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**6<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum**  
**African Parliamentarians' Meeting**

**STATEMENT OF HER EXCELLENCY TUMUSIIME RHODA PEACE, COMMISSIONER FOR  
RURAL ECONOMY AND AGRICULTURE, AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

**TOPIC: AFRICAN UNION PERSPECTIVES ON WATER AND SANITATION**

**Palais des Evenements, Pev A5, Marseille, France**  
**15 March 2012**

- Your Excellencies;
- Honourable Members of Parliament;
- Distinguished Partners of the Water Agenda in Africa;
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
- Distinguished Guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour of conveying to you cordial greetings and best wishes from the African Union Commission.

It is also with appreciation to the organising committee that I take this opportunity to address you at this important meeting.

You deserve to be saluted for devoting attention to this precious resource of water and your presence here reassures us that you are committed to using your leadership position and political constituencies to advance the cause of water and sanitation both through legislation and mass mobilisation.

### **Your Excellencies, Honourable Ladies and Gentlemen**

Against the background of the African Water Vision 2025 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for water supply and sanitation, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was launched, in 2001, highlighting the vitality of environment and natural resources systems – particularly freshwater – to unleashing Africa's development potential. Given the transboundary nature of most of Africa's freshwater resources and challenges of competing and rapidly growing demands on the resources on account of population growth, urbanisation, pollution; and inadequate investment in the water sector, a key first step to harnessing that potential is to improve water governance. Effective water resources management is a prerequisite to both achieving and sustaining aspirations of improved water access in Africa.

It is thus that NEPAD's key objectives relating to water and sanitation emphasise the need to:

1. plan and manage water resources to become a basis for national and regional cooperation and development;
2. cooperate on shared rivers among member states; and,
3. ensure sustainable access to safe and adequate clean water supply and sanitation especially for the poor.

These objectives have been fundamental building blocks of major initiatives in Africa for improving water resources management. Key among these initiatives are:

- the 2002 Abuja Ministerial Declaration on Water, which not only pronounces water as a key to sustainable development in Africa, but also established the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW);
- the 2004 Sirte Declaration on the challenges of Implementing Integrated and Sustainable Development in Agriculture and Water in Africa;
- the 2008 eThekweni Declaration on Sanitation and Hygiene;
- the 2008 Ministerial Declaration on Accelerating Water Security for Africa's Socio-Economic Development; and,
- the 2008 Sharma El Sheikh Commitments on Water and Sanitation.

### **Your Excellencies, Honourable Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is, therefore, evident that significant success has been registered, especially on the political front, in the efforts to address Africa's water challenges. Similarly, extensive technical and institutional solutions for developing, utilising and managing Africa's water and related resources have been developed with great promise to catalyse and sustain socio-economic development and prosperity for its peoples.

Lest us take, for example, the issue of redressing the imbalance in social relationships that is one of the key causes of poverty and vulnerability. The African Union developed the gender mainstreaming system, and also at very high level decreed the engagement of young people who now comprise over 60% of our population, in meaningful, productive activities that boost their self confidence and inculcate their desire to better themselves and the society in which they live.

These two simple initiatives are already starting to yield fruits. On gender, hundreds of civil society and NGOs have come to agree on a common framework for measuring progress on gender- no mean achievement.

But even more important they have agreed to harmonise and create synergy in each country, with periodic evaluation through AMCOW where the Minister for Water presents progress reports that have been mutually agreed on at the country level before they are table.

This is a take-off from the Africa peer review mechanism, and reinforces the need for Africans to learn from and strengthen one another.

For the youth, more than 20 countries now have work programs engaging youth in critical spheres of economic activity.

At the African Union Commission, we are monitoring the effects of these youth empowerment activities so we may report on and strengthen the scale and scope of their engagement.

However, tangible benefits out of these successes hardly trickle down to the community level , in part, due to incommensurate prioritisation of water issues at national level. If, for instance, water resources management at national level was treated with half the level of urgency and financial commitment accorded to the development of – say – the oil sector in a country where commercially viable reserves have been discovered, there would be no need for such undertakings as those earlier mentioned. Now contrast this with the fact that there can be no life – let alone development – without water; and also that there are many a developed country without oil resources. One cannot help but observe that we are literally neglecting our life by neglecting water resources.

### **Your Excellencies, Honourable Ladies and Gentlemen**

Our appeal to you as key stakeholders in the legislatures of AU Member States is to champion the cause of:

- creating an enabling legal and regulatory environment for community level interventions to improve water resources management, as well as improving sanitation and hygiene standards;
- enforcing the commitments of our Heads of State and Government to increase domestic financial resources allocated to water and sanitation development activities. For instance, there are commitments for countries to allocate at least 0.5% of GDP to sanitation and hygiene; and at least 5% of national annual budgets to water and sanitation. These are commitments we can rely on our parliamentarians to enforce during budget approval sessions in the Houses of Parliament.
- raise the profile of water resources management in your constituencies and thus help drive the campaign to achieve the levels of public awareness and participation necessary to assure best practice in water development, utilisation and management.

### **Your Excellencies, Honourable Ladies and Gentlemen**

Given the vitality of water to improving livelihoods; ensuring food security; and driving economic development, it goes without saying that the hopes of our people are pinned to the political leadership of our continent and countries to ensure that we stay the course towards the Africa Water Vision 2025 of:

***“An Africa where there is an equitable and sustainable use and management of water resources for poverty alleviation, socio-economic development, regional cooperation, and the environment”.***

In the execution of our core mandate of policy harmonisation, partnership building, resource mobilisation and advocacy, the African Union Commission remains committed to servicing all AU Member States in taking forward issues of water and sanitation as part of the development pillar in addition to other pillars of peace and security, institutional capacity building and shared values.

Thank you.