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Statement

By

**H.E. Amb. Josefa Sacko
Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and
Sustainable Environment**

At the opening of the

**5th Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical Committee (STC)
on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment (ARDWE)**

Friday 17 November, 2023

- Excellency El Sayed El Quseir, Minister of Agriculture of the Arab Republic of Egypt and Chair of the 4th STC;
- H. E. Frank Tumwebaze, Minister of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries of Uganda and Incoming Chair of the 5th STC.
- Excellences, members of the Bureau of the 4th STC;
- Honorable Ministers Responsible for Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment,
- Representatives of the Private Sector,
- Representatives of Farmers and Farmer Organizations,
- Representatives of Civil Society Organizations,
- Representative of Development Partners,
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
- All Protocol dully observed.

On behalf of H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, I warmly welcome you to Ministerial Segment of the 5th Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment (ARDWE). May I take this opportunity to thank your Excellences for making out time to attend this all-important statutory meeting to the review progress made in the implementation of the previous STC Decisions, provide policy guidance that will in turn guide the activities of the department in the next 2 years.

Honorable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Following the AU institutional reforms, the Department now has two Directorates:

- i) The Agriculture and Rural Development Directorate (ARDD) with two Divisions: Agriculture and Food Security Division, and the Rural Development Division;

ii) The Sustainable Environment and Blue Economy Directorate (SEBED) also with two Divisions: Sustainable Environment Division and the Blue Economy Division.

I am pleased to report that despite challenging times affecting our work, we have achieved a lot together on the recommendations of the previous sessions of the 4th STC. I will briefly present the progress that the Commission has made in implementing the decisions and recommendation since the last STC in December 2023 in our two Directorates.

Agriculture and Rural Development

The Directorate, in collaboration with member states and strategic partners, has made tangible advancements in enhancing agricultural productivity, promoting sustainable farming practices, and addressing the critical issues of food security and rural poverty. Through initiatives such as the Comprehensive Agricultural Development Program (CAADP), investment in agricultural infrastructure, and the promotion of sustainable farming practices, we have seen positive impacts on the lives of millions of smallholder farmers and rural households.

1. On Implementation of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), we successfully produced the CAADP 4th BR Report which would be presented to your Excellences shortly. 49 out of the 55 AU Member States reported. The 4th BR results indicates that no country is on track to meet the CAADP seven commitments and this is due to multiple crises experienced over the past three years. However, 19-member states member states made substantial progress. With only two (2) years remaining before the Malabo Declaration period lapses, there is an urgency for member states to accelerate CAADP implementation, including through the provision of the financing required to achieve the aspirations of CAADP in order to build resilient African food system.
2. The Department, in collaboration with AUDA-NEPAD and the Government of Zambia successfully convened the 14th Africa Day of Food and Nutrition Security and the 19th CAADP PP, in Lusaka, Zambia

early this month. The event served as a rallying point to underscore how the CAADP agenda and increased intra-African trade in agricultural services and products can accelerate the achievements of food and nutritional security through safer and healthier diets across Africa. Key highlight from the event was the Launch of the Consortium of Youth in Agriculture and Climate Change. This is a significant step in involving youth in agricultural sustainability and climate resilience efforts.

3. The Department developed the Digital Agriculture Strategy and its implementation Plan which covers the period from 2024 to 2027. As the framework for the digital transformation of African agriculture, the Digital Agriculture Strategy promotes digital agriculture to “Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods” in line with the 2014 Malabo Declaration.
4. The African Union recognizes the critical role of women in agriculture and we have consistently made efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the agricultural sector. This included initiatives to increase women's access to land, finance, and agricultural extension services. The Directorate is developing a Policy Framework for Women in Agriculture in Africa. The policy is expected to bring to the fore the central role African women play in agriculture and the need to create an enabling environment where agriculture innovation is encouraged for all citizens, especially women. In addition, the Department Organized the celebration of the International Day of Rural Women on 15 October 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya under a theme “Elevating Rural Women: Unlocking Potential with Digital Technology and AfCFTA for Agri-food Systems Transformation”. The day aimed at highlighting the transformative power of digital technology and innovation in empowering and improving the lives of rural women across Africa including facilitation of financing for rural women’s economic empowerment. In line with the African Union theme of the year.
5. On the Common African Agro-park Programme (CAAPS, the Extra ordinary session of the STC for ARDWE endorsed CAAPS as a Flagship Project of the Agenda 2063 for the second 10 Years Implementation Plan

(2023-2033). To cascade the CAAPS to the Regional Economic Communities, an engagement workshop was conducted in Lusaka Zambia that brought together all the 8 RECs of the continent. The engagement was aimed at the RECs developing roadmap for their regular engagement with AU Member States on promoting the CAAPs and facilitating its implementation.

6. On Food Safety, the Commission supported 12 Member States to undertake studies on gender and food safety. These studies generated empirical data in relation to food safety and women's involvement in the food system. In addition, the Commission provided capacity building training to participants from 21 member states on harmonization of aflatoxin sampling and analysis. It also undertook training of 19 Member States on domestication of the strategic framework for holistic aflatoxin control in Africa as approved by the 4th STC for use in all 55 Member States.
7. The Commission working with the Arab Republic of Egypt and international partners convened the African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum which is an important platform in our efforts to improve food safety and competitiveness of the agriculture and agri-food sector in the continent. The Commission is also making efforts to operationalize the Africa Food Safety Agency, which continues to receive resounding endorsement from Member States as an important food safety coordination mechanism to better prioritize and improve food safety in the continent. As requested by the 4th STC, we have submitted a proposal on the food safety agency which is under consideration by AU policy organs. Hopefully, the PRC will approve it ahead of the upcoming AU Summit.
8. Since the last STC in 2021, the Department successfully held two All-Africa Post Harvest Congresses and exhibitions and has institutionalized the event as a biennial African Union Platform on experience sharing and reporting on collective efforts to reduce food loss and waste on the continent.

Sustainable Environment and Blue Economy

We shall present to you the progress we have made in various areas under this Directorate, including the following:

9. **On climate change**, significant progress has been made in addressing this crucial challenge facing humanity. My department coordinated the development of a comprehensive African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan for the next 10 years (2022-2023). The Strategy was endorsed by the African Heads of State and Government during the 35th ordinary session in February 2022. My department is also implementing the Green Recovery Action Plan and has established a climate financing desk.
10. The African Union successfully convened the **Africa Climate Summit** which was hosted by the Republic of Kenya from 4-6 September 2023. The output of the Summit was the African Leaders Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change and Call to Action. The Declaration provides fundamental principles and programme of action for accelerating ambitious climate action and for achieving sustainable development in the continent.
11. The Commission is also supporting the implementation of the Comprehensive Action for Climate Change Initiative (CACCI). Through this initiative, the Commission is undertaking activities to design and implement policies and programmes to support sustainable and inclusive growth and promote climate adaptation and resilience. Moreover, the Commission is part of the Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS) being implemented by the US Government to support the African Union Common Position on Food Systems including a focus on indigenous agriculture and orphaned crops.
12. **On Disaster Risk Reduction**, substantial progress has been made. In response to increasing disaster losses, in 2021, the Africa Union Commission developed the AMHEWAS Programme to contribute to resilience building and reduce disaster losses by 2030. The Programme has since gained momentum leading to the establishment of four Multi-

hazard Early Warning Situation Rooms, training of Member States experts and building their capacities to implement the AMHEWAS Programme. More than 35 experts from at least 30 African Union Member States have been trained in the AMHEWAS Situation Room in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

13. **On Transboundary Disaster Risk Management**, my department is also executing the Decision of the 4th Specialized Technical Committee meeting regarding the establishment of the Continental Civil Capacity Mechanism for Disaster Preparedness and Response. We have a draft Statute which will be finalized after guidance is received from Your Excellencies.
14. **On meteorology**, my department coordinated the revision of the Integrated African Strategy on Meteorology (Weather, Water and Climate Services), a continental framework for climate-informed decision making in all sectors of socio-economic development. The Meteorology Strategy, covering the period from 2021 to 2030, was endorsed by the African Heads of State and Government during the 35th ordinary session in February 2022. Also, in collaboration with the Republic of Cameroon, the Chair of the African Ministerial Conference on Meteorology (AMCOMET), my department engaged the European Commission and mobilized financial resources for the implementation of the Abidjan and Cairo Declarations, specifically utilization of meteorological space products and services for early warning.
15. **In the area of the environment**, with the technical support of the European Union, and with the engagement of the AU Expert Working Group on Circular Economy, the Commission has developed a Continental Circular Economy Action Plan (2024-2034). The Action Plan will provide direction to the continent towards a competitive and cleaner development pathway by setting out Africa's key priorities and intervention areas for an enhanced circular economy approach to development.

16. **On water**, the Commission in collaboration with AUDA NEPAD and International High-Level Panel led the preparation of the Africa Water Investment Program (AIP). The objective was to mobilize \$30 billion towards closing the investment gap and transforming the investment outlook for water security and sustainable sanitation. In this context, the Panel landmark report - Africa's Rising Investment Tide – identified actionable pathways and nine sources of finance to mobilize the needed resources. The report was launched during UN Water Conference in March, 2023. Now work is progressing in the development of the AIP Water Investment Plan which would be launched during COP28.
17. **On the blue economy**, the commission has been implementing the African Union Blue Economy Strategy including empowerment of women to participate in the blue economy, specifically fisheries.
18. **On the Great Green Wall Initiative**, the Department has developed the Regional Strategy for the Southern Africa Region Great Green Wall Initiative Strategy and Implementation Framework in the past two years. Nine Member States were supported in the development and launching of their National Action Plans and Investment pillars for the implementation of the Great Green Wall, and the remainder of the Member States are currently being supported. Furthermore, a New Great Green Wall Initiative Implementation Strategy and Ten Years Framework was successfully developed. The Department undertook advocacies and promotion events in several global, continental and national forums.

Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are aware, we are drawing closer (just two years) to the timeline our Heads of States set in 2014 for achieving the Malabo goals and targets. the major agenda of the expert segment of 5th STC will be the discussion and endorsement of the CAADP Fourth Biennial Report and the Post Malabo. Unfortunately, the major highlight of the report is that we are nowhere closer to achieving the Malabo targets! This finding might disappoint you and, indeed, all the People of Africa.

Against this bleak backdrop, I have committed myself to leading a post-Malabo planning process that has already started with a Regional Economic Communities Consultation held last week. We would be presenting this Agenda to the STC for your review, guidance and endorsement. The Concept Note is aptly titled “Propelling Africa Agricultural Growth, Agri Food Systems Transformation to boost Economic Transformation, Food Sovereignty and Resilience”, and the goal of the post-Malabo Agenda is to unleash ‘business unusual’ agenda that stimulates result-yielding implementation of interventions based on a ten-year (2026-2036) Sector-wide Action Plan.

As I conclude my remarks, I would like to take this opportunity to thank H, E. El Sayed El Quseir, Minister of Agriculture of the Arab Republic of Egypt and Chair of the 4th STC as well as other members of the Bureau. It was through their effort that we were able to record all our achievements.

We also want to express our commitment to work with the new Bureau of the STC to implement the decisions that will come out of this 5th Session.

Thank you for your kind attending and I wish all of us fruitful deliberations.

Merci. Shukran. Obrigado. Gracias. Asante Sana.

CLOSING REMARKS

- Excellency El Sayed El Quseir, Minister of Agriculture of the Arab Republic of Egypt and Chair of the 4th STC;
- H. E. Frank Tumwebaze, Minister of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries of Uganda and Incoming Chair of the 5th STC.
- Excellences, members of the Bureau of both the 4th and 5th STC;
- Honorable Ministers Responsible for Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment,
- Please permit me to stand on already established protocol since our day is already far spent.

I stand here once again to express my sincere gratitude to your Excellences for responding to our invitation to take part in this fifth session of the Specialised Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment. I am humbled that you took this convening seriously leaving your busy offices and foregoing other equally important engagements.

I was worried that with several major events taking place at the same time as the 5th STC, we might not make the quorum, but happily we met the quorum and we were able to conduct the business which is in our mandate.

To all the Experts and Senior Officials of Member States who deliberated for the past three days and a half, going to bed late to finish the business we set for ourselves, I cannot thank you enough. I am aware that you took your time to read all the dozens of reports made available and presented to you and deliberated on them for several hours. This is no doubt one of the largest STCs that the Commission convenes every two years as it covers 23 different programmes and more. The report endorsed and decisions reached by the Honourable Ministers and their delegates is a result of your invaluable and impressive work.

I would like to commit my office fully to exert a serious effort to plan and carry the activities matched against each decision and each recommendation of this STC in a structured way.

Perhaps the most notable of the decisions you took and the documents endorsed for the next two years, is the concept note and roadmap for the post-Malabo agenda. This is on top of my agenda considering its significance for paving the road to our current aspirations such as transforming our agriculture, our food systems and our livelihoods. We will work on concretizing this document and other documents, which you have approved and submit them to the February 2024 Sessions of the Executive Council and General Assembly of the AU.

Behind every success there is good amount of thinking, work and preparations. Please permit me, Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen to appreciate the efforts of my team, the AU support directorates, units and offices for contributing to this success. We apologize once again for some of the lapses like documents not being ready on time.

Thank you, interpreters for enduring the long meetings but, nevertheless, doing a superb job.

With these few remarks, I thank you wholeheartedly for your cooperation and attentive listening.

Bon voyage as you return home.