



environment, forestry & fisheries

Department: Environment, Forestry
and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

STATEMENT BY HER EXCELLENCY, MS BARBARA CREECY, MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA FOR FIFTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY, 22 FEBRUARY 2021

Your Excellency, Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn, President of UNEA and Minister of Environment and Climate of Norway,

Your Excellency, Ms Inger Anderson, Executive Director of the UNEP,

Your Excellency, Ms Joyce Msuya, the Deputy Executive Director of UNEP,

Your Excellences, fellow Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening.

I am delighted to be part of this important occasion where as an international community we have once again gathered to discuss critical issues defining the global environmental agenda. It is however unfortunate that we are meeting virtually, under these challenging times when we are still faced with the COVID-19 pandemic. On that note I would like to thank the President of UNEA, and the Secretariat for successfully organising this meeting with the hope that we will be able to meet again in person during the resumed session of UNEA-5 in 2022.

Excellences, ladies and gentlemen, it is clear that the COVID-19 Pandemic is still wreaking havoc socially and economically. This is attested to by the rising numbers of infections globally. We wish to therefore extend our sincerest condolences to all who have experienced loss as a result of the global pandemic and express our solidarity with all of those otherwise impacted by COVID-19.

This crisis has highlighted the challenges we face as an international community and has put a spotlight on among others the importance of nature, compassion and solidarity which is required, as well as the delicate balance between nature and human life. It has also brought sharp focus on societal vulnerability to systemic and multidimensional risks of climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation among others. Given the current global challenge of COVID-19 Pandemic, the United Nation Environment Assembly theme, **“Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve Sustainable Development”** is therefore most relevant, important and timely.

Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen, the pandemic is not only causing a tremendous health burden, it is also threatening key sectors of our economies, dramatically affecting the lives and livelihoods of our people. The pandemic has severely disrupted global value chains, industries and government revenue for the foreseeable future and has devastated the informal economy. The most vulnerable sectors of society and the most vulnerable countries are clearly the most adversely effected. Therefore, the theme calls for the international community to strengthen the efforts and actions for nature in order to achieve sustainable development goals and to reduce the accelerating biodiversity and species loss as well as combat degradation of the natural resources.

Whilst the pandemic is having a profound negative impact on our sustainable development efforts and our collective efforts to eradicate poverty and combat environmental degradation, it also presents an unprecedented opportunity to reset the global economy on a pathway towards a more equitable and more environmentally sustainable and low-carbon developmental trajectory.

In this regard many governments and regions are developing large stimulus packages, and an inclusive green recovery should be at the heart of such programmes. We need to seek and promote opportunities for cleaner, more sustainable and resilient economies, post the Pandemic, as we lay a green foundation for our future generations.

As part of the recovery efforts on the African continent, the African Ministerial Conference of the Environment (AMCEN) has adopted the Africa’s Green Stimulus

Programme at its eighth Special Session in December 2020. 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.

The African Green Stimulus Programme 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 as well as to build the Continent's resilience to future shocks.

Ladies and gentlemen, we need to work together on the recovery of the economy of the global society from the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to leverage on the opportunities that are there for Africa and globally in our response to the pandemic. There is a need for us to come up with the mechanism on how we can handle the pandemic such that we reduce the negative effects and realise the opportunities that might also be presented to us for economic recovery.

Our interventions should include the commitment to the implementation of circular economy. At AMCEN, we are committed to implement circular economy in order to contribute to economic growth, job creation and divert waste, in particular plastics, away from landfills or polluting the oceans. In this regards ladies and gentlemen, The South African Cabinet has approved the National Waste Management Strategy which has recently been gazetted. The National Waste Management Strategy has circular economy and waste hierarchy as some of the key principles for effective and efficient waste services, chemicals and waste economy as well as waste minimisation.

South Africa, in response to the immediate challenge of the COVID-19 Pandemic, has developed an Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan with a relief package of a total value of \$26 billion. Although the biggest on the African continent and in the country's history, a considerable amount of international support would be required. This recovery plan and its relief package also includes green recovery measures.

We subscribe to the slogan that says, “**leave no one behind**” in the path towards a better and truly inclusive development trajectory which will form part of the legacy of the post COVID 19 response and recovery plans. Living in harmony with nature must be central to this new path.

Chair,

We bare witness on a daily basis to the constant reports of biodiversity threats and species loss and to the severe impacts of climate change. Globally we are experiencing dramatic changes in weather patterns which bring severe destruction, loss of human lives and livelihoods, we are therefore appealing to the international community and, in particular the developed countries and those with leading economies to show leadership in these times of global crisis through greater ambition and greater action to address the current challenges facing our world.

Domestically, several developments have taken place over the last few months which demonstrate South Africa’s commitment to addressing various environmental challenges and transitioning to a low carbon, climate resilient economy. The South African Cabinet approved the establishment of the Presidential Climate Change Coordinating Commission to coordinate and oversee the just transition. President Cyril Ramaphosa has appointed members of the Inaugural Commission and the inaugural meeting of the Presidential Climate Change Coordinating Commission took place on Friday 19 February 2021. The Commission will advise on and facilitate a common understanding of a just transition, cognisant of the socio-economic, environmental and technological implications of climate change. This covers adaptation, mitigation as well as means of implementation. South Africa is currently also in the process of updating its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to be submitted ahead of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)’s COP 26 later this year.

Cabinet also approved South Africa’s Low Emissions Development Strategy (LEDS), which has been submitted to the UNFCCC Secretariat. The LEDS aims to succinctly build upon this foundation and articulate the path going forward in order to place the

country on a low-carbon trajectory, while at the same time ensuring broader socio-economic development.

In addition, the National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (NCCAS) has also been approved. The NCCAS defines the country's vulnerabilities, plans to reduce those vulnerabilities and leverage opportunities, and outlines the required resources for such action, whilst demonstrating progress on climate change adaptation. It also outlines a set of objectives, interventions and outcomes to enable the country to give expression to its commitment to the Paris Agreement.

Chair,

In conclusion, we reaffirm our commitment to the system of multilateralism, with the United Nations at its centre, and our firm conviction that only a collective and united response can address global challenges, especially in these current times. We call on the international community to demonstrate solidarity with Africa in our extreme need through the provision of massively scaled-up financial support and other means of implementation such as capacity building and technology transfer, in support of our green recovery and towards strengthening actions for nature to achieve sustainable development.

I thank you,