

AFRICAN GROUP STATEMENT DELIVERED

BY

H.E. BARBARA CREECY

**MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE
ENVIRONMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA AND
PRESIDENT OF THE AFRICAN MINISTERIAL
CONFERENCE ON THE ENVIRONMENT (AMCEN)**

**AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE VIRTUAL
FIFTH UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY
(UNEA-5.1)**

22 FEBRUARY 2021

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**The President of the Fifth United Nations Environment Assembly,
Your Excellencies,
The Executive Director of UNEP,
The Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the African Group.

Firstly, allow me to p thank and commend you, Your Excellency, Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn, Minister for Climate and Environment of Norway, and President of this Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly for your good leadership, under the very unusual and challenging circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Allow me to also thank the members of the Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Representatives under the leadership of His Excellency, Ambassador Fernando Coimbra, for the outstanding work in preparing for this first session of UNEA-5.

Mr. President,

The African Ministers of Environment met virtually on 4 December 2020 for the 8th Special Session of the African Ministers Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) under the theme “Enhancing environmental action for effective post-Covid-19 recovery in Africa”. During this session, the Ministers deliberated on Africa’s engagement in and commitment to their active participation the first part of UNEA-5.

The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to continue efforts to conserve, protect and enhance the resilience of Africa's environment and natural resources as part of their determined efforts in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

As part of the recovery efforts on the African continent AMCEN has adopted the African Green Stimulus Programme. The African Green Stimulus Programme seeks to address, in a sustainable manner, the devastating socio-economic and environmental impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic and to, more importantly, harness the opportunities which this approach brings for the Continent. It further aims to mobilise additional financial and technical resources to upscale and enhance the implementation of the portfolio of programmes within the 12 Key Priority areas, whilst identifying areas requiring new interventions to support Africa's Green Recovery. The AGSP intends to provide an overarching framework which consolidates and coordinates Green Economy and Climate Change initiatives in Africa which have been grouped into twelve key priority areas under one comprehensive umbrella.

Mr. President,

The African Group welcomes the UNEP Mid-Term Strategy for the period 2022-2025, the Programme of Work and Budget for the period 2022-2023 and the related appropriations for the Environment Fund. This has already been articulated by the Group's engagement during the recently concluded Open-Ended meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

The Group wishes to emphasize the need for a more coordinated and coherent regional delivery of the Programme of Work. This is also in the context of previous requests by the Group on strengthening of UNEP's regional presence in Africa. We believe such strengthening will continue to promote an efficient and effective delivery of UNEP's mandate in the region.

Mr. President,

Regarding the draft procedural decision on the adjournment and resumption of UNEA-5, the Group wishes to reiterate its position that this virtual UNEA session only address procedural issues and that any substantive issues that need to be addressed by UNEA, are done so during the resumed session in 2022.

The African Group acknowledges the importance of commemorating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of UNEP in Nairobi. The Group is ready to work collaboratively with the President of UNEA-5 and the incoming President of UNEA-6 in the preparations towards a successful commemoration. The Group reiterates that a successful commemoration of the 50th anniversary of UNEP will help reinforce the centrality of UNEP in the global environmental agenda and as the leading global environmental authority.

The African Group would like to encourage others to refrain from the need to continue to push for online negotiations on substantive matters in global processes due to the ongoing challenges the world is facing. The virtual format of negotiations has not proven to be one where there

is a level playing field with some delegations, most notably from continent being left behind in the process. The just concluded meeting of the OECPR was testament to the myriad of difficulties delegations faced in conducting meetings via the virtual format, not least of which were the technical hurdles and continued connectivity challenges. In addition, the line-by-line consideration of the draft decisions in the Contact Group proved that even with a significantly scaled back set of procedural decisions it was immensely difficult to forge ahead.

Finally, Mr. President,

The African Group remain ready to engage constructively in the deliberations of this online UNEA-5.1 and look forward to a possible consensual message or statement integrating the key messages highlighted by the ministers as an outcome of this session.

I wish to once again, express our unequivocal support towards cooperating with all Member States, regional groups, and your team in ensuring a successful UNEA and beyond.

I thank you for your attention.