

Draft Statement by Ethiopia Minister at CVF Regional Workshop for Africa

7 May 2015
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Excellencies
Expert representatives of fellow African nations
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to welcome you today in Addis Ababa!

My colleagues and I very much look forward to two days of rich and stimulating discussions at this Climate Vulnerable Forum regional workshop for Africa.

I am particularly pleased to see with us delegates from our neighbouring countries across the region: Burkina Faso, Comoros, DRC Congo, Ghana, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, South Sudan, Zambia [..].

As you all are aware, 2015 marks the end-point of a very important track of climate negotiations agreed on African soil in 2011 at the United Nations Climate Change Conference at Durban in South Africa. The Durban Platform concludes in Paris this December with, we hope, a new and strengthened international framework for working in unison to hold down the increases in temperatures due to human activity and to assist developing and vulnerable countries to manage unavoidable impacts.

At this stage, of course, the big picture is that slow progress has been made in reducing emissions, which have expanded by around 40% since the UN climate convention was signed in 1992. We also know from a string of climate-related calamities, with freak super storms, unprecedented droughts and severe flooding, that on the whole not enough has been done to equip communities to cope with the impacts of climate change.

Africa really is the most vulnerable continent to the types of changes brought about by global warming. In geographical terms, our expansive tropical zones carry tremendous biodiversity risks as warm climates become hot ones, and hot climates become hotter. Impacts for Africa's fisheries are predicted to be particularly severe as waters warm more than anything previously observed. River deltas and low-lying coastal land, particularly in West Africa, are already being put under huge pressure as a result of rising sea levels as they face salt intrusion, submergence and extreme tidal flooding. Arid and semi-arid regions, too, are becoming even more dry – Lake Chad has actually vanished – while the Sahel fights with desertification due to increasingly long hot and dry periods, and increasingly short and erratic wet seasons.

From an economic perspective, our economies are largely agricultural, the sector most directly susceptible to changes in the weather. Africa is also home to the largest number of least developed countries (LDCs), and of course LDCs have gained formal recognition within the UNFCCC as a group especially vulnerable to climate change.

In social terms, malaria, malnutrition, and food and water borne illnesses, the most serious climate-sensitive diseases, are all more widespread in Africa than almost anywhere else. Very significant proportions of the African workforce also labours out-of-doors every day, and without air conditioning, directly fending against more and more extremely hot days and correspondingly higher health risks, as well as detrimental effects for productivity.

It would be impossible that such wide-ranging and fundamental effects would not also have influences on broader issues. Many of us, I think, would be convinced that climate change is one key factor behind a number of security situations in the region, from Mali to Darfur to

Somalia. Many of us would also consider climate change as an important factor driving migration and displacement, inflating migrant volumes heading to Europe for instance.

Of course, for the large part, African economic growth has been remarkable this past decade, so we cannot say that climate change has inhibited that. However, in the two decades since 1990, most other developing regions of the world were able to reduce extreme forms of poverty by more than half: South-East and East Asia even experienced 70% reductions in poverty or more. Whereas Sub-Saharan Africa cut poverty by just 10% over that same period.

No doubt African economies would have grown faster and more inclusively were it not for climate change, which has such a disproportionate impact on the livelihoods of the poorest groups. But we have of course been very busy working to rise to the challenge of climate change. All of our countries have undertaken considerable activities both in terms of adaptation and emissions measures. The country delegates here all herald from dedicated teams who devote considerable energy to developing national climate change strategies and plans, and much more so to seeing through their implementation.

Nevertheless, tackling climate change in Africa is no easy task. Our institutional and technological capacities and capabilities are very limited compared to other countries. We face massive resource constraints and the frustration of investing in the development of national plans that often go largely unfunded and unimplemented due to limited national and international financing for climate change despite the criticality of its importance for this region.

In gathering here for these two days, we have a chance to delve further into what precisely is holding back progress in Africa. We can showcase what is working well, and what have been our key successes. And we have a new opportunity to build support, joining with other countries, to address our concerns.

I hope we can look at the extent, for instance, that some of our countries have been pioneering responses to specific areas, such as renewable energy, the transport sector, disaster risk reduction, REDD+ or on climate change and health. We should be able to establish what is needed to take our efforts to the next level, and to identify who will take on what steps towards that. Where, moreover, do we absolutely require international support, and where are we able to be self-sufficient either nationally or regionally?

As you know, because this is a Climate Vulnerable Forum event, it is not only a regional event but also a key component of global level activities. Our conclusions will have an important role in informing what the Forum will be active on in the run-up to Paris and in the period following this important summit. Ethiopia will present our outcomes at a Forum meeting in Bonn next month during the UNFCCC round that will compare different regional climate agendas as informed by events just like this taking place in all other key regions.

Ethiopia joined the Climate Vulnerable Forum in November 2011 when some 20 high representatives of vulnerable countries from every region gathered at Dhaka, Bangladesh just ahead of the important Durban climate change conference. We see it as vital to work with vulnerable countries from other regions, including other LDCs, the SIDS and also vulnerable middle-income countries like Philippines, who currently chairs this Forum.

There is of course obvious interest in looking to be more collaborative with countries facing similar challenges in the context of what is a truly global negotiation process towards a new international climate change regime. In particular looking towards Paris, we need more effective outcomes in particular on areas such as on mitigation ambition and means of implementation, like finance, capacity building and technology development and transfer. These will be very hard won.

There will certainly also be interests that are special to Africa that only African nations can effectively advance or advocate on. But we have most likely not worked closely enough across, for instance, SIDS, LDCs and middle-income countries as we could have. More energy could be devoted to examining commonalities with the small islands of the Pacific or Caribbean, with the landlocked mountainous countries of Central Asia, or the plains of South Asia, as well as the territories along the Central American isthmus. On what, for example, can all these countries collectively advocate for in the UNFCCC in specific terms? Aside from commonalities, there are most likely also a number of uniquely African priorities that other countries would still be open to support.

There is also a great deal we can learn from leading examples from Asia or Latin America, for instance, in terms of governance mechanisms, accessing of climate finance and the organization of national responses. We need to start paying attention to what has worked and why from elsewhere. For instance, why has Vietnam consistently been a top recipient of adaptation funding? What was their recipe for success?

In this particular workshop, it is also possible to take your thinking beyond the Paris conference and UNFCCC track since the Climate Vulnerable Forum has already been quite active in intergovernmental fora outside the climate talks. The Forum has a three-year Action Plan that specifically looks at other policy domains relevant to climate change. At the last session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, for instance, an entire day was actually devoted to climate change as a primary order of work due in large part to the efforts of a number of the Forum's members, especially Bangladesh and Philippines.

The Forum has also engaged with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Council, the World Bank and other institutions and processes that are highly climate change pertinent. The Forum's efforts in the context of the IOM, for instance, contributed to its establishing the first ever operational division on migration, climate change and the environment—a move that should be valuable in helping African countries to mainstream climate and environment and human mobility issues into policy-making.

While you will hear more on the international context of these issues and the objectives of the Climate Vulnerable Forum from its ad hoc secretariat, which is hosted by UNDP, I would in any case encourage all of you who are not already members of this Forum to recommend your governments to consider participation in it. Let us ensure that our region's voice is well reflected as we head towards this year's critical climate policy milestones.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to close now by saying that I very much look forward to study the outcomes of your work, including in particular any specific recommendations for what can be done by who in order to enhance the response to climate change for African nations.

In closing also, I would like to extend the thanks of Ethiopia to our colleagues at UNDP who have been responsible for organizing this important event. We are very grateful for the efforts that have been put in to help make it a success.

Finally, I wish you a very productive meeting as well as an enjoyable stay here in Ethiopia. Your views and experience are highly valued and your participation is integral to the success of this workshop. We thank you for your involvement.

Thank you very much.