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Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA P. O. Box 3243 Telephone 517 700 Cables: OAU,
ADDIS ABABA

Statement by Her Excellency Tumusiime Rhoda Peace

Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture

African Union Commission

on the occasion of the official opening of the

**Second Sahel and West Africa Programme in Support of the Great Green Wall for the
Sahara and Sahel Initiative Conference (Second SAWAP/BRICKS Conference)**

Addis Ababa 18th February 2015

- The Honourable State Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, H.E. Ato Sileshi Getahun,
- Executive Secretary of the Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel Region (CILSS), H.E. Dr. Djime Adoum.
- World Bank Country Director for Ethiopia, Mr. Guang Ze Chen,
- The Executive Secretary of West African Science Service Center on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL),
- Task Team Leader, Ethiopia SLMP and Regional BRICKS Project Mr. Stephen Danyo
- Representatives of Various Partners, Countries and Participants of the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel initiative
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I welcome you all to the African Union Commission, I know you have been here for the past three days, and I hope the meetings went on very well and you attained your objectives. On behalf of the Chairperson of the Commission, H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, let me take this opportunity to wish all of you a happy and productive New Year. .

Let me extend a special welcome and salute the high-level personalities and senior officials for being here despite your busy schedules at the beginning of the year 2015. We also welcome the technical and financial support that our partners contribute towards the success of the SAWAP programme. I also commend the Country Focal Points in the Member States who are here today, for working directly and tirelessly to make sure the project achieves its aims and objectives.

Distinguished guests Ladies and Gentlemen and Staff of the Commission,

The objectives of this second conference of SAWAP , one year into the implementation of the project as you all know is to bring all the principal actors involved in its implementation to share experience, ensure consistency, build synergies, to together seek solutions to identified challenges in order to plan adequately for the coming year

and advocate for adequate support from partners and member states in favour of the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel initiative.

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished Guests, the Sahel and West Africa Programme and the BRICKS constitute the biggest initiative in support of the GGWSSI since its inception in 2005. I am convinced that the SAWAP and BRICKS programmes will go a long way in the realization of the vision of our Heads of State and Government. On behalf of the Commission, I thank the GEF, World Bank, TERRA AFRICA for mobilizing the resources to ensure the realization of the project and also CILSS, IUCN, OSS for supporting field implementation, and the Focal points in the 12 Member States for making sure that the activities actually take place and benefit the intended stakeholders. I am aware that apart from the SAWAP and BRICKS initiatives, we have other important projects currently being implemented in support of the Great Green Wall, such as the Action Against Desertification of the FAO, the FLEUVE initiative of the Global Mechanism and other initiatives and projects at country level.

I would like to pay special tribute to the European Union Commission, especially the EU Delegation to the African Union, The FAO, the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD, TERRA AFRICA - NEPAD, others including SOS SAHEL, APEFE, KEW GARDEN, and the various Ministries of Member States of the, who have been advocating, undertaking sensitization towards the mobilization of resources and support to keep the initiative alive and progressing despite all odds.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as experts and practitioners in the field, you are all aware of the numerous challenges facing the dry lands of Africa today, apart from the challenges linked to general weather conditions, i.e. challenges of climatic extremities, including the degradation of ecosystems with dire consequences on the livelihoods of the over 200 million inhabitants living in the area. The area also faces greater challenges that are related to human activities ranging from unsustainable exploitation of the 'over-stretched' natural resources exerting enormous pressure on natural resources. This mode eventually leads to challenges in access of important natural resources thus leading to natural resources related conflicts that degenerate into socio-cultural and ethnic related conflicts. In addition to all these challenges, the Sahel zone of Africa has

become a centre of terrorism, human and drug trafficking, that do not only compromise the efforts made by the initiatives such as the Great Green Wall, but the very existence and the future of both human and natural systems. A combination of all these may make the Sahel and Dry land areas, the 'weakest links' in Africa's Development. We cannot allow this to happen. The Sahel and Dry lands of Africa are areas with huge potential including the dynamic young population, the natural resources, current and future potential for animal husbandry, agriculture, not to mention the underground resources, (diamonds, patrol, natural gas, etc.)

Ladies and Gentlemen, invited Guests, Honourable Ministers

The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel Initiative, remains a unique programme by its vision, size, approach, multiplicity of actors and intervention, and above all, by its very conception and creation. It is the first and I dare to say, the only programme, conceived, engineered and created by the Heads of State of the African Union, I mean entirely, and receives the highest support from its creators. Many people 'jokingly' demand to see the 'wall', I always tell them, the wall is under construction and the Builders (like yourselves) are making progress faster than they can imagine, they just have to look. Multimillion Initiatives like SAWAP and BRICKS, with all the Action plans, the harmonized regional action plans, communication and capacity building and reporting framework is the WALL, the National Plans of Action and Agencies, the jobs already created directly and indirectly is the WALL, the Special coordinating hub here at the AUC, the numerous Presidential resolutions and the Global support garnered, that is the WALL. The Mere fact that we are gathered here today, all these important people from all over the world, in this magnificent architecture, is the WALL. Tell the world that the 'African Green Wall' is under construction and making very good progress in the 'RIGHT DRIECTION' especially. I thank you all who are making every effort to contribute to the construction of the Wall.

Ladies and Gentlemen, invited Guests, this Conference, taking place just after the 26th Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African union. During the said Summit, Women Empowerment and Development towards the realization of the AU Agenda 2063 was adopted as the 2015 theme, the Strategy and

Road map for the implementation of the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Africa Agriculture Growth and Transformation was also launched. This is to mention but a few of the highlights. The GGWSSI of which you are architects and champions will be called to play a 'pivotal' role in the achievement of all these ideals.

The African Union Commission, in its role as the overall coordinator of the GGWSSI initiative in collaboration with its partners apart from providing the political support has also been engaged in improving the implementation with the creation of the CoordinatingHub in collaboration with Partners (FAO and UNCCD) for now, the organisation of the second African Dry land Week and the forth coming of a Forum. I call on our Partners, technical and financial to also support the Coordination hub of the African Union, we need resources to undertake the mandate of coordination, advocacy, resource mobilization and supporting the Member states and you the Partners, etc. There is the need for the presence of African Union in all the communications relating to the Great Green Wall alongside the Logo of the Initiative. I will also call for support of the initiative by IUCN, aimed at closing the 'gaps' and building synergies amongst all programme stakeholders.

We need to reinforce these efforts, advocacy, common vision, and one GGWSSI, through harnessing synergies, and rationalising activities, resources and combining efforts in support of the initiative. The GGWSSI needs to be supported through greater collaboration and communication between projects at the level of the region and even in- country. It is also important to acknowledge and recognize the fact that the GGWSS is an African Union initiative. At the level of the Member States, the GGWSS should be advanced in a multisectoral approach.

Ladies and Gentlemen, invited guests,

For our vision of a 'Great Green Wall' to be realized, we have no choice but to work together, in synergies, strategize together, implement together, organize a common activities like the steering committee, this will even lead to better 'value for money' and make our 'story' in the 'eye' of the world and our stakeholders, the citizens of Africa. I

understand that these are all recommendations from the last regional Steering Committee that took place in December 2014 in Dakar, Senegal.

They are inline with the Malabo Declaration and the Strategic Plan 2014- 2017 of the African Union and DREA on collaboration and partnerships. There is a need for our work to be guided by Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the AUC and Partners especially in Regional projects like the case with SOS Sahel and the one coming up under FAO and GM- UNCCD.

Ladies and Gentlemen, working in synergies for a common vision is a basic recommendation in the Sustainable Land Management tools, the main approach adopted in the initiatives. Let me conclude by reaffirming the readiness of the Africa Union Commission to work with all Partners at All levels without exception for our common goal.

I thank you for your attention and wish you productive deliberations.