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Strengthening the African-Arab regional agriculture and food security initiative

By

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Statement at the Inaugural Session of the Steering Committee of the African-Arab

Joint Action Plan on Agricultural Development and Food Security

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Khartoum, Sudan

Your Excellencies

Chairman of The Steering Committee and Director General of the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, **Dr Tariq Al-Zadjali**

Permanent Representative of the League of Arab states to the African Union

Ambassador Noah

The Representative of Director General, BADEA

The Representative of the African development Bank

The Representative of NPCA

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

1. It is with a great sense of honour and appreciation that I participate in the **inaugural session of the Steering Committee of the African-Arab Joint Action Plan on Agricultural Development and Food security.**

Let me first of all present the compliments of the Chairperson of the African Union H. E. Dr Jean Ping to you all and his best wishes for a successful deliberation as we inaugurate the Steering Committee today.

On my own behalf, please allow me to express my gratitude to the AOAD leadership and in particular to the Director General Dr Tariq for the very warm reception accorded me and my delegation. I am also mindful of the ‘behind-the-scenes’ efforts that have now culminated to the successful takeoff of our meeting over the next two days. We all appreciate your efforts, enthusiasm and hard work.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

2. For all intents and purposes, we have come to another important milestone in our corporate walk together in our quest for the common good of the African and Arab regions particularly in the area of Agriculture and Food Security.

It is gratifying that the political leadership of the African and Arab peoples have always placed a high premium on the subject of Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development. At about the same period, when the African leadership endorsed the

Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), the Arab leadership followed suit by launching the **Sustainable Arab Agricultural development Strategy for the next two decades 2005-2025**.

These two programmes are a testimony of the concrete nature of the Africa-Arab partnership and its goal of delivering socio-economic benefits to our peoples. The African Union values this strategic partnership and I wish to reaffirm our commitment to take our collective efforts to greater heights.

3. Today, we are gathered together to elaborate ways and means of giving expression to the desires of our political leaders in the area of self-sustaining fight against poverty and food insecurity. A few decades ago, Mr **Jawaharlal Nehru**, the first Prime minister of India stated that ‘Everything else can wait but Agriculture cannot wait’. That statement is no less valid today than it was six decades ago. Today, we have come to another watershed in the political and economic emancipation of our peoples. The inauguration of the Steering Committee as a means to an end is very encouraging. Now we have all come to put our hands on the plough and we cannot afford to look back anymore. I salute the efforts of the thinkers and the strategists – especially our experts who have worked very hard to distill a realistic joint action plan that is based on the existing policy frameworks of both peoples.

4. With an agriculture-led economy in Africa where over 80% of the work force is agriculture-based, it is logical that agricultural development rightly deserves all the attention it is currently receiving as the engine of our industrial revolution and economic growth. Our recent experiences on food and nutrition security in the continent have culminated in our current corporate strategy to put a foolproof system in place to contain the undesirable outcomes of poverty, hunger and unemployment in Africa.

5. In a broad sense, agriculture provides a wide variety of employment opportunities in itself and at the same time, it is the only logical process to

sustainable food and nutritional security on our continent. Unfortunately, Africa has had a phenomenal decline in per capita food productivity during the last thirty years rendering the continent food insecure and consequently the largest destination of food aid and net food importer.

6. Currently the threat of hunger and malnutrition and the urgent need to ensure food and nutrition security are at the top of the global agenda. The net-effect is not only a physical condition of hunger and poverty, it is a drain on economic growth and development, a threat to global security, a barrier to health and education, and a poverty trap for the millions of people in Africa who work every single day but can barely produce enough food to sustain their lives and the lives of their families. This is happening, despite the past and current efforts of support to agriculture by Member States and development partners. It is, therefore, paradoxical that there are many cases of hunger, malnutrition, food insecurity in our continent that is versed with diverse potential such as, natural resources, good weather and fertile soils, but is still confronted with challenges such as climate change, emerging health challenges and associated drought and floods that have exacerbated the problems.

7. From another perspective, the evolving production systems on the continent apart from grappling with inadequate production inputs, also have to deal with adapting to new demand-driven production techniques commensurate with current climatic exigencies. As a result of drastic climate events, agriculture and rural livelihoods have been adversely affected in recent times. In addition, the need for food aid coupled with rising global food prices and its multiplier effects were at record levels in the last few years coupled with rife incidences of droughts that leave the farm lands bare and the garners empty especially in most arid and semi-arid areas. The inclement impacts of climate change are a daily reminder of the need to urgently put in place sustainable strategies to palliate these undesirable outcomes.

8. The need to address food and nutritional securities of our peoples in the context of changing climatic events is now at all time high. Climate is changing fast and so is the vulnerability of the agrarian communities. There is, therefore, the need to react equally as fast as the climate is changing if we will avert calamities.

There is no gainsaying that repeated weather shocks undermine our progress towards Millennium Development Goals. To address these increased frequency of natural disasters, including those driven by climate change, Africa must transition from **managing crises** to **managing risks**. Effective food security risk management requires custom-built strategies.

9. Our gathering today is therefore a response to the persistent demand for a food secure African and Arab peoples. From a macro-economic perspective, Africa is spending up to US\$33 billion annually to import food while exports have stagnated at US\$14-15bn. Invariably; Africa remains a net importer of food with negative balance of trade of US\$18bn on food alone. I am convinced that there is a lot of room for the JAP to reverse this undesirable trend.

10. From another perspective, it is encouraging to note that the JAP is synchronized with our continental strategy on Food Security – the CAADP. The JAP will certainly provide the much needed platform for governments, Development partners and the private sector to play their role especially in our Member States that are preparing to implement CAADP and to develop investment strategies in agriculture.

11. Finally, the African-Arab Joint Action Plan is in line with the AU strategy especially as it dovetails into CAADP on the following issues:

- intensification of input supply and use and irrigation,
- the food reserves initiative,
- Infrastructure, trade and market initiative and

- agricultural research development and technology transfer initiative

Also including

- trans-boundary and environmental challenges
- Capacity building

All of which are linked to CAADP pillars and actions to operationalise CAADP at country level. So the Action plan finds a good ground work in Africa through CAADP

12. Building on a series of AU Summit Decisions and in line with the CAADP core principles and values, the JAP provides ample space for the following:

- Intensification of Continental, regional and country commodity focus – through establishment of commodity platforms
- Focus on development and use of fertilizer and other inputs to accelerate and enhance production and productivity
- Increase area under irrigation to respond to climate change especially during drought invulnerable areas.

These will be able to make early and quick-wins for advancing agricultural agenda and attainment of Africa and Arab world vision on agricultural development

Your Excellencies

13. Let me conclude that in aiming to succeed in working together to realize the Vision for a Food Secure Africa, we would have inadvertently succeeded to a large extent in putting poverty behind us. That is what our Ministers aimed at in Sharm el Sheikh, which was later endorsed by our Heads of State at their Summit in Tripoli. Our coming together to deliberate on implementation mechanisms and our agreeing to take them forward is what our political leadership expects us to do.

14. I thank you

