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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

P. O. Box 3243

Telephone: 5517 700

Fax: 5517844

Website: [www.au.int](http://www.au.int)

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**PROPOSAL OF AN AFRICAN ARCHITECTURE FOR  
DISASTER RISK REDUCTION  
(Item proposed by Cameroon)**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Following resurgent and frequent disasters in Africa and globally, that affect poor and rich countries alike, 185 countries adopted the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 at the 3rd UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) in Sendai, Japan, March 2015.

It is generally known that the host country for the WCDRR is an archipelago affected not only by frequent seismic tremors, but also hurricanes, including one of the most devastating tsunamis that had a wide-ranging impact on life and economy, bringing down Japan from the second largest economy to the third.

Nevertheless, Japan retains its major economic power status and remains one of the pillars of the global economy. This performance is evidence, not only of the country's capacity to resist disasters, but also its ability to detect the factors that lead to disasters and limit the impact of their damage through risk governance. Japan has thus enhanced its resilience to disasters through risk governance, a factor of survival and economic prosperity against the negative forces of nature and poor development.

Other countries and regions throughout the world tackle with mixed fortunes natural or human-induced disasters whose costs, both in terms of loss of life and livelihoods as well as reconstruction of damaged infrastructure, exceed by far those of the investments which, if made early enough, would prevent or reduce the scale of disasters.

It is therefore, for the right reasons that the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) which the focal point for disaster risk reduction in the UN system and the mandated UN body to implement the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, bases its interventions on the principle of effective investment for the prevention of future risks and establishes a functional link between disaster risk reduction and sustainable development. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is the new guide for what is being called risk-centred development with its objective to develop resilient communities.

It is in this regard that, as part of the UN Secretariat, UNISDR will ensure and monitor the implementation of the Sendai Framework.

The UN provides a dynamic definition for resilience as a concept describing it as "the capacity of a system, a community or a company exposed to a disaster, to resist it thereby weakening its effects, and even adapting to it because it has means to quickly and effectively recover from it, by protecting or restoring vital public infrastructure and services".

## PROBLEM

Where does this definition leave all African countries? What is the continent's level of resilience? What measures have they taken to build or enhance this resilience within the framework of the 2063 Agenda?

From 2000 to 2014, Africa suffered serious damages, loss of life and infrastructure. Droughts affected over 175 million in sub-Saharan Africa; floods resulted in 5,500 deaths annually, epidemics resulted in the deaths of 70,000 people with over 11,000 from Ebola alone; and earthquakes occurred in 30 major instances in Africa affecting 400,000 people. These figures can only increase in future due to the fact that Africa has the highest urbanisation rate globally. The Ebola epidemic which ravaged thousands of human lives in three western African countries within a short period of time, paralyzed countries' economies, caused widespread fear-and panic throughout the continent and severely put to the test the free movement of people and goods in a region that is nonetheless Africa's most advanced, is enough evidence that Africa is a continent that is particularly fragile when it comes to disasters.

This fragility is not only dependent on the scale of disasters, but also and especially on the lack of financial resources, infrastructures and suitable equipments in most countries for prevention, mitigation, reduction and fast and effective response. Limited knowledge of the environment and the changes that are likely to take place, low capacity to detect potential disaster threats in good time, lack of inter-institutional planning and resource allocation, largely explain the often tragic levels of damage that result from disasters.

An assessment of losses in human lives and economic terms following disasters - which we can classify, according to their impact in the very least, as among others: flash floods, landslides both in rural and urban areas, drought, fires of all kinds, epidemics, the "El NINO" phenomenon currently raging in several East African countries in spite of the alerts issued in February 2015 - reveals the level of vulnerability of African communities.

Nevertheless, this situation is not simply a matter of fate. The trend is reversible if the leaders of the continent are sensitized to invest more in disaster risk reduction and to base their national development on enhancing resilience, keeping in mind the fact that 'prevention is the economy of the poor'.

The first step in this direction was taken in 2004 when the African Union endorsed the Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction. The Extended Programme of Action for implementation of the Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction is in the process of being aligned with The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030). This initiative is aimed at providing Africa with instruments of exceptional

value whose utilisation, supported by strategic investment and evaluation, will allow it to ensure sustainable development now and for future generations.

## PROPOSAL

The foundation for this paradigmatic shift was laid at the 7th Session of the Africa Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and the 4<sup>th</sup> High-Level Meeting of African Ministers in charge of Disaster Risk Reduction, 21-24 July 2015, Yaoundé, hosted by the Government of Cameroon, in partnership with the Economic Community for Central African States (ECCAS) Secretariat, African Union Commission and UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction who served as Secretariat. This High-Level Meeting led to the adoption of the Yaoundé Declaration with a series of recommendations which are proposed by Ministers in charge of Disaster Risk Reduction for endorsement of the Council.

In their declaration, said Ministers recommended *inter alia*, the following:

- i) African Union Member States and Regional Economic Communities to align their strategies, programmes and actions with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030;
- ii) States to include and integrate disaster risk reduction in their economic development policies and programmes as the most important tool for resilience, sustainability and human and capital development;
- iii) need for the African Union to set up a follow up mechanism at the highest possible level with a direct and institutional commitment of political leadership;
- iv) *Recommend*, in the interim period, at minimum, the establishment of a sub-committee responsible for disaster risk reduction within the African Union Specialised Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment;
- v) wide dissemination at regional, sub-regional, national and sub-national levels of the Sendai Framework, Africa Regional Strategy and Programme of Action on disaster risk reduction;
- vi) *Recognition of* the support provided by the European Union as part of cooperation with the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States and call for all development partners to prioritize support for the implementation of the regional, sub-regional and national strategies for disaster risk reduction;

During its first meeting, the STC on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment was, due to its complex composition, not able to decide on the number of

sub-committees it can establish. In fact, the thematic areas to be covered have proved so diverse that more than eight member states Ministers find their attention required by the STC.

Given this situation and duly taking into account the uniqueness and indisputable importance of disaster risk reduction in Africa, Cameroon, to which the Yaoundé ministerial meeting had entrusted the mission of supporting the process of anchoring disaster risk reduction in the Union programs and projects, proposes to the Council the establishment of an African architecture for disaster risk reduction consisting of:

(1) A Specialized Technical Committee dedicated to disaster risk reduction.

This measure is motivated by several facts: disaster risk reduction crosses all sectors as it is related to managing risk to inform development policies and practice thus, in the first instance, saving lives and livelihoods. Most importantly, it is the basis for risk-informed development for sustainable growth and development as envisaged by the SDGs and 'Agenda 2063; the Africa We Want.'

Second, for development to be sustainable, there is need for integrated policy and budget planning in governments, regional communities and with the inclusion of local authorities. Currently, many member states continue to see disaster risk reduction solely in preparedness and response, disaster management terms generally entrusted to Ministries of Interior or Territorial Administration. Though important, to be effective **disaster risk management** requires multi-sectoral and inter-institutional approaches which play the role of interface and coordination of initiatives by several ministerial departments and local authorities who are at the receiving end when disaster strikes.

Disaster risk reduction appears in this respect as one of the rare themes that can truly justify the creation of a Specialized Technical Committee in the sense stipulated by the Constitutive Act and be subject to general and inclusive follow-up at national, regional and continental levels.

The STC would be a multidisciplinary framework, bringing together various areas of economic and social governance, defence, economic planning, finance, social affairs, health, scientific research, education and, naturally, environment, urban planning and finance.

The Ethiopian model can inspire the African Union and many Member States because of its coherence and efficiency;

(2) A coordination unit within the Office of the Chairperson of the Commission. This unit, whose work will be directed towards AU's rapid disaster response, could consist of a coordinator assisted by a secretariat and focal points on secondment or retained in their current departments within the Commission, but working as a team under the coordination of the head of unit.

The focal points would be designated in various departments including those in charge of agriculture and rural economy, political affairs, peace and security, social affairs, infrastructure and energy and economic affairs.

There would be no significant financial implications under this scheme as, for the transition period leading to a fully funded coordinator, the UNISDR sub-office, Addis Ababa would act as focal point and provide guidance and support as agreed and appropriate.

(3) Though not specifically mentioned in the Yaoundé Declaration, it would be strategic to re-activate the centre concept which was adopted by ministers in charge of DRR in 2010 but has since not yet been implemented. Contingent on funding, a centre of excellence for the whole continent whose activities would include networked research with universities and research centres throughout Africa, prevention, early warning in close collaboration with early warning system of the Department of Peace and Security, and the establishment and constant updating of African disaster risk mapping. This centre would also have the responsibility of receiving and using national and regional periodic reports on the implementation of the Programme of Action of the Africa Regional Strategy currently in the process of being aligned with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

(4) The Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) could extend the mandate of its subcommittee on the Special Emergency Fund for Drought and Famine in Africa to enable it to take into account the two themes of management and disaster risk reduction.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSED MEASURES**

### **A) Setting up an STC on disaster risk reduction**

It will suffice to rename and reorganize the current High Level Meeting of African Ministers in charge of Disaster Risk Reduction into an STC. This transformation would have limited financial implication for AU as the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction will continue to offer logistic and financial support to this process which remains at the core of its mandate, in partnership with AUC.

### **B) Creating a coordination unit within the Office of the Chairperson of African Union Commission.**

This measure will only imply a negligible financial cost for running a secretariat. As mentioned above, coordination will be provided by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, sub-office, Addis Ababa whereas the other members of the unit will be state employees already working within AU Commission.

**C) Creating a continental centre for disaster risk research, prevention and management.**

Cameroon has committed itself to offer land and the necessary initial installations for the launch of such a centre. It also counts on support from the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction to assist in the mobilization of support from development partners.

**D) Extending the mandate of a PRC subcommittee will have no substantial financial effect.**

With regard to the proposals hereby presented for the establishment of an African architecture for disaster risk reduction, the following draft decision is submitted to the Council for adoption.

The Council:

- 1) Takes note of the presentation by Cameroon, the Declaration and recommendations of the 4th High-Level Meeting of African Ministers in charge of Disaster Risk Reduction held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 21st to 24th July 2015;
- 2) Commends the AU Commission and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction for the initiative to convene and hold this meeting, as well as the ECCAS Secretariat and the Government of Cameroon on their contribution to the Yaoundé conference;
- 3) Underlines the relevance and the opportunity for AU to have an architecture for disaster risk reduction in Africa at national, regional and continental levels;
- 4) Urges all member states to implement the measures prescribed in the Yaoundé Recommendations and Declaration and produce periodic reports on the implementation of the aforementioned recommendations;
- 5) Decides that the High Level Meeting of African Ministers in charge of the Disaster Risk Reduction becomes one of the Specialized Technical Committees of the African Union with the peculiarity that it will continue to enjoy logistical and coordination support from the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction;
- 6) Authorizes the creation of a coordination unit for the initiatives by all stakeholders in charge of disaster risk reduction, prevention and management, under the direct authority of the Office of the Chairperson of the Commission;

- 7) Welcomes the offer by Cameroon to host in Yaoundé and to provide the necessary support for the launch of a continental centre of excellence for disaster research, prevention and management;
  - 8) Commends and thanks the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction for its commitment to work with the AU;
  - 9) Urges the AU Commission and the Permanent Representatives Committee to take appropriate measures, in collaboration with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, for the creation and operationalization of the unit for the coordination of disaster risk reduction initiatives;
  - 10) Directs the Commission to collaborate with the Government of Cameroon in order to submit a roadmap for the creation of the centre of excellence for disaster risk research, prevention and management during its next session.
- 1.** The Council further urges the PRC to extend the mandate of its subcommittee on drought and famine in Africa in order to take into account disaster risk management, namely, prevention, reduction, mitigation and building back better.

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# Proposal of an African architecture for disaster risk reduction (Item Proposed by Cameroon)

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