

Development First: Addressing Climate Change in Africa

H.E. Mr. Hailemariam Dessalegn,
**Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, of the Federal
Republic of Ethiopia**

Statements at the opening session of the
1st Conference on Climate Change and Development in Africa
(CCDA-I)

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

(Note that this may change to H.E. Erastus Mwencha, Deputy Chair, African Union Commission)

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

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by extending to you as well as to the delegations that accompany you, the warm and brotherly greetings of the Government of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia and its people.

It is always with great honour that Ethiopia plays host to important African events such as the **Conference on Climate Change and Development in Africa**. Because of the geography and recent history of this country, the Government and People of Ethiopia have serious concerns about the consequences of weather vagaries and climate variability.

Just like other countries of Africa, Ethiopia is experiencing some of the worst effects of climate change; but more than most countries of the continent, Ethiopia was at the epicentre of drought for decades – all of these exacerbated by prolonged absence and unpredictability of rain fall, and in a country whose major share of agriculture is rain-fed dependent!

As you are well aware, of the fact that current climate variability is already posing a significant challenge to Ethiopia by affecting food security, water and energy supply, poverty reduction and sustainable development efforts, as well as by causing natural resource degradation and natural disasters. The impacts of past

droughts such as that of the 1972/73, 1984 and 2002/03 are still fresh in the memories of many Ethiopians.

Floods in 2006 caused substantial loss of life and property in many parts of the country. These challenges are likely to be exacerbated by anthropogenic climate change.

Climate related hazards in Ethiopia include drought, floods, heavy rains, strong winds, frost, heat waves (high temperatures), etc. Though the historical social and economic impacts of all of these hazards are not systematically well documented, the impacts of the most important ones; namely droughts and floods are discussed.

Ethiopia is highly vulnerable to drought, which is the single most important climate related natural hazard impacting the country from time to time. Drought could occur anywhere in the world but its damage is not as severe as in Africa in general and in Eastern Africa in particular. Recurrent droughts in the past have resulted in huge loss of life and property as well as migration of people. In fact, several social problems are also linked to the sudden displacement of large numbers of people in this region.

Another climate-related hazard that has been affecting Ethiopia is flood. Major floods which caused loss of life and property occurred in different parts of the country such as in the lower Awash and Lower Omo Basins were particularly destructive.

Traditional and contemporary coping mechanisms to climate variability and extremes in Ethiopia include changes in cropping and planting practices, reduction of consumption levels, collection of wild foods, use of inter-household transfers and loans, increased petty commodity production, temporary and permanent migration in search of employment, grain storage, sale of assets such as livestock and agricultural tools, leasing of land, credit from merchants, use of early warning system, food appeal/aid, etc. In

recent years, and under my government, we are taking significant measures to combat and mitigate the effects of climate change and variabilities through better preparedness and enhanced actions such as improved water and flood control and management. These are also done in tandem with our development endeavors, such as multipurpose development projects such as, hydropower development combined with increasing agricultural productivity, flood and drought control.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this context, on-going planning and implementation of climate change adaptation policies, measures and strategies in Ethiopia are not only necessary, but they are also national priority.

There are already a number of existing national policy initiatives, sectoral programs and strategies that could directly or indirectly address climate change adaptation. In this regard, the most relevant policy and program documents that have relevance for climate change adaptation include Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to end Poverty (PASDEP), Environmental policy of Ethiopia, Agriculture and Rural Development Policy and Strategy, Water resources Management Policy, Health Sector Development Policy and Program, National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Preparedness, National Policy on Biodiversity Conservation and Research, Science and Technology Policy, Population Policy and National Agricultural Research Policy and Strategy.

Improved economic growth has been registered in the country over the past ten years is a testament to the efficacy of these policies. In fact the lessons drawn from the experiences and practices of these policies have helped inform the current Growth and Transformation Plan. This is an undertaking that the country needs financial, technological support and capacity building supports to fully implement these plans and strategies.

The Ethiopian National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA) preparation process has followed the steps and guiding principles outlined in the NAPA Annotated Guidelines. Through stakeholder consultations and expert assessments of vulnerability there was a general consensus that ecologically arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid parts of the country are the most vulnerable to drought.

Through the NAPA process, several priority project ideas that seek to address immediate climate change adaptation needs of the country have been identified. These projects broadly focus on the areas of human and institutional capacity building, improving natural resource management, enhancing irrigation agriculture and water harvesting, strengthening early warning systems and awareness raising.

The implementation of the existing national initiatives I mentioned earlier is of central importance for climate change adaptation. However, these are not entirely hitch-free, as potential barriers and adjustments are constantly being dealt with in order to optimise climate change adaptation gains from the ongoing national initiatives, and to exert a coordinated effort towards successful implementation of environmental initiatives as well as the strategies and action plans of the Rio-Conventions.

The Conference of African Heads of State on Climate Change, which the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, H.E Ato Meles Zenawi, has the privilege to chair has repeatedly stated that as far as Africa is concerned, adaptation is the critical response to the impacts of climate change, because even if current agreements to limit emissions were to be implemented, that by itself, will not stabilize atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases and climate change.

It is only through adaptation initiative that Africa can mitigate present and future losses from climate variability and change. As

you probably know better than I do, it is neither a one-off intervention nor a stand-alone activity; but rather a process that needs to be incorporated in the overall development planning, including the design and implementation of projects and programs across relevant sectors.

Our understanding of this conference is that its outcomes will be translated into concrete adaptation projects for immediate implementation at country level throughout Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The immensity of the challenges posed by climate change are such that African countries cannot effectively address them without the support of development partners, and indeed, of the international community.

For example, just in the area of adaptation, our national initiatives face a myriad of obstacles, including the absence of strong coordination mechanisms both at the national and regional levels; lack of capacity, or the absence of a center or an institution for research and development on climate change adaptation. That is why we welcome the establishment of the African Climate Policy Centre the United Nation's Economic Commission and the broader Climate for Development in Africa (CLimDev-Africa) Programme. We hope the centre will be able to meet the expectations of African countries in policy formulation and the design of practicable projects at country level.

Ethiopia will move ahead resolutely to prepare and strengthen specific Climate Resilience and Green Economy mitigation and adaptation plans. We are working towards carbon neutral development pathways. Our national plans are on track for an effective participation at COP17 in Durban, South Africa.

I have noted with a sense of satisfaction that this conference will focus on substantive and detailed discussions on climate change issues that are of special relevance to Africa.

I believe I can count on your sense of duty towards Africa to close this conference with recommendations that adequately address policy, practice and knowledge pertinent to the African region.

Our expectations are that the outcomes of this conference would serve as input to the Durban COP17 and also a basis for doing substantive future work by policy makers, scientist and practitioners.

With this brief remark, I declare the conference open.

Thank you so much for your kind attention.