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REGIONAL SESSION ON AFRICA
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Introductory Remarks

by

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Mr Chairman,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like, on behalf of Mr. Abdulie Janneh, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, to thank you for attending this important session, which focuses on regional discussions of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Africa, for the thematic areas of energy for sustainable development, industrial development, climate change, and air/atmosphere pollution.

Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, African governments, regional and sub-regional institutions and other stakeholders have pursued a wide range of strategies and activities aimed at implementing the global commitments towards attaining sustainable development. For the cluster of thematic issues at hand, the Chair of the Africa Regional Implementation Meeting (RIM) will give you a report of the achievements, constraints/barriers, challenges, opportunities, lessons learnt and the way forward. For my part, I wish to thank our partner agencies and programs, especially UNEP and UNIDO, for their effective technical contribution to the regional review and limit my remarks to highlighting just a few points.

Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Socio-economic development in African countries is critically impaired by their limited production and consumption of modern energy and extreme vulnerability to climate change, as well as the inadequate contribution of the industrial sector to growth and environmental sustainability.

First, the economies of most African countries largely depend on natural resource-based sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism, which are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Climate change is expected to result in increase in droughts, floods and other extreme weather events adding to the stress on water resources, food security, health, infrastructure, and thus overall development. Most of African communities are vulnerable to these impacts mainly because of high poverty levels, heavy reliance on rain-fed agriculture, limited access to technology and cultural practices.



Second, we know that industrialization is crucial for overall development in Africa. Yet, by all industry-related indicators, the continent lags behind other developing regions in industrial performance. For instance, Africa's meagre share of world manufacturing output declined from 0.9% to 0.8% over the last two decades. The contribution of manufacturing value added to GDP in 2004 ranged from a high of about 20% in Mauritius to as low as 0.5% in Djibouti and an average of only 9%.

But the quest for industrial development carries with it several threats to the environment, which require explicit attention on the road to sustainable development in the region. The main concerns here relate to air emissions, discharge of effluents, use of non-renewable material and energy resources as well as toxic substances, hazardous waste, non-recyclable products, and pressures on biodiversity. Any strategy aimed at fostering environmentally sustainable industrialization in Africa must focus on structural issues, which relate, among others, to building domestic capacity and strengthening domestic factor markets and supply of public goods. Sustainability will require a shift from current production processes to less polluting and resource-wasting industries and production processes.

Third, the key air pollutant sources in the region vary among countries, but include, in general terms, the industrial sector (especially thermal power stations, cement factories and chemical industries), the transport sector, and domestic fuel use and waste burning. Emissions from these sources have negative impacts on human health, the ecosystems on which livelihoods depend, materials and infrastructure, climate change and biodiversity.

Fourth, despite relatively important energy resources, Africa generates only 3.1% of the world electricity, less than any other region of the world. This share has not changed for the last 10 years and most analysts forecast that this will remain the case for the next 15 years, although production of fuels used for electricity will continue to grow steadily. Efforts undertaken by various actors must be pursued to improve the institutional, legal and regulatory environments in order to attract the private sector and more investors in energy production and distribution. In so doing, there is also a need to promote environmentally safe energy technologies, and to increase access to modern energy for the rural and urban poor.

Mr Chairman,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude, we must reiterate that overall success in meeting the objectives of sustainable development in Africa will, to a large extent, depend on good governance within each country and at the international level, transparency in the financial, monetary and trading systems, as well as the fulfilment by the international community of the implementation commitments made in Rio, Monterrey and Johannesburg.

Thank you.