

**Africa Regional Preparatory Conference for United Nations
Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)**

**Opening Ceremony, 9:00 - 10:30hrs, 24th October, Addis Ababa,
Ethiopia**

**Remarks by Amina Mohamed, Assistant Secretary General and Deputy
Executive Director of UNEP**

Your Excellency, Mr. Denis Sassou-Nguesso, the President of the Republic of Congo,

Your Excellency, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,

Your Excellency, Mr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,

Your Excellency, Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

Your Excellency, Mr. Tegegnework Gettu., UNDP Regional Director for Africa,

Honorable Ministers and Heads of Delegations,

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations Environment Programme, I have the honor and great pleasure
of addressing you on my first official visit to Ethiopia in my capacity as the new Deputy
Executive Director of UNEP.

Mr. Achim Steiner, the UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of UNEP, sends his
best wishes and reiterates UNEP's full and unconditional support for Africa's preparatory
process to Rio+20.

At this time, we are also celebrating the life of one of the world's heroines for sustainable
development, the late Nobel Laureate Prof. Wangari Maathai,

It is my hope that we will build on her legacy and that her inspiration, vision and spirit will be
with us to deliver on the promises to build a better and brighter future for Africa.

Your Excellencies, Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me tremendous pride to be with you today at this landmark meeting, that will deliver Africa's common position on the key issues that will be discussed at the upcoming Rio+20 meeting.

It will prove that Africa is a key player in setting and moving the international agenda for sustainable development goals forward.

I can assure you, that we at UNEP know, that Africa is uniquely placed to effect this momentous and much needed change.

Simply put, it has the world's greatest natural resources that are currently, like no other time before, at the centre of global interests, activities and discussions.

As custodians of this great wealth, you are today presented with an incredible and once in a lifetime opportunity, to come up with an optimum solution for economic growth, with built in and fully integrated environmental standards and values.

Yet despite its abundant natural capital, Africa still remains the victim of development strategies which do not improve the livelihoods of its communities, do not create greater wealth and not decrease the vulnerability of its population fast enough.

Let me be clear, the systemic value creation of the assets of this great continent will therefore, be in the main determined by the boundaries, conditions and strategies you shall formulate and include in your design for sustainable development, in the next few days in readiness for Rio.

Why is Rio+20 so important?

Rio+20 needs to be the date when the promises of 1992 are finally transformed into practical and purposeful action that resonate with the aspirations of more than 6 billion people, rising over 9 billion by 2050.

Rio+20 is also about building a pact that brings together the ambitions for economic growth, the aspirations for social equity and the urgent needs for responsible management and use of natural assets in the interests of current and future generations.

In order to do so, you are called upon to make some key decisions.

First, you must rethink the fundamentals of your development strategies and programs, by structuring and implementing solutions that will expeditiously transform the way your natural resources will be accessed, exploited and traded. In doing so, we must ensure that the principles of inclusivity are mainstreamed in our development plans. You must also ensure that your communities and the vulnerable ecosystems they depend upon are systematically protected against further degradation.

Second, we need to be determine and to finally reach agreement on the key principles of the Green Economy.

What does that entail? Well One of its main goals, is to help reduce poverty while increasing resource efficiency and improving social welfare. It entails, the way Green Economy solutions are identified and implemented; it involves a common set of agreed rules and regulations to encourage and guide the transition to Green Economy; it pertains to the way we configure the necessary incentives.

So what do these incentives translate into for Africa? New job opportunities for the youth, use of technology to solve Africa's chronic energy, health and water problems, to name a few, as well as pragmatic programs for the exploitation of natural resources.

The continent is already to a large extent articulating this vision for sustainable development.

In fact, the African Development Forum, held in October 2010, described the Green Economy as a vehicle for addressing the challenges of climate change impacts and as well as an opportunity for low-carbon growth and job-creation.

But this is not enough.

Rio+20 will also present us with the inordinate opportunity to review the current institutional framework for sustainable development, which requires balancing the social, economic and environment pillars of sustainable development are governed in more integrated and productive ways and to address the deficiencies identified by African Heads of State and Government.

Excellencies, Hon. Ministers, Distinguished delegates,

The Heads of States and Governments of Africa at the 17th African Union Summit in Malabo acknowledged that *"current institutional structures do not fully address Africa's needs in matters of the environment, sustainable development and climate change."*

By calling for the transformation of UNEP into a UN specialized agency, Africa's leaders demonstrated a clear vision and commitment for structural change in international environmental governance.

It is noteworthy, that the outcome of Malabo has been echoed around the world.

A few days ago, the Prime Minister of Malaysia proposed the establishment of a World Environment Organization, a UN Specialized agency to anchor global efforts for the environment.

He acknowledged that it is *"virtually impossible for developing countries to participate meaningfully"* in the current governance system and stated that the new organ would *"help facilitate the participation of developing countries in a more realistic and meaningful way"*, in the international environmental governance process.

We must understand however, that what is actually at stake is not the transition of UNEP to a UN agency, but the urgent need to build the capacity to respond adequately and within a meaningful timeframe to the needs and priorities of countries. That's what it is about.

Additionally, In Rio we will also be called upon to contribute to the global issue on have on emerging issues that you will have to deal with.

The ability to correctly identify key emerging issues will avail the right information and intelligence to plan properly, to decrease your vulnerability, respond effectively, hence its relevance.

Emerging issues of a global nature, such as food security, access to and quality of water and energy could be some of the "core" issues on which we need a clear globally agreed response : these are issues that are clearly critical for Africa.

Your Excellences, Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion,

Rio+20 cannot be about negotiations on marginal issues.

Indeed, Rio is no longer about business as usual.

It is about the way leaders and decision makers will confront the 21st century challenges with 21st century solutions.

This is especially true, in this climate of financial and economic crises which requires you to make bold decisions on how the global alliance of countries will tackle their development challenges.

A common position stemming from the African consultations will be instrumental in building bridges with and inspiring other regions that are consulting on these very same issues.

Africa has the power and ability to deliver an ambitious agenda in Rio and is uniquely placed to be the game changer.

With 54 votes and a common position, each of your countries can contribute to build a better future for our planet.

I am confident that you will work together as you have always done on the priorities, actions and strategies that will support Africa's sustainable development.

With that, I would like to assure you that UNEP stands in full support of the African member states, as crucial deliberations and negotiations toward Rio+20 take place.

Thank you!