

**Opening Statement for H.E. Mr. Collen V. Kelapile, President of ECOSOC**

**Eighth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**

***“Building forward better: a green, inclusive and resilient Africa poised to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”***

***3 March 2022***

***Kigali, Rwanda (hybrid)***

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished delegates,**

1. I am honoured to address the Eighth Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. I thank the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the host country Rwanda, as well as other partners for organizing this important event.
2. Let me, at the outset, indicate that the theme of this Session: ***“Building forward better: a green, inclusive and resilient Africa poised to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”*** perfectly describes the path that the region should take, as it strives to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic in a sustainable manner.
3. In this connection, let me share a few thoughts on the actions that need to be taken now to achieve this sustainable recovery for the people we serve.

4. **First**, we must overcome the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring equitable access to the life-saving vaccines. The current vaccine inequity gap between developed and developing countries is seriously concerning.
5. As we have seen with the emergence of variants, if the gap in access to the vaccines is not addressed, the virus will continue to mutate, spread, and wreak havoc around the world. As it is often said, *no one is safe until everyone is safe*.
6. As ECOSOC President, I have therefore pledged to utilize the full strength of the Council, as well as the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) to identify sound policy solutions and promote international solidarity.
7. The High-level segment of ECOSOC this year will address the shortcomings in multilateral cooperation that were revealed by the response to COVID-19, and efforts to ensure equitable access to the vaccines. The HLPF will also reflect on the kind of recovery that will put us on a path towards achieving the SDGs.
8. Furthermore, I should note that ECOSOC, the General Assembly and the Secretary-General are speaking with one strong voice on this matter and closely coordinating their efforts. On 25<sup>th</sup> February 2022, the President of the General Assembly held an event on “*Galvanizing Momentum for Universal Vaccination*” -- in which I participated to reinforce the key messages.
9. In the same vein, vaccine equity is a recurrent theme in the Secretary-General’s activities. For instance, the Secretary-General’s report on “*Our Common Agenda*” calls for an immediate global vaccination plan to at least double vaccine production. This is an important call, which I also support.

10. We need this kind of ambitious collective action to overcome the pandemic. Vaccine equity will help us overcome COVID-19, and embark in a resilient social and economic recovery that puts us on track to achieve the 2030 Agenda.
11. **Secondly**, there is a need to ensure that African countries have the adequate fiscal space to finance COVID-19 recovery efforts. Measures need to be taken to mobilize resources from all sources for immediate response, as well as for long-term investments in critical socio-economic systems and infrastructure.
12. **Thirdly**, in pursuing the recovery, we must simultaneously address the Climate Crisis. Fast action now is needed to prevent the most severe disruptions from climate change. The climate finance commitments, that have long been made to African and other developing countries, should be honoured to enable the necessary climate action to foster resilience and adaptation.
13. **Lastly**, part of building back better should include decisively addressing the root causes of persistent inequalities within and between countries. This includes providing equal economic opportunity as well as robust social safety nets to vulnerable groups who have borne the full brunt of the pandemic.
14. In conclusion, let me reaffirm ECOSOC's commitment to supporting Africa, which is one of the established priorities of the United Nations system. As part of our contribution, I am happy to inform you that the President of the General Assembly and I have agreed to jointly convene a special event soon on the **Development of Africa**. We hope the event will bolster the actions towards the 2030 Agenda and the continental vision and aspirations of Agenda 2063.
- 15. I thank you for kind attention, and I wish you a successful Forum.**