

Key messages from the Sixth Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

A submission to the 2020 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

By

**Honourable Professor Paul Mavima (MP),
Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, Republic of Zimbabwe
and Chair of the Sixth Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**

New York, 15 July 2020, 9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

- Your Excellency President of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, Ms Mona Juul;
- Your Excellency the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, Ms Vera Songwe;
- Excellencies Heads of Delegations;
- Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to deliver Africa's contributions to this High Level Political Forum as defined in Victoria Falls during the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development held from 24th to 27th February 2020 under the theme ***“2020–2030: a decade to deliver a transformed and prosperous Africa through the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”***.

The Forum was officially opened by H.E President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and a diverse and inclusive turnout of over 3,000 participants including governments, the private sector, civil society and persons of all abilities and backgrounds positively contributed to the outcomes of the Forum.

The second Africa Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation; the retreat of the United Nations Development System; the special session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa; and the youth Forum hosted by the Deputy Secretary General, Ms Amina Mohamed, also enriched the outcomes of the forum.

Madam President, I wish to highlight from the onset that the deliberations of our Forum were done before the onset of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic in Africa, and that its negative effects had not yet been felt in the way it has gravely affected us globally today. That said, I will present the Key Messages as agreed, as well as to

highlight possible intervention areas to address the impact of COVID-19. The following are the major highlights of the discussions of the Forum:-

Number One

The Forum noted that Africa has registered mixed progress in achieving the SDGs by 2030 and dramatic scaling up of resources and acceleration of efforts is necessary to bring the continent back on track.

Africa is currently grappling with:-

- i. Diseases and poverty;
- ii. Emergencies caused by climate change;
- iii. Wars;
- iv. Youth unemployment; and
- v. Fragile social systems in the health and education sectors among many other challenges.

With this in mind, the Forum noted that Africa's projected average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of 3.2 for 2020 is inadequate to achieve the goals, and even in a best-case scenario, Africa's average GDP growth for 2020 will fall to 1.8 per cent.

In addition, while the proportion of people living in extreme poverty declined from 43 per cent in 2013 to an estimated 32.5 per cent in 2019, the absolute number of poor people increased from 388 million to 422 million over the same period. Up to 29 million people may be pushed into extreme poverty and 19 million jobs may be lost in the region linked to COVID19 according to the ECA.

Number Two

The UN 2030 Agenda and Africa's Agenda 2063 remain the most relevant frameworks for achieving the SDGs. Africa therefore reiterates its commitment to the full and effective implementation of these two frameworks as they are mutually supportive.

Number Three

Africa calls for the development and implementation of national and regional strategies aligned with the decade of action. In this regard, Africa agreed to:-

- (i) Seek solutions from within Africa as well as to strengthen regional partnerships to support Member States to refine their implementation frameworks. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us, through very difficult times to seeks national solutions to challenges affecting us and to strengthen our disaster preparedness frameworks.
- (ii) Include costing the implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 and mobilising financing accordingly.
- (iii) Strengthening of Voluntary National Reviews should be strengthened, and Voluntary Local Reviews should be scaled up as vital tools to bolster national implementation.

Number Four

Climate change is an existential threat that should be addressed with raised ambition and urgency and Member States need to redouble their efforts in implementing the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Number Five

African Member States should leverage the Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area to support increased production, create jobs, strengthen regional value chains and developing resilience to external shocks and future crises.

Number Six

Ensuring gender equality and inclusion and empowerment of women, youth, disabled persons, the aged and other marginalized groups will be central to inclusive growth and no one should be left behind. Moreover, the refugee-development nexus needs to be addressed directly as part of this response in the spirit of leaving no one behind.

Number Seven

Member States and partners need to adopt a human rights-based approach, eliminating discrimination and ensuring that all people have access to decent livelihoods in order to address poverty and inequality.

Number Eight

Member States should strengthen regional and national innovation hubs, incubators and common equipment centres and advance the development of emerging technologies and digital transformation to serve industry, the academic sector and society at large in line with the SDGs. Special attention should be paid to enhancing the participation of women and girls in the science, technology and engineering sectors.

Number Nine

Improved availability, accessibility and timeliness of quality and disaggregated data and statistics is essential in providing guiding information on progress being made in the implementation of the SDGs and enhancing decision making in line with the decade of action.

Finally, as I conclude Madam President, I wish on behalf of Africa to express our deep condolences to all Members States following the COVID-19 induced deaths and the severe strain it has caused globally. Africa stands with other regions in the fight against COVID-19 and will spare no effort in preserving human life. We remain hopeful that through collaborative effort, we will find an end to this pandemic which now poses a serious threat to achievement of the SDGs.

I thank you.