**Deputy Secretary-General's remarks at the Ninth African Regional Forum for Sustainable Development 2023 [as prepared for delivery]**

His Excellency, Mohamed Bazoum, President of Niger,
Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission,
Vice Chair of the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen, youth,

Let me begin by appreciating deeply the President, the government and the people of Niger for their warm welcome to me and the UN delegations here in Niger, but also for the excellent facilities that you have put at our disposal.

I want to pay a special tribute and thank my sister, Minister of environment of Niger.

I also thank my colleagues in the Regional Economic Commission for Africa for putting together this event, it is an important event where we get to hear Africa’s voice on the subject of development.

We meet at a crucial moment for Africa and for us all.

Our world is experiencing a series of cascading crises that are undermining hard fought development gains and threatening current and future generations alike. Africa is taking the impact full on, with socio-economic fall outs of Covid-19, the climate crisis, and the war in Ukraine, all of which Africa have least contributed to.

We are meeting in the Sahel where the climate emergency is exacerbating a rising security threat, the spread of terrorism and a catastrophic humanitarian situation.

We are currently heading to 2.7 degrees of warming, which could translate to losses of close to 15% of GDP in the Sahel region.

And there is an unprecedented cost of living crisis that have pushed some 23 million people in Africa into extreme poverty in 2021.

At the mid-point of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 we are far from where we need to be.

But now is not the time to despair.

On the contrary, now is the time for solidarity, leadership, and for commitment to the actions that we need to take to implement the agendas.

As the Secretary-General said in Addis earlier this month, ‘Africa is poised for progress and the 21st century is poised to be Africa’s century.’

His Excellency, Mr. President,

Thank you for bringing us together here in Niamey to face these challenges head-on. Thank you for your leadership in face of incredible complexities in our environment in which we much achieve so much with so little and urgently for our people and the earth we live on.

We do so with the common understanding that through African-led solutions, born on African-soil, we can change course and rise to the challenge of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs.

Intra-African trade is rising in the region and the Continental Free Trade Agreement has the potential to lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty. Thanks to the leadership in the African Union.

African heads of state have also endorsed an action plan on sustainable industrialization and economic diversification. We must ensure that the emerging green and digital economies better serve Africa’s people and natural environment. And key to implementation will be the inclusion of our young population.

Africa’s energy transformation is at the heart of these efforts. The development of a sustainable value chain for electric vehicle battery minerals by Economic Commission for Africa and other development partners is a promising example.

So too is the Congo Basin Carbon Credit registry, which provides a platform to ensure high integrity carbon credit that are issued and strengthens Africa’s carbon market.

Meanwhile, the Great Green Wall initiative has the potential to deliver both climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable populations, so that they have an alternative to the conflict in the Sahel.

The proposed ‘Great Blue Wall’ can secure similar benefits from effective management of the continent's marine and fresh water eco-systems. This is important, because as we have a conflict in the Sahel and many other parts of Africa, so too, do we see the rise of criminality in the Gulf of Guinea.

His Excellency, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen,

When world leaders, including our 54 African leaders, gather for the SDG Summit next September, it is solutions like these from a rising Africa that they must support, that must be invested.

The Summit is the moment when we come together to fight for the SDGs, but also to keep the promises that we made in 2015.

It must deliver in three key areas.

First, we must re-energize national SDG promises.

It is clear after 7 years of implementation, we are not taking the bold decisions and making the needed investments to drive transformative progress.

At the Summit, world leaders must set out clear ambitions to reduce poverty and inequality by 2027 and 2030. And they must do so by making investments in Africa, investment in our economy, and investment in our people, especially women and youth.

They must convey a clear commitment to fully align national institutions and budgets with framing of the SDGs.

And they must put forward concrete plans to drive critical SDG transformations – from energy to food systems, to digital technology, social protection and education – and make real our commitment to leave no one behind.

Second, the Summit must deliver tangible progress in the area of SDG financing.

The financing gap to achieve the SDGs and deliver climate resilience continues to widen.

43% of African nations are in or near debt distress, mostly driven by external factors beyond the control of their governments This is not acceptable.

The Secretary-General has called on the G20 to unlock an SDG Stimulus of at least $500 billion dollars annually to developing countries, especially in Africa.

On so many fronts, our world is on fire.

Putting that fire out demands equality in our support– not hypocrisy and broken promises.

More broadly, we also need systemic reforms to a global financial architecture that today is not fit for purpose – and that remains too short-term oriented, crisis-prone, and fundamentally skewed towards the interests of the rich.

Through the SDG Stimulus, coupled with initiatives like the Bridgetown Agenda, we will continue to call for such reforms. This includes ensuring that African countries can access the debt relief, write-downs, and additional finance they desperately need to recover, and plan for an uncertain future.

We need a breakthrough in access to finance for African countries so that they can urgently upscale required investments.

Third, the Summit must reinvigorate the concept of genuine partnership.

That means engaging with young people, it means engaging with civil society and the global public as co-creators in our efforts to transform the world by 2030.

It means securing more ambitious and more credible SDG ambition from business, the private sector — while expanding the engagement of local authorities, our traditional fathers and mothers, and investing in the science-policy interface.

And it means mobilizing global support behind those interventions that we know will drive maximum progress across the goals at the country level.

His Excellency, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen,

Over the coming months, the UN system will work with governments and other partners to advance on these three areas towards your ambition.

These efforts will be grounded in the work being done by our Resident Coordinators, Country teams and regional capacities.

The Resident Coordinators are supporting countries to develop and move ahead on key transition pathways, policy transformations, partnerships and coalition-building — all to accelerate momentum towards the 2030 Agenda. It is important that we see the Resident Coordinators not only as coordinators of the UN system in your countries, but as conveners of the partners that will accelerate the progress towards the SDGs.

The UN’s Regional Collaborative Platform will also meet here this week to continue strengthening our support to countries across the region.

You can count on our full support and collaboration.

His Excellency, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen,

The 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 represent our road to peace and prosperity.

And let us use the ninth Africa Forum on Sustainable Development presents an important opportunity to chart an ambitious path forward.

I look forward to fruitful deliberations and the outcome that is influenced by Africa’s ambition, that we can take to the SDG summit in New York and to COP28 in the United Arab Emirates.

Thank you.