STATEMENT BY

H.E. MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT
CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

AT OPENING OF THE AFRICA FERTILIZER AND SOIL HEALTH SUMMIT

9 MAY 2024
NAIROBI, KENYA
Excellency Dr. William Samoei Ruto, President of the Republic of Kenya and Host of the Africa Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit,

Excellencies Heads of State, Government and Delegation,

Honorable Ministers,

Partners,

Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour and privilege to welcome every one of you to this important Summit.

At the outset, allow me to thank President Ruto for hosting and chairing this key summit on a vital issue for Africa which is soil health and fertilizers, after hosting here in Nairobi an African summit on Climate last year. Your commitment and personal leadership, Mr President, has been a pivotal driver for the momentum we see today.

I also wish to reiterate my compassion and solidarity with you, Mr. President and Dear Brother, and the government and people of Kenya amid the devastating floods which have claimed more than 100 innocent lives. Let me ask you to stand in a moment of silence.
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the context of the continued negative impacts of climate change, the theme of this Summit is particularly pertinent. We must Listen To The Land.

Africa is experiencing accelerated soil degradation, including through desertification and floods as we are seeing in East Africa and here in Kenya, often alternatively -either droughts or floods which in turn reduces the production and productivity in the African agricultural sector.

But the current pace of soil degradation in Africa has attained a threshold which requires proactive attention and action from all, to halt the degradation and commence effective soil health management.

What is clear is that Africa’s agricultural production capacity falls way below global norms. Equally important are the causes of soil health degradation on the Continent.

The Africa Union Commission is committed to address the issues of soil health in all African countries. This determination is what led us to develop the Soil Initiative for Africa (SIA) and the Africa Fertilizer and Soil Health...
Action Plan. While the Soil Initiative for Africa is a long-term framework aligned with our Agenda 2063, the Action Plan is the 10-year implementation plan.

Regarding fertilizers, they constitute a critical input for productivity if properly used according to accepted scientific norms.

**Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,**

In terms of fertilizer use, Africa is below the global average and the target set by African Heads of State and Government in 2006 where they endorsed the Abuja declaration on Fertilizers for a Green Revolution in Africa, with a target of 50 kilograms per hectare per year. Eighteen years later, the average fertilizer use rate stands at about 18 kilograms, less than half of the target set in 2006. We have a responsibility to learn and apply the lessons on why this gap remains.

Some African countries produce fertilizers but we depend mostly on imported fertilizers, making them very expensive for our farmers. Yet the African Center for Fertilizer Development based in Zimbabwe has been in existence since the 1980’s. We must optimise use of such existing Continental assets to boost local fertilizer
production and deliver quality fertilizers to African farmers at affordable prices. This is imperative if we are to improve the Continent’s agricultural sector, key for our food sovereignty and security. These investments should also be reflected in our national budgets.

However, and as our biennial reviews show, we remain far from attaining the targets set in Malabo in 2014 which gave us a clear implementation roadmap. Ownership is partly hamstrung by an over dependence on partners for the financing of our agricultural development ambitions. It is simply not sustainable.

So in conclusion and in light of all the points I raised, we need to renew strong political will by Member States through the mobilization of domestic resources to reflect the priority of the agricultural sector and as defined in Malabo.

Indeed, it is up to the Continent to lead a pragmatic technological revolution to transform this key sector if we are to move beyond the classic strategies since Abuja and reinforce our implementation capacities. Agriculture remains a strategic and key lever for Continental industrialization and the creation of jobs that are so vital for development, stability and prosperity. It is therefore up
to us to harness our collective determination and resources in addressing soil health and fertilizer use in a holistic manner if we are to achieve sustainable food systems on our Continent.

Our strategic frameworks are in place and we have the capacity to work together to produce the fertilizers and other agricultural inputs we need. Let us therefore give ourselves the necessary political means to address the challenges to our food sovereignty.

I thank you for your kind attention.