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OFFICIAL PARTICIPANT – AFRICAN UNION

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REMARKS

DIGNIFIED STORYTELLING

“Food from the Roots Event ”

24<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2022

Your Excellencies, Dignitaries, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. All protocols observed.

I would like to start by giving my heartfelt thanks to the Mexico Pavilion Expo 2020 for partnering with the African Union and Dignified Story Telling to celebrate the authentic culinary delights offered by our peoples as we extend our south-south collaboration to celebrating our cultural heritage in this themed event “Food from the Roots”

It is my great pleasure to be a part of this celebratory occasion where we place at the heart of our discourse the issues of food and nutrition. The substances that nourish our bodies and even more nourish, our spirits when we gather in the company of those with whom we are united in the bonds of family and friendship.

There is an African Proverb “***Even the best cooking pot will not produce food.***” This is a reminder of the need for us to invest in sustainable food production systems that not only provide adequate food but, which can economically sustain those that are at the heart of producing the foods we eat.

To this end, The African Union’s Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) was established as one of the continental initiatives under Agenda 2063 wherein AU member states committed to increase agriculture productivity as a means of not only attaining food security, but also enabling economic growth and sustainable development through agriculture-led development. CAADP recognises that with 60% of the world’s arable land, Africa has the potential to meet its own food security and nutrition goals, as well as those of global markets through investments and trade in agricultural products. Through CAADP, African governments agreed to allocate at least 10% of national budgets to agriculture and rural development, signifying the import placed in this sector; so as to improve productivity and farm incomes, through sustainability of

agricultural production and use of natural resources.

And now my second African Proverb ***Your food is supposed to be your medicine and your medicine is supposed to be your food.*** This proverb takes us even further that the first one to remind us that, what we eat must nourish our bodies and our spirits if we are to thrive.

Nutrition is the focus of the African Union's Theme of the Year 2022 as the YEAR OF NUTRITION with the goal of "*Strengthening resilience in nutrition and food security on the African continent: Strengthening agro-food systems, health and social protection systems for the acceleration of human, social and economic capital development*";

Why the focus on Nutrition? Because whereas as a continent we have made significant progress in reducing mortality of children under 5 years; malnutrition is still a major cause of death for children. Poor nutrition has the added impact of preventing children from reaching their full potential and becoming productive adults in the long run. Furthermore, we witness other nutrition related issues such as overweight, obesity and non-communicable diseases related to the quality of diets increasing rapidly, worsening morbidity and mortality rates.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the economic vulnerability of our health and food systems as we balanced keeping the virus at bay, at the expense of gains made in reducing malnutrition seen, in the disruptions of social protection programmes like school health and nutrition among others. Compounded with other climate and environmental factors, there is now even more than ever, a need to create strong linkages between agriculture production, supply and access of food with food systems required to deliver ***more diverse and affordable diets.*** The diversity of what can be offered in the African diet is also why we have the distinguished chefs and nutritionists here today and who have the herculean task of not only educating us about the virtues of different foods but also reminding us that we need to pay attention and even revert to consuming the hitherto neglected traditional food sources which have been shunned in favour of

supposedly modern / processed foods that may not necessarily cater for what we need to thrive, just what we need to survive. Good food must equate with good nutrition. I would like to repeat again, ***Your food is supposed to be your medicine and your medicine is supposed to be your food.***

Healthy and well-nourished children must be at the heart of every society. I would like to take this opportunity to circle back to the aspect of dignified storytelling. When we tell the stories of children affected by war, famine, poverty, environmental calamities and so on, do we still do so because we are shocked that children could be in such dire situations or do we relish the thought of the retweets, likes, potential awards for film or photography or even more how many points we score for how much funds a charity or organization may raise with no accountability on how those funds are actually used. Many individuals and institutions have thrived on these stories about children. The Dignified Storytelling movement, should be one that challenges us all to tell these stories with an aim of alleviating the suffering and punishing those who cause the suffering, not rewarding the story tellers who fail to recognise that facing that camera is a human soul whose dignity must be preserved even as we tell their story. We may move on with our lives but that image follows that child for life and defines them.

Focusing on children and their right to good nutrition is encapsulated in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and in our Agenda 2063; and as we roll out the various initiatives in this our Year of Nutrition, the African Union will continue to place emphasis on several existing interventions such as the African Unions Home Grown School Feeding Programmes as well as other initiatives under the African Regional Nutrition Strategy, promoting trade of agricultural products within the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and driving political interventions through the African Leaders for Nutrition. I should also mention that annually we commemorate the Africa Day of School Feeding on 1<sup>st</sup> March and the Africa Food Security and Nutrition Day on 30th October.

And finally, my closing African proverb. ***“One who eats alone cannot discuss the taste of the food with others”*** so I invite you to join me and others here today to savour the delights placed before us by these wonderful

chefs of Alkebulan African Restaurant and may we find much to discuss as we nourish our bodies and form the bonds of friendship united in our love for good nourishing food.

Thank You