom of African leaders and, indeed, with the support and dynamism of our farming communities, other stakeholders, civil society and private sector, technical and financial partners.

Coming from the CAADP-PP recently held in Addis Ababa and in its tenth year on implementation, since Maputo Summit of African Heads of State and Government, we have all worked very hard to move the Continental blueprint on agricultural development forward. Especially in the last four years, Africa has recorded significant increase in the number of countries that have signed CAADP Compacts. We are now at a phase where we need all hands to push this agenda forward in terms of implementing the NAIPs

We are aware that such an endeavour at the country level also calls for stronger commitment on the side of our partners. We would like to call on all our technical and financial partners to step up their efforts in support of this remarkable momentum. We welcome every contribution that moves us towards realizing our goal of a poverty-free, food and nutrition-secure Africa.

Today on the continent, mycotoxicological contaminants within the human food chain remains one of the most potent sources of morbidity and sometimes mortality in the African society. With the grim potential of significantly reducing life expectancy on

society's longevity as well as a know contributory factor to reduction in the attainment of optimum potential of the children's growth with a net-effect of stunting and immune-suppression in early childhood. The domino effect of this scenario is very alarming.

The aflatoxin challenge has been with us for a long time as well as the gri consequences that we face today. Most of the strategic commodities that our leaders identified at the Abuja 2006 Food Summit are potentially vulnerable to aflatoxicosis. In particular, Cassave, Maize and Groundnuts which constitute a huge proportion of the food basket are affected. Once contaminated, the effect on food security, rejection of tradeable farm products – especially where cross border trade is involved and the ultimate bio-accumulation of carcinogens in the food chain and human bodies are of great concern.

In order to galvanize a coherent and consistent approach to aflatoxicosis control in the continent, with the help of some of our donors, the ground work to curb aflatoxicosis was birthed on the margins of the 7th Partnership Platform of the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) held in Yaounde Cameroon in 2011. In order to allow for synergistic opportunities, it became imperative that success in aflatoxin control would be inextricably linked with the CAADP process and the leadership of the AUC in the process.

The event of today coupled with the high level representation from the host country is a strong testimony to the perception of Africa of the very timely and complementary development of a sustainable mitigation strategy against aflatoxicosis on the continent.

The political leadership of Africa recognized the pivotal role of agriculture in the economic growth and it embarked on innovative policies aimed at a pragmatic

agricultural transformation agenda. This nouvelle agricultural development blueprint for Africa was endorsed in 2003 during the Maputo Summit. The Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme was inaugurated and it has continued to grow in leaps and bounds to date. The CAADP had become the common agricultural growth agenda that aims at fostering a 6% annual growth rate in the agriculture sector as well as the commitment of a minimum of 10% of total public expenditure to agriculture sector.

We will continue to engage at various forums including the diverse political mechanisms at our disposal.

Within the last three years, there has been a massive drive geared towards increasing private sector investment and the increasing involvement of non-state actors in the agriculture transformation agenda.

The next decade will be very crucial with very heavy demands on the food sector. Population increases are expected in the most challenged regions of the world. With Africa as the most food insecure and a rising food import bill approaching 40bn USD, it is imperative that we need to apply ourselves even more to be able reduce the import bill to sustainable levels. I am convinced that this goal is achievable and with the usual support of our partners, I see a food-secure Africa within the decade.

We are equally mindful of the fact that for this transformation to happen, we need to adopt new ways of doing business in Agriculture. The global investment portfolio in the agriculture sector will have to increase significantly before any meaningful transformation can occur. The private sector engagement and the full participation of non-state actors in the sector is a pre-requisite for a sustainable production base.

Within the broad context of the African continent, sustainable development is hinged on agriculture as the mainstay of the continent's economy. Currently, the agricultural sector is confronted with a plethora of challenges of both biophysical and biological nature – climate change, genetic resource conservation, land degradation, natural resource management, changes in population dynamics, increasing human population etc. overcoming these challenges is a onerous task requiring purpose-built interventions to address the different sides of the challenge.

I would like to seize this opportunity to assure you that at the continental level, a lot of effort has been placed on the CAADP agenda since 2003. Within the last decade, Africa has chosen to take its common destiny in its own hands with a reaffirmation of commitment to increase agricultural production, productivity, food and nutrition security thereby combating hunger, malnutrition and poverty, and, indeed, contributing to the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGS).

Today is the celebration of the wisdom of African leaders and, indeed, with the support and dynamism of our farming communities, other stakeholders, civil society and private sector, technical and financial partners. Coming to its tenth year on implementation, next year, since Maputo Summit of African Heads of State and Government, we have all worked very hard to move the Continental blueprint on agricultural development forward. Especially in the last four years, Africa has recorded significant increase in the number of countries that have signed CAADP Compacts. As at today, we have thirty AU Member States that are now aligned with the CAADP initiative in terms of both signing the compacts and increasing budgetary allocations to

the agricultural sector. It is no wonder, therefore, that despite the global economic and financial downturn coupled with challenges posed by climate change, Africa's agriculture has continued to grow at impressive rates. We are now at a phase where we need all hands to push this agenda forward in terms of implementing the NAIPs.

We are aware that such an endeavour at the country level also calls for stronger commitment on the side of our partners. Let me now use this occasion to invite all our technical and financial partners to step up their efforts in support of this remarkable momentum. We welcome every contribution that moves us towards realizing our goal of a poverty-free, food and nutrition-secure Africa.

Our task is an onerous one – to put it mildly. In the last few years, I have been deeply involved in the Commissions work on the Better Training for Safer Foods Programme funded by the European Union. The PACA initiative is a very strong component of this programme in the sense that our food safety programme will be one notch higher if we are able to control aspergillus contaminations in our food system. Across the three major sectors of agriculture, trade and Health, we will need to work together and strengthen surveillance, epidemiology and basic public and community health issues. We will also need to strengthen our communication strategies and the information sharing platforms. I know that we will come to the greater details in the course of this meeting.

Let me assure you that we have success stories to learn from on the continent. I am confident that with the kind of support we are receiving from our partners, we will soon be on our winning streak against aflatoxins.

Over the next two days, it is my hope that we will be able to put the right foot forward and get PACA moving towards its next strategic milestone here in Dar Es Salaam.

I thank you for your attention.