

**FIRST AU/FAO/WHO INTERNATIONAL FOOD SAFETY CONFERENCE,
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA, 12 TO 13 FEBRUARY 2019**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMB. JOSEFA SACKO
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AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION.**

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to extend to you all a very warm welcome on behalf of African Union and to say how grateful we are to the Government and people of Ethiopia for accepting our request to host this event.

To our visitors, welcome to Africa- and to the Headquarters of the African Union.

I wish to acknowledge that we are all attending this conference in our different capacities. Amongst us are Presidents, Ministers, Heads of Food Safety Institutions, leading authorities on food safety, technical experts, international organizations, development organizations, food producers, the private sector, civil society and the media.

Notwithstanding, we are all united by a common denominator, which is food safety, we are all consumers! And our quest to assure the safety of our food systems has brought us together. I hope you are all well and are excited to be here as I am, to discuss matters of food safety.

I recognize our co-organizers, FAO and WHO, and the unflinching support of the European Union and other partners that have supported this Conference. Thank you for your continued support.

Over the years, tremendous investments and progress have been made by governments, development organizations and other partners to improve food

safety globally. However, the challenges that our food systems face are still numerous.

Inadequate risk-based food laws in some countries, limitations in regulatory oversight and extension activities coupled with inadequate integration of food safety research outcomes into food control systems remain an impediment in assuring food safety to consumers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we face yet another public health threat - **Antimicrobial Resistance**. In the past decades, inappropriate use of antimicrobials especially in humans and animals, has promoted the evolution of microorganisms that are resistant to commonly used antimicrobials.

We are now witnessing the spread and prevalence of antimicrobial resistant organisms including resistant foodborne pathogens which have direct impact on food safety. Consumption of food contaminated with resistant foodborne pathogens means that humans will acquire foodborne diseases that can no longer be cured. Years of public health gains could be easily derailed by antimicrobial resistances if urgent mitigation measures are not pursued in all countries of the world.

The changing rainfall patterns and extreme weather conditions are equally important environmental stressors that are likely to exacerbate the food safety challenges I have already enumerated. Food safety also has a direct impact on the global goal of ending hunger in all its forms by 2030 and achieving food security. Unsafe food contributes to food insecurity because it reduces the quantity of food available for consumption.

It is obvious that, no country or region can exist in functional isolation in the quest to address these food safety challenges. We need to make deliberate efforts to bring all countries to an acceptable capacity threshold where food safety can be managed to protect public health and with minimal distortions to food trade whether in local or international markets.

We need heightened commitment to enhance food safety management in all countries of the world. The need for strategic and smart partnerships for the safe and environmentally-friendly production of food is urgent.

Addressing contemporary food safety issues will require changes in policy and practice across multiple sectors and disciplines.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The African Union remains committed to this call, and will continue to engage in strategic partnerships to support our Member States to establish and operate functional and effective institutional structures, to provide policy guidance and create a policy environment that assures the delivery of safe and nutritious food.

I am encouraged by the high-level political representation and the diverse experiences in this conference. I have no doubt that this conference will lead to the required commitments for increased and better coordinated collaboration and support to improve food safety globally.

I welcome you all again to Africa and the African Union Headquarters and I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you