

Opening Address on Sustainable Development

**H.E Mr. Meles Zenawi
Prime Minister of the F.D.R.E**

**24 October, 2011
ECA- Addis Ababa**

Your Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to welcome you all to this important conference organized to unify and streamline Africa's position in the upcoming UN conference on sustainable development, Rio+20.

Twenty years ago at Rio De Janeiro, world leaders came together to adopt Agenda 21 which was expected to serve as a blue print to achieve sustainable development by promoting economic growth that is socially equitable and environmentally responsible. Many had hoped that agenda 21 would generate the necessary resources and political commitment to help us to jointly embark on a new and more sustainable way of managing our planet's resources.

Not much has since happened to realize the lofty objectives set at Rio twenty years ago. Indeed a disturbing pattern of much promise and little or no delivery on promises seems to have emerged in such large international meetings to the detriment of those who do not have the necessary resources and technology to cope with the changing global environment. In many ways Africa is getting the short-end of the stick in such meetings. The same limited resources are pledged to us at every such meeting and so at times the same money is pledged ten times for ten different objectives. The technology transfer that is often promised is very rarely if ever acted upon.

Africans would therefore be excused if they were to ask what the point of all such international meetings is. Africans would be justified if they were to take all the promises made in such meetings with a lot more than a pinch of salt because they have been let down once too many. I fully share the frustration and skepticism that many Africans have towards such meetings.

Legitimate skepticism and frustration is however not an adequate substitute for better strategizing nor is it sufficient cause for giving up the fight. We can never give up the fight however the outcomes of such meetings have come short of our needs and expectations. We need to engage more, fight better and approach such meetings with realism.

In order to fight better we need to speak with one voice. That is why we have come up with a mechanism that allows us to speak with one voice in climate change negotiations. That is also why we have agreed to speak with one voice under the leadership of my brother President Sasu Nguesu of the Republic of the Congo. That is why Your Excellencies are gathered here to unify and streamline Africa's position at Rio+20.

To fight better we also need to develop effective and realistic strategies. In this regard I believe a dual approach to such meetings would serve Africa's interests better. On the one hand we have to fight tooth and nail to get decisions that enhance resource flows and technology transfer to Africa and fight for their implementation unceasingly. And this despite our bitter experience of countless unfulfilled promises. We do not and can not give up. We fight for what is ours by right however slim the chances of success are.

We can not however limit ourselves to fighting for the crumbs of the benefits that we are promised in such meetings. We should also recognize that when push comes to shove we are on our own. We should therefore always have a plan that we can implement on our own with or without external support. This is different from giving up the fight for global fairness or hopelessly waiting for others to take us out of the quagmire that we find ourselves in. It is a realistic approach of on the one hand fighting for every benefit that belongs to us while at the same time preparing ourselves for the eventuality of promises given to us being broken again and again.

**Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen**

I am confident that you will come up with a common African position in the form of the Africa consensus statement to Rio+20 and the draft resolution to be presented to the upcoming AU Summit. I am confident that on the basis of such a common position we will fight the good fight in Rio to get what we deserve and to do whatever we have to do to promote sustainable development in our continent ultimately depending on our efforts and African solidarity.

**I wish you success in your deliberations.
I thank you for your kind attention.**