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STATEMENT BY

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Delivered at the

**Seventh Session of Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable
Development**

Held in

**Brazzaville, Congo
3rd March 2021**

Your Excellency Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of Congo;

Your Excellency Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations;

Honourable Ministers;

Your Excellency Dr. Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa;

Representative of the African Development Bank;

Representatives of Development Partners;

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am happy to be in this Forum taking place in the beautiful city of Brazzaville, Congo.

I convey greetings and best wishes from His Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission who has designated me to represent him.

I would also like to thank **His Excellency Denis Sassou Nguesso**, President of the Republic of Congo and through him, the Government and People of Congo for hosting this session in this difficult environment of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The decision to host reflects strong commitment to the issue of sustainable development, a major issue of our time.

The theme of the 2021 African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development “***Building forward better: Towards a resilient and green Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.***” is timely.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has disrupted our health and economic systems.

At the same time, the challenges of climate change are increasing.

Going beyond this state of affairs demands recovery followed by growth, hence the need to build forward better.

Sustaining that growth demands creating a green Africa without which there will be no resilience. And our guiding posts are Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063.

Progress on sustainable development in Africa had been mixed and uneven. Poverty rates were declining but they are now expected to increase as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic which is threatening livelihoods as jobs are being lost.

As governments in Africa deploy resources to meet the COVID-19 challenge, they also face the imperative of expanding fiscal spaces to meet the equally imperative needs of inclusive sustainable development.

This comes against the background where Africa's average fiscal deficit is estimated to have climbed to 10.7 % in 2020, from 4.9% in 2019. Africa's debt has soared to about 70% of GDP in current US dollars in 2021, up from 65.7 % in 2020 and 56.3% in 2019. While this average remains sustainable, the debt-to-GDP ratio is likely to exceed 100% of GDP in at least seven African countries.

The foregoing highlights the importance of strengthening domestic resource mobilization. To achieve Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063, 75% to 90% of the resources must be mobilized within the continent. In this connection, investing and supporting the African tax administrations is critical to improving revenue collection. The average efficiency of tax administrations in Africa increased by 4.1% over four years (2016 – 2019). However, this improvement has not been sufficient to collect adequate revenues. Much more needs to be done.

In addition, our continent needs to strengthen the fight against illicit financial flows from Africa. Approximately US\$50-89 billion is lost annually through these flows. In addition, almost US\$ 100 billion is lost through tax evasion. All these resources can contribute immensely toward sustainable development if the illicit outlets are plugged.

Another avenue of building more resilient and diversified economies is the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which according to the World Bank, has the potential to boost the region's income by 7%, an additional US\$450 billion; and, lifting 30 million people out of extreme poverty by 2035. The market will also facilitate the acceleration of manufacturing, infrastructure development and investments in digital technology, which is vital in this COVID-19 era.

Let me now turn to the issue of vaccine acquisition. According to the Africa CDC, the continent will need approximately US\$10 billion for vaccine acquisition and vaccinate 60% of the population to achieve herd immunity.

To spearhead this, the African Union has established the COVID-19 African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT).

The AVATT has managed to secure provisional 270 million doses of vaccines from the COVAX facility. The acquisition will be made through the Africa Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP).

The vaccine doses are from Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and AstraZeneca.

Negotiations are underway with other suppliers, including India, expected to provide 400 million doses by the end of the year. Russia and Johnson & Johnson are expected to deliver 300 million doses each in 2022.

The African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), has been a significant player in providing financial support to fight the pandemic and vaccine acquisition.

The Bank has provided an advance procurement commitment guarantee of up to US\$2 billion to candidate vaccine manufacturers. The Bank is committed to raising up to \$5 billion.

At the international level, we are conveying the message that no human being on earth will be safe from COVID-19 until all human beings are vaccinated.

Let me now turn to this Forum.

The African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development should be instrumental in reinforcing the joint implementation, monitoring, reviews, reporting and resource mobilization processes of both Agendas as clearly indicated in the AU-UN Framework for the Implementation of Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063;

The Fourth African Union-United Nations Annual Conference held on December 2020 underscored the importance of robust AU-UN cooperation at the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

As part of the implementation of the joint AU-UN framework, AUC in collaboration with UNECA, AfDB and UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa prepared four annual reports under the heading: “**Africa Sustainable Development Report**” in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. The Reports provide an integrated assessment of the continent’s progress towards implementation of Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063.

The 2020 Report will be discussed in this meeting. It is designed to encourage African governments and other stakeholders to accelerate actions aimed at achieving the sustainable development goals and the goals of Agenda 2063 in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic and climate change challenges.

The AUC and the UN system are also collaborating in statistical activities on the continent to respond to the huge data demand required for the monitoring and evaluation of the two Agendas.

I will conclude by stating that the deliberations taking place in the next days should come up with recommendations moving us towards a resilient and green Africa as well as accelerated implementation of Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063.

I thank you all for your kind attention and wish this Forum fruitful deliberations.