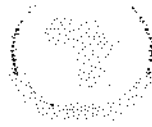


AFRICAN UNION
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UNION AFRICAINE
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STATEMENT

BY

HER EXCELLENCY MRS.TUMUSIIME RHODA PEACE

COMMISSIONER FOR RURAL ECONOMY AND AGRICULTURE

AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE OPENING OF PARLIAMENTARIANS COLLOQUIUM

ON

BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF CHEMICALS AND
WASTE IN AFRICA

Honorable Speaker of the Parliament of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Excellency Ambassador of Uganda in Ethiopia and Goodwill Ambassador of Multilateral Environmental Agreements

Excellences, the Ambassadors/Permanent Representatives of African Union Member States

Honorable Speakers of African Regional Parliamentarians,

Honorable Members of National Parliaments

Distinguished Head/ Representative of the European Union in Addis Ababa,

Distinguished Secretary General of the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Secretariat

The Regional Director for Africa in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

**The Director of Rural Economy and Agriculture African Union Commission
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, all Protocols observed**

Good morning,

On behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma ; I am honored and pleased to welcome you at the African Union Commission in the context of this Parliamentarians Colloquium on Conservation of Biodiversity and Management of Chemicals in Africa, organized by African Union Commission, Multilateral Environmental Agreements Project, in close collaboration with United Nations Programme for Environment.

At the outset, allow me to thank all of you for being able to come to this Parliamentarian Colloquium despite your tight schedules. Your presence here, is eloquent testimony of the importance you attach to environment, and particularly, to the Conservation of Biodiversity and Management of Chemicals in Africa.

**Honorable Parliamentarians,
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We consider parliaments as being crucial partners for promoting sustainable development, environmental governance and advancing laws and policies. Indeed, one of your main roles is to develop, review, debate and enact laws and agreements that effectively lead to good governance, socio-economic and political stability.

In some AU Member States, parliaments are also involved in one way or another, in ratifying or approving treaties including Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). Therefore, you do play a key role in developing of laws through debates of bills for adoption and also act as overseers in enforcement of and compliance with Multilateral Environmental Agreements. In this regard, you are responsible for monitoring government efforts to protect the environment in order to achieve sustainable development and poverty reduction. We salute you for your effective contribution to the AU's vision through executing your roles.

**Honorable Parliamentarians,
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It would be recalled that taking into account this great role that Parliamentarians are playing in promoting environmental sustainability on the continent; the African Union Commission, organized a Parliamentarians colloquium in June 2012, in Entebbe, Uganda. The said colloquium resulted in a Decision of the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) urging Governments to work closely with Parliamentarians in MEAs development, and the establishment of a network of African Parliamentarians called "**Green Bird-Africa**" (GBA). A source book on MEAs mainstreaming for African Parliamentarians was also developed. We are proud of this progress as we strive for more.

Today, the MEAs Project, with assistance from UNEP is organizing a second parliamentarian's colloquium on biodiversity conservation and chemicals and waste management, particularly their related international and regional agreements and conventions, their ratification and domestication, as well as application in respect of sustainable development.

**Honorable Parliamentarians,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

In Africa, all population depends on biodiversity for their livelihoods. It is well known that natural resources play a critical role in providing food, medicines, shelter, materials for industrialization and income for many. While human life unquestionably depends on healthy ecosystems that supply life-sustaining resources and absorb wastes, the concern is that current growth and consumption patterns in Africa are placing increasing stress on ecosystems. Today, Africa is witnessing land degradation, biodiversity loss, deforestation and wetland destruction which are among the most visible indicators of stressed ecosystems.

We know that a number of AU Member States are putting in place and enforcing effective ways of biodiversity conservation in an attempt to balance on one hand extraction of materials from ecosystems for development activities and on the other hand conserving the sustainability of the ecosystems for future development. This balance will lead AU Member States to bring environmental issues at the core of their national development plans. In this processes, you Honorable Parliamentarians can play a crucial role in providing legislative orientations within national environmental frameworks for sustainable development. Today, in most of our countries, the contribution of biodiversity to economic growth is not adequately recognized because the way official statistics are made they do not capture much of the economic value that biodiversity generates. Policies in the areas of environment, forestry, wetlands, land use, wildlife policies among others have been developed in most of AU Member States and this gives us hope and confidence that Africa is on the right track. We are encouraged to promote this positive trend.

It is, nevertheless, worth noting that though most of AU Member States have ratified international conventions and agreements such as **CITES** (the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species** of Wild Fauna and Flora, also known as the Washington Convention), **Ramsar Convention** (formally, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat), the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**, the African **Convention** on the Conservation of nature and Natural Resources (The **Maputo Convention**) and so on, their implementation remains weak and needs stepping up.

We would like to call upon all Member States that have not yet ratified them to do so and to take further steps to regularly assess changes in forest and water as well as the quality, cover, presence and abundance of threatened species. We would like to see African countries using the environmental assessment tools to assess impacts of the development projects on the physical, biological, socio-economic and cultural aspects of the environment.

Honourable Parliamentarians
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is noteworthy that more immediate challenges to biodiversity include the increased use of chemicals in households, agriculture and industrial production and how to manage those chemicals and their residues and waste. Due to limited knowledge on environmentally sustainable alternatives and proper quality control of agricultural products, African farmers have greatly increased their use of chemical-based pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides. Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) pesticides are still being used or stocked in make-shift stores where the dangers and risks due to exposure are enormous. More recently, the FAO estimated that there might be more than 40, 000 tons, perhaps even much more, of these chemicals stocked or discarded over many parts of Africa. Apart from agricultural chemicals, other hazardous chemicals exist in Africa and pose a serious threat to human health and the environment. Furthermore, toxic chemicals, such as Persistent Organic Pollutants can enter body tissues and breast milk, through which they are passed on to infants, causing reproductive and immunological disorders. This is extremely dangerous even for the future of our continent. Mercury is also considered to be a highly toxic metal but despite its toxicity it is used in soaps and cosmetics; antiseptics; paints; pesticides and pharmaceutical products; human and veterinary products and even in dental fixtures in Africa. The increase in use of these chemicals in Africa coupled with the risk due to their illegal entry pose a major health and environmental concern. We are keen to mobilize our citizens, communities and nations across Africa to raise their consciousness over this threat and to get them to protect themselves and the future of our continent.

Honorable Parliamentarians
Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

As if that is not enough, unregulated disposal of discarded electronic devices and appliances known as “e-waste” is rapidly becoming a challenge to the health of

biodiversity on the African continent. The coming of electronic devices to Africa was supposed to offer solutions for rapid social-economic growth; it has, however, not yet offered solutions on how to manage the e-waste which is a threat to the health of ecosystems. Honorable Parliamentarians, we look up to your leadership in taking up this matter.

It is important to note that E-waste contents, if dumped in a landfill, toxic and hazardous materials such as mercury, lead, cadmium, beryllium and chromium, may leach into the soil and water. If burned, hazardous chemicals may be released into the air. Failure to have proper mechanisms to dispose of our e-waste is contributing to the environmental degradation. We need drastic actions to address this state of affairs.

Because there is no effective law regarding e-waste, business people in industrialized countries have found developing countries as a dump site for second-hand electronics. Unfortunately African countries have not yet developed adequate policies and institutions on how to regulate and manage the importation of such electronics and related appliances. Honorable Parliamentarians can create the necessary pressure in your respective countries to have this matter.

Honorable Parliamentarians
Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

One of the priority goals of the 2014 -2017 Action Plan for the environment initiative of AUC is to build Africa's capacity to implement environmental conventions and other international legal instruments. An overwhelming majority of AU Member States are now parties to many MEAs. The achievement of the objectives of MEAs by African countries largely depends on the extent to which their general public and decision-makers are aware and understand the content of the relevant provisions in various conventions and their respective national obligations. Many African countries have institutional frameworks for performing specified functions required for participation in international efforts to implement MEAs. Nevertheless, they need adequate and suitable capacity to ensure the sustained fulfillment of objectives specifically assigned in the MEAs. Indeed, many African countries lack the technical, financial, legal and human resources to effectively deal with their MEA obligations. We hope that we can work together in mobilizing resources in support of AU Member States in pursuit of this cause.

Building the capacity of African member states of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of Countries to implement MEAs has been recognized as one of the priorities if we are to address the challenges to pave the way for sustainable development on the continent. This need has also been emphasized in a number of meetings of African States, including the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN). The AMCEN of September 2012 took several Decisions related to such needs and these Decisions were endorsed by the AU Summit of January 2013. Africa's priorities for the implementation of MEAs can also be drawn out of national strategies and action plans, project proposals submitted to financial institutions.

It is in this context that Honorable Parliamentarians are requested to take the lead in initiating and drafting policies that can enable AU Member States to sustainably conserve the ecosystems for balanced socio-economic development. It is essential, within the context of national blue prints for rapid economic growth, to review all the relevant multilateral agreements that impact both directly and indirectly to the health of our environment which in turn affects our health and our development.

Your debates in parliaments are important in increasing citizens' awareness of where the nations are heading to in terms of communities' interests, ownership, mitigations against hunger famine for both humans and cattle resource depletion. All these measures depend on healthy and sustainable ecosystems at the levels of the nation, community and household.

Most importantly your powers to enact laws governing national budgets must be perceived by the citizens to be fair, equitable in enhancing basic needs that are directly linked to the health and survival of ecosystems. Needless to say, no country can develop without healthy ecosystems.

Honorable Parliamentarians
Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to conclude by reminding us that as the African Union and its Member States strategize for Africa Agenda 2063 for an integrated and prosperous Africa, we still face major challenges linked to conservation of biodiversity and management of chemicals in the context of increasing economic activities as they relate to exploitation of ecosystems for human survival. I am very confident that Honorable Parliamentarians and Experts from various institutions will have intensive discussions on this topic and recommend how

development policies can be implemented by striking a balance between conservation of biodiversity and sound management of chemicals and waste for a sustainable development in Africa. I look forward to the resolutions you will come up with and we look to the Honorable Parliamentarians in making sure that the resolutions will be implemented effectively at national and community levels.

I thank you and wish you fruitful deliberations.