

Opening Statement for H.E. Mr. Collen V. Kelapile, President of ECOSOC
at the
Regional preparatory workshop for African voluntary national reviews and
voluntary local reviews: strengthening integration and reporting on the 2030
Agenda and Agenda 2063

Eighth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development
1 - 2 March 2022
Kigali, Rwanda (hybrid)

Distinguished delegates,
Dear colleagues and friends,

1. I am deeply honored to join you at the opening of the regional preparatory workshop on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs).
2. The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), convened under the auspices of ECOSOC, is designed to provide a central platform for the follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. The VNRs, presented at the HLPF, facilitate peer-learning and the sharing of experiences among countries on how they implement the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

4. Since 2016, we have come a long way and learnt a lot through the VNRs process. So far, 176 countries have presented their VNRs, including 46 of the 54 African countries. Several countries have done so more than once.
5. I commend the outstanding effort of the Africa region this year, as 21 of the 45 countries presenting their VNRs at the 2022 HLPF in July are from the region. I am proud that my own country, Botswana, is also preparing for its second VNR.
6. Such an impressive number of participation demonstrates that the region is fully committed to achieving the 2030 Agenda, and also mindful of the imperative to embark on an SDGs-led recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Distinguished delegates,

7. This VNR-VLR workshop aims to help facilitate the work of those of you who are preparing your VNRs this year -- whether for the first time or the fourth. I am sure that the workshop will also provide useful insight on VLRs, and how input from the local and grass-roots level can contribute to VNRs and overall implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
8. To support your efforts, I, together with the President of the General Assembly have appointed the Permanent Representatives of Morocco and the Philippines as co-chairs of the Group of Friends of VNRs.
9. This important Group coordinates support to countries in preparation for the HLPF presentations. In this regard, I encourage your countries to identify “friends” to assist you with preparation of your presentations at the 2022 HLPF.

10. As you are already aware, the theme of this year's ECOSOC session and the HLPF is: ***“Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”***.
11. I therefore look forward to learning from your VNRs, about measures your countries are undertaking for a sustainable recovery from the COVID pandemic -- and how the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is guiding the recovery efforts.
12. I want to conclude by thanking you all again for being a part of this process. Regardless of the setbacks compounded by COVID-19, it is through your concerted efforts that we can make tangible advancements towards the better world envisioned in the 2030 Agenda -- for all our countries and peoples.
13. **I thank you for your kind attention, and I wish everyone a very productive workshop.**