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Statement

by

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Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture
African Union Commission**

at the

ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY

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Colleagues and Partners,

We are here for this important cause; the issue of land. I am pleased that I have this opportunity to participate in this high-level Conference on Land and Poverty.

The African Union Commission takes this Conference as important as it is addressing one of the key development factors, and, that is land.

The African Union Heads of State and Government do recognise land as a critical resource underpinning Africa's development. Under their guidance, a continent-wide regional consultative process was undertaken by the Commission and a Consortium of partners and stakeholders including the World Bank, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). This process culminated in the **Land Policy Framework and Guidelines** which the AU Summit adopted in 2009 and were launched last October.

The Land Policy Framework and Guidelines are, indeed, important for us because as you know, Sustainable Land and Water Management constitutes one of the four key pillars of the **Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)**, the strategic framework for agricultural transformation. The Land Policy Framework and Guidelines provide systematic and comprehensive guidance on both land policy and land administration with the objective to support AU Member States strengthen their capacity and systems for evidence-based and objective analysis and decision-making on land and land-related matters. We are, therefore, keen on interacting with distinguished participants at this Conference and seeing how we can jointly support AU Member States to more efficiently and effectively utilise Africa's land resource, and related biodiversity including water, to promote the development of the continent, drawing on relevant best practices of other regions of the world.

It is also noteworthy that the Land Policy Framework and Guidelines came in handy as a number of AU Member States were striving to deal with internal

challenges of land policy, land tenure and utilisation. At the same time, they were dealing with massive foreign investment in land. The Land Policy Framework and Guidelines are to ensure that outcomes of such ventures are win-win both for investors and for recipient countries and communities.

Africa welcomes foreign direct investment in land as in other sectors. We are interested in investments that benefit both the investors and the recipient countries and communities.

- We welcome investment in land for agriculture considering that agriculture employs, feeds and sustains the **majority of our people**, most of whom live in rural areas; and, so, investing in agriculture, if properly guided, can impact positively on the livelihoods of the vast majority.
- We welcome investment in land more for **food production** than for biofuels and flowers, for example much as we do not underrate the value of horticulture and other land uses.
- While a number of our countries remain stricken by **hunger and poverty**, and our **population** is increasing rapidly, Africa has **expansive arable land** that hitherto remains unexploited and it is imperative that this resource gets harnessed to satisfy the needs of the African population.
- Yes, we have land, we also have manpower but what we lack is **technology** to exploit our land potential to proportions that generate food and cash crops, to combat hunger and poverty. An investor who brings in technology for large-scale mechanised agriculture will be welcome and more especially if the investor takes care not to marginalise or edge out the **small-holder farmers**, but to support and uplift them.
- We welcome investors in land who will **not displace populations** into desperate conditions but those who will also concern themselves with **socio-economic development** such as provision of community services including rural infrastructure, support for health facilities, educational

institutions, human and institutional capacity building especially in and around where such foreign direct investment is deployed.

- As part of corporate social responsibility, we would like to see investors in land that care about the **environment** preservation for sustainable development.

The elements I have just highlighted are incorporated in the AU Land Policy and Framework Guidelines. I am happy to report that more and more AU Member States are taking them into account as they engage foreign investors in land.

We remain grateful for the support received from the World Bank and other partners, members of the Consortium as we consulted and formulated the Land Policy Framework and Guidelines. I would like to thank the World Bank very much for organising this important Conference and for inviting us to participate, share our experiences and gain from the insights of our counterparts from other regions of the world.

As we begin to disseminate and popularise these Land Policy Framework and Guidelines throughout the African continent, we need your continued support. In fact, we are also here to know more how we can push them forward to the grassroots.

I thank you for your kind attention and I look forward to productive deliberations.