



**H.E. Ms. Lachezara Stoeva, President of ECOSOC, and Permanent Representative of
Bulgaria to the UN**

**Statement for Opening session of the
Ninth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**

28 February 2023

Niamey, Niger

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honor to address the ninth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, as part of the 55th session of the Economic Commission for Africa.

On behalf of the Economic and Social Council, I extend my sincere appreciation to the Economic Commission for Africa for their leadership in convening Forum each year, and to the Government of Niger for hosting this year's gathering.

The Regional Sustainable Development Forums are instrumental in catalyzing momentum from the ground up, and for channeling local and national voices to the international level, including for the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, convened under the auspices of ECOSOC every July.

HLPF and ECOSOC

The HLPF plays a role in promoting sustainable development in Africa, by providing a forum for collaboration, promoting policy coherence, building capacity, and mobilizing resources.



This year, the HLPF will address the theme of “Accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels.”

The Forum will also conduct an in-depth review of progress towards a focused set of Sustainable Development Goals, including: SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation; SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy; SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure; SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and SDG 17 on partnerships for the Goals.

The HLPF programme includes sessions dedicated to the priorities of African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States, and middle-income countries; as well as focused dialogues on science, technology and innovation; finance, local action, voices of civil society, and leaving no one behind.

We encourage all countries to bring your stories of successes and challenges, and your ideas for collaboration and partnership to these discussions.

VNRs and VLRs

During the ministerial segment of the HLPF, a total of 40 countries will present their Voluntary National Reviews this year, including seven countries from Africa. The EU will also present a voluntary review.

The Voluntary National Reviews are at the heart of the HLPF. They have been instrumental in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs.

The VNRs provide a common framework for member States to share their experiences, provide examples of challenges and successes, and record progress through collection and analysis of data and indicators.



The process of preparing a VNR is also an exercise in fostering multi-stakeholder engagement, bringing together diverse actors within governments, civil society, the private sector, and academia to collaborate and reach for common aspirations.

Similarly, the increase in subnational reviews—or Voluntary Local Reviews—has provided space for local authorities and community-level stakeholders to participate in the implementation of the SDGs on the ground.

By conducting a VLR, local governments can assess their contributions to the SDGs, identify gaps and opportunities, and develop action plans to scale-up initiatives to the national level.

Africa's progress toward the SDGs

As Africa struggles to recover from the worst aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic, we can note some general trends.

Overall, progress towards the SDGs in Africa has been mixed, with significant challenges remaining in many areas. However, there have been some notable successes, particularly with regard to clean energy, health, and economic growth.

Africa has made significant progress in reducing child mortality rates, increasing access to essential health services, and improving maternal health outcomes, which supports efforts to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment.

It is encouraging to note that many countries in the region are investing in education and health services for women and girls, along with legislation and other measures to eliminate gender-based violence and discrimination.

While poverty rates have declined in many countries, setbacks in efforts to eradicate extreme poverty have required expanded social protection programs.



Despite strong economic growth rates, high levels of youth unemployment and a lack of decent work opportunities in many sectors persist.

More must be done to support economic growth and job creation as a means of reducing poverty, and the importance of comprehensive and integrated development strategies that address the root causes of poverty and inequality in Africa cannot be overstated.

Increased investment in infrastructure, education and health, as well as improved governance and the promotion of economic diversification and structural transformation are all critical for the region. Currently, Africa's infrastructure deficit is a critical bottleneck constraining the continent's inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Many African countries have set ambitious targets for expanding access to clean energy. They have made significant investments in renewable energy infrastructure that are driving the rapid expansion of solar and wind power. Powering Africa through clean and affordable energy could be a driver of industrialisation, local value creation, and food and nutrition security.

Efforts to expand access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation services are increasing, yet access remains a significant challenge in many parts of the continent, particularly in rural areas. The lack of adequate service delivery is a driver of social tension and conflict.

The key to success is to prioritise predictable financing for African countries by taking a long-term view of domestic resource mobilization, while optimising not only revenue collection, but also the efficiency of expenditure and targeted investments. At the same time, external funding is an important source of seed investments and an enabler of institutional reforms to enhance transparency and accountability in public finance in Africa.

Africa is a priority for the United Nations



Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

I want to take this opportunity to express my admiration for the work of my predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile, who raised the visibility of Africa's progress and challenges on the global stage.

He guided the presentation of an outstanding turnout of 21 African countries that came to New York to present their VNRs to the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development during the ministerial segment of ECOSOC.

Immediately following the HLPF, he collaborated with the President of the General Assembly to convene a Special High-Level Dialogue on "Reconfirming the Development of Africa as a Priority of the United Nations System" to further elaborate on measures to address the development needs of Africa.

SDG Summit

It is my honor and my duty to continue to ensure that the voices of all African countries are not left behind this year.

With this, I would like to invite the Economic Commission for Africa to utilize this Regional Forum on Sustainable Development—and also the upcoming Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to be convened in March—to define key messages and priorities as inputs to the SDG Summit later this year in September.

I urge you to use this process to advocate for your interests and to help emphasize the unique challenges that Africans are struggling with, in achieving the SDGs.

African countries can make their voices heard at the SDG Summit by actively participating in preparatory meetings and discussions leading up to the event, to highlight



success stories and progress towards the SDGs, and to share best practices and lessons learned.

By working together and speaking with a unified voice, African countries can help ensure that the SDG Summit results in concrete actions and commitments that will accelerate progress towards the SDGs and leave no one behind.

I encourage your countries to come to the SDG summit prepared to announce their vision and share transformative actions to achieve the SDGs. I wish all of you a very successful Forum and hope to welcome you to New York in July.