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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 THE FIFTH SESSION UNITED
NATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSEMBLY, LEADERSHIP DIALOGUE –
22 FEBRUARY 2021**

Theme: “Contribution of the environmental dimension of sustainable development to building a resilient and inclusive post-pandemic world”,

H.E. Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn, President of UNEA and Minister of Environment and Climate of Norway

Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme,

Your Excellencies, fellow Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Government and people of South Africa, I would like to thank the President of UNEA, and the Secretariat for organising with success, this first part of 5th United Nations Environment Assembly given the challenging times when the international community is still grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The global health emergency brought about by the COVID-19 Pandemic that we are faced with, calls for review of our plans and priorities so that we

respond accordingly and with urgency. 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.

Programme Director, as part of the recovery efforts on the African continent, the African Ministerial Conference of the Environment (AMCEN), of which I am the current President, has adopted Africa's Green Stimulus Programme at the eighth Special Session of AMCEN 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. 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. The identified priority areas include:

- Improving Air Quality, enhancing Chemicals and Waste Management and promoting the Circular Economy,
- Conserving Biodiversity and Combatting Illegal Wildlife Trade,
- Revitalising Eco-tourism and the Biodiversity Economy

- Combating Land Degradation, Desertification and Drought,
- Enhancing Climate Action – Scaled up resources to support African Adaptation Programmes, including the Investing in the Blue Economy Scaling up Climate Smart Agriculture and Food Security,
- Supporting sustainable management of forests,
- Improving Water Conservation and Use
- Investing in Renewable Energy,
- Developing Smart Cities and Green Urban Areas, and
- Enhancing Information and Communication and Technology (ICT).

The African Green Stimulus Programme has been presented to the African Union with a view to it being incorporated into the overall COVID-19 Recovery Programme for Africa, to ensure the Continent's recovery is sustainable and resilience to future shocks is built.

Programme Director, ladies and gentlemen, we call on the international community and the United Nations to demonstrate solidarity with Africa in the time of extreme need through the provision of massively scaled-up financial support and other means of implementation, in support of our green recovery.

In order to respond to the immediate challenge of the COVID-19 Pandemic, South Africa 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.

Some critical interventions that South Africa has prioritised in the green economy recovery programme include, amongst others:

- the biodiversity economy infrastructure roll out inclusive of protected areas;
- support for Small Micro and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMMEs) and cooperatives to take advantage of opportunities in the green economy;
- support for small grower farmers through Public Private Partnerships (PPP's) in forestry, including in state plantations;
- support to rural communities to unlock economic opportunities within the biodiversity economy including in the wildlife, ecotourism and bioprospecting value chains;
- waste reclaimer integration in municipal refuse collection systems and revitalization of buy-back centres;
- revised industry waste management plans centred on a circular economy approach; and
- support for the aquaculture sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, the decline in global tourism has resulted in direct impacts on conservation in many countries which are primarily dependent on this revenue for their core operations. The conservation authorities have an additional burden and responsibility to support the rural community stakeholders who are the custodians of the landscapes and wildlife on which tourism depends.

To address this challenge, South Africa has established the Tourism Relief Fund which provides once-off capped grant assistance to SMMEs in the tourism sector to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in order to ensure their

sustainability. However, the effectiveness of these efforts depend also on additional international public and private support being provided.

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, 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.

In conclusion, allow me to 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 times of COVID-19. We should also continue to work together to address these challenges. We call on developed countries to show leadership in these times of crisis through the provision of support to developing countries to address the environmental challenges facing our world.

I thank you,