UNITED NATIONS

Special Session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa

**Opening address**

**By**

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**Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe**

**24 February 2020**

His Excellency, Ambassador Kwesi Quartey, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission

Honorable Ministers and Heads of Delegation

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address this special session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa (RCM-Africa).

The significance of the African Union as a strategic partner of the United Nations cannot be overstated.

The recently concluded thirty-third African Union session provided the opportunity for the leaders of both organizations to renew their commitment to a strengthened partnership, particularly in the context of the Peace and Security joint framework, the Development joint Framework and the forthcoming Human Rights joint framework.

The African Union Agenda 2063 and the 2020 AU theme *"Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development"* are central to today's special session, as we examine ways of accelerating the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The session also provides an opportunity to consider how we continue to work together within the context of the reforms that both the African Union and United Nations are undergoing to better and more efficiently serve our people.

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Advancing the integrated implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is at the core of the work of RCM-Africa.

I appreciate the tremendous work that has been done and the productive relationship between the UN and the AU and its building blocks- the Regional Economic Communities, which has provided us a good opportunity to jointly implement and track progress.

I am aware, for example, that in 2019, RCM-Africa and its sub-regional Coordination Mechanisms (SRCMs) prepared joint workplans for 2019 and 2020 informed by the African Union strategic priorities and the peace and security and development frameworks.

Like the rest of the world, Africa is however not on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030, and the goals of Agenda 2063.

Africa has made notable progress in education, health and other social outcomes.

Progress in poverty reduction has been steady, however, the pace of poverty reduction is also slow, and inclusive growth—leaving no one behind—remains elusive.

The region also has the highest prevalence of hunger, with the rate increasing from 18.3 per cent in 2015 to 19.9 per cent in 2018.

This means that almost 40 million Africans – especially women and children –have gone hungry under this period.

This is exacerbated by the impact of climate change on the continent with nearly 22.8 million people now severely food insecure in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.

Major gaps also exist in the area of employment and gender equality, putting at risks the continent efforts to leverage the democratic dividend.

Distinguished participants,

The Secretary-General issued a global call for a Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs last September.

The Decade of Action is an opportunity to unleash a new wave of implementation efforts that will deliver for the people and planet.

Based on extensive consultations, we have identified three fronts to advance our work.

The first is mobilization. The SDG transformation will not happen unless people across the world are aware of the goals, see their own concerns in the Goals, and know what they can do to implement the Goals.

That is why I am pleased that as part of the programme today, we have a dialogue with the youth where young people will share their thoughts and recommendations on how to step up the pace and scale of implementation.

The second front for the Decade of Action is raising ambition. No government can claim to be on track to meet the Goals by 2030, therefore, every government and indeed every stakeholder must aim higher.

We must support governments to ensure their broader national development plans and financing frameworks correspond to the magnitude of the change needed to deliver by 2030.

We must strengthen transparency, data and accountability efforts and use several important international meetings this year on gender equality, biodiversity, the oceans and sustainable transport to demonstrate renewed and strengthened commitment to the SDGs.

A third front for the Decade of Action is to supercharge ideas to solutions – drawing on the capacities of different stakeholders and effective international cooperation.

Since 2015, we have seen a wave of initiatives to support the SDGs.

But too few of these have delivered concrete results at scale in the countries and communities that need it most.

We know that certain policy changes or specific breakthroughs around key challenges have the potential to catalyze progress on several SDGs simultaneously, at speed and at scale.

The Decade of Action must ensure that those changes and those breakthroughs are advanced as a matter of priority.

Distinguished participants,

There is no better example of a strong partnership around an SDG solution than the African Union initiative on *Silencing the Guns*.

While there has been a significant reduction in inter-state conflicts in Africa over the past two decades, internal armed conflicts continue unabated on the continent.

The most vulnerable groups, including women and children bear the brunt. They suffer disproportionately from gender-based violence and other abuses and violations of their human rights, both during and after armed conflicts.

The United Nations has been at the forefront of supporting the African Union peace and security agenda, including fielding peacekeeping missions in the afflicted countries.

I look forward to hearing your views on how best to further strengthen our collective and coherent support to the implementation of the AU Roadmap on the theme of the year.

Distinguished participants,

For the United Nations, the repositioned UN development system will serve as the bedrock upon which we advance our work for the Decade of Action.

Last year, I updated you on the progress made in implementing the reforms thus far. Since then, we have begun to see a range of benefits emerge as the new Resident Coordinator system and new generation of country teams took root.

We have also made progress on the development of solutions to restructure the regional assets of the United Nations to ensure we can better support countries in facing challenges that know no borders – regional, sub-regional or cross-border.

As the Secretary-General stated - the UN has incredible assets siting in regions, but these are often scattered and not organized in a way that helps to maximize the impact of our action.

Africa is no exception, despite the great practice of collaboration between UN agencies and the AU in this RCM format.

The Secretary General is working on five broad areas to guide the regional reform:

First, create a unified mechanism for coordination in each region-UN Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) to subsume the RCMs and the R-UNSDG platforms.

In Africa, this transition will reflect the much-welcomed leadership and ownership of the AU, including through jointly chaired meetings.

Second, we will establish knowledge management hubs in each region. This will help make the UN offer in the regions clear to partners and more easily accessible by countries.

Third, we will enhance transparency and results-based management at the regional level, including by ensuring every region sees annual workplans for the UN's support and reporting on how we performed.

Fourth, we are moving in consolidating capacities on data and statistics, finally integrating data on the SDGs to facilitate access by countries.

and fifth, we are identifying administrative services that could be provided more efficiently to regional offices through common back offices.

Resources for development are scarce and we are determined to spend less on administration and bureaucracy, and more to support development efforts of countries.

Extensive consultations are ongoing to refine these recommendations.

In the Africa region, the Under Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the ECA, Vera Songwe, and Assistant Secretary General and UNDP Regional Director for Africa, Ahunna Eziakonwa are leading the work of the UN family to finalize the review.

Based on the consultations in the different regions, the recommendations are being refined and will be submitted to ECOSOC for consideration in May 2020.

Today, I will listen carefully to your perspectives and requests.

Tell us what you expect from our regional presence moving forward.

Help us ensure that the partnership with the AU can be even stronger moving forward.

Distinguished participants,

The United Nations family recognizes that the African Union is primarily responsible for driving the continent's development and that its role is supportive.

Therefore, the Secretary General is committed to ensuring that implementation of our reforms and the advancement of the Decade of Action is informed by the needs and priorities of the continental body.

Implementation will build on good practices and draw lessons from RCM-Africa and its SRCMs.

Strong leadership and sustained engagement at the highest possible level of the United Nations and African Union institutions will be key.

Given the premium placed on national level results and impact in both the global and continental Agendas, effective linkages with coordinating structures at that level will be necessary.

The transformation of the NEPAD Planning and Coordination Agency to the African Union Development Agency - with the responsibility of supporting governments in the implementation of Agenda 2063 - is a significant step in the right direction.

So too is the drive in the context of the UN reforms, for a reinvigorated UN system at the national level, including the Resident Coordinator system and revamped United Nations Country Teams supported by the recently established regional UN Development Coordination Offices.

In terms of global level advocacy, the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa has an important role to play.

In this context, the UN and AU reforms - which recognize the subsidiarity principle as a key tenet - cannot be timelier.

The prospects for the accelerated realization for the SDGs and Agenda 2063 in the context of the Decade of Action and the unfolding African Union and United Nations reforms are exciting.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The convening of this special session of RCM-Africa back-to-back with the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is by no means a coincidence.

Linking the two events will facilitate the translation of the Forum's outcomes into programmatic responses by participating entities of the Mechanism and enhance the visibility and success of both events.

As we move ahead, I look forward to hearing your views on how we can further strengthen our collaboration and better support implementation of our two Agendas in the context of the Decade of Action.

I thank you for helping us shape our partnership moving forward – and, more broadly, the future of the UN in this region and beyond.

And I wish you successful deliberations.

Thank you.