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**REPORT ON THE FIFTEENTH SESSION OF THE AFRICAN  
MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE ENVIRONMENT (AMCEN),  
CAIRO, EGYPT, 2 - 6 MARCH 2015**

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**PART 1: INTRODUCTION**

**I. Background**

1. The ministerial segment of the Fifteenth session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) was held at the Dusit Thani Lakeview Hotel, Cairo, Egypt 4 to 6 March 2015. The ministerial segment was preceded by an Expert Group meeting from 2- 4 March 2015. The 15th session was held under the theme *"Managing Africa's Natural Capital for Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication"*.

**II. Objective of the 15th session of AMCEN**

2. The main objective of the session was to provide a platform for African Ministers of the environment to deliberate on some of the key steps needed to achieve a more sustainable use of natural capital, looking at policies and strategies to support Africa's economic transformation and growth. In addition, the session analyzed outcomes of the twentieth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Lima in December 2014 and reviewed the issues at stake for Africa in preparation for the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Eleventh Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to its Kyoto Protocol (COP 21/CMP 11) to be held in Paris later in 2015 where a new legal instrument is expected to be finalized.

3. The session also considered outcomes of the first United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) that took place in June 2014 and their significance to Africa, in particular issues related to the post-2015 process and illegal trade in wildlife. Other regional pertinent issues related to the environment and sustainable development, such as the development and implementation of the regional flagship programmes, biodiversity, coastal and marine, enhancing implementation of environmental law in Africa, and the draft Africa climate change strategy, among others, were discussed.

**III. Participation**

4. The conference was attended by representatives from 45 AMCEN Member States at the level of Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Ambassadors, the Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Economy of the African Union Commission, Lead African Climate Change negotiators and High level officials/Experts from Ministries of Environment and the Regional Economic Communities in Africa.

5. The 15th session of AMCEN was also attended by representatives of African regional and sub-regional organizations, United Nations agencies, international

organizations, secretariats of various environmental conventions including the Executive Secretaries of UNFCCC and UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Minister of State for Development and the Francophonie of France, Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change of India, Representative of the European Union (EU) Commissioner for Environment, the African Development Bank (AfDB), research institutions, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, Civil Society Group, Media Personnel, Women, and the youth.

#### **IV. Opening ceremony**

6. The ministerial segment was officially opened by H.E. Eng. Ibrahim Mahlab, the Prime Minister of the Arab Republic of Egypt on Wednesday, 4 March 2015.

7. Opening statements were made by H.E. Dr. Khaled Fahmy, Minister of Environment of Egypt, incoming AMCEN President; Honourable Dr. Eng. Binilith Mahenge, Minister of State for Environment in the Vice President Office of Tanzania and outgoing President of AMCEN; Ms. Olushola Olayide, who read remarks by H.E. Ms. Rhoda Peace Tumusiime, African Union Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, and Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

8. Other remarks were made by Ms. Annick Girardin, Minister of State for Development and the Francophonie, France; Mr. Prakash Javadekar, Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India; Ms. Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary, UNFCCC; Mr. Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, Executive Secretary, CBD; Ms. Naoko Ishii, CEO, GEF; Mr. Timo Makela, Representative of the European Union Commissioner for Environment; Prof. Anthony Nyong, AfDB; Mr. Husam Abudagga, World Bank Acting Country Director for Egypt; and Mr. Augustine Njamnshi speaking on behalf of civil society organizations.

#### **V. Organizational matters**

##### ***Election of officers***

9. The following countries were elected to serve on the Bureau of AMCEN for the period 2015-2016:

<b><u>Sub-region</u></b>	<b><u>Country</u></b>	<b><u>Position</u></b>
North Africa	Egypt	President
Central Africa	Gabon	Vice-President/Rapporteur
Eastern Africa	Uganda	Vice-President
Southern Africa	Namibia	Vice-President
West Africa	Niger	Vice-President

**PART II: DELIBERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS****i) The ministerial segment deliberated on the following issues:**

- a) Managing the natural capital of Africa for sustainable development and poverty eradication;
- b) Illegal trade in wildlife and its implications for Africa;
- c) Biodiversity;
- d) Climate change.

**(a) Managing the natural capital of Africa for sustainable development and poverty eradication**

**10.** The representatives recognized that Africa's natural capital is crucial to supporting human, animal and plant life, in addition to its considerable capacity for wealth creation. They agreed to the need to increase productivity in the use of natural resources in enhancing economic and social benefits for poverty reduction, job creation and sustainable development. They recommended that the status of natural capital in national planning and financing be elevated to that of strategic national resources and be managed and used in that context in order to secure its sustainability and contribution to economic development and environmental stability.

**11.** Suggestions were made for stemming the loss of natural capital and better utilizing environmental assets for sustainable development and poverty eradication. A number of representatives stressed the need for better governance highlighting that environment ministers had inadequate resources to expend on governance and it was important to raise the stature of environmental bodies to enable them to deal effectively with the management of natural resources. African Governments needed clear strategies and programmes for reversing illicit flows and making full use of the continent's huge natural potential.

**12.** The session agreed to take measures at the national, regional and international levels to combat the illicit trade in Africa's natural resources and reverse illicit flows. It agreed on the need to put in place appropriate policies and institutional measures in order to harness the full potential of Africa's rich natural resource endowments, ensure that the use of natural resources benefits the countries that possess them in an inclusive manner, and create value addition in sustainably managing natural resources. The session encouraged the strengthening of international cooperation to promote research and development and technological innovations, as well as capacity development for sustainably harnessing the continent's natural resources. The session agreed to convene a Joint meeting for African Ministers of the Environment, Finance and Industry with the aim of promoting the importance of Africa's natural capital.

**(b) Illegal trade in wildlife and its implications for Africa**

**13.** General appreciation and support were expressed for the proposed draft common strategy and international conference on an issue that threatened natural capital and,

hence, the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of African countries. Several representatives expressed particular appreciation for the proposal to include consumer countries among the conference participants, as their support was crucial to the fight to end illegal trade in wildlife, with one pointing out that taking stock of existing initiatives would serve to build a database.

**14.** Key elements to be considered in the forthcoming discussions included the need to strengthen national legislation, with the imposition of stiffer penalties for offenders and measures such as the destruction of seized goods and a clear distinction between illegal and legal trade; the need to enhance cooperation between customs and law enforcement agencies at the subregional, regional and global levels, given that individual countries could not win the fight alone; the need to ensure that the trafficking of wildlife was more widely regarded as a criminal activity of similar importance to drug smuggling; the need to enhance regional and subregional platforms for research, capacity-building, the sharing of best practices and communications systems; and the need to promote sustainable livelihoods for local communities and involve them in conservation efforts, given that as long as they were sharing the benefits they would not become involved in illegal trade, and the need to take into account such questions as compensation to local farmers for the destruction of crops by local wildlife.

**15.** The session agreed that the process of developing the draft African Common Strategy on Combating Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora should continue at the International Conference on Illegal Trade and Exploitation of Wild Flora and Fauna in Africa, to be held in Brazzaville from 27 to 30 April 2015. It encouraged stakeholders, in particular from Africa, to contribute to the development of the strategy and countries to strengthen national legislation on illegal trade in wildlife. The session further agreed to strengthen cooperation in legal and sustainable trade in African wildlife and urged member States to attend and actively participate in the Conference to be held in Brazzaville. The representatives also agreed to present the strategy at the next session of AMCEN for approval.

### **(c) Biodiversity**

**16.** There was consensus as to the value of the rich diversity of ecosystems in Africa and a shared commitment to their conservation. Several representatives commented on the opportunities for sustainable development provided by the green economy, underlining that such development was bound up with the effective management of natural capital. Many representatives outlined initiatives taking place in their own countries in that regard. The challenges facing biodiversity were, however, significant, and the impacts of climate change were of particular concern. A number of representatives called for greater coordination and cooperation between African countries on matters relating to biodiversity and for stepping up conservation efforts.

**17.** The representatives adopted the proposed African Union Strategic Guidelines for the Coordinated Implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing and to takes note of the accompanying Practical Guidelines for the Coordinated Implementation of the Nagoya Protocol in Africa.

**(d) Climate change**

**18.** Several representatives praised the African group of negotiators for its continuing hard work in representing Africa in the negotiations leading up to the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change. A number of representatives said that Africa needed to speak with one voice during the negotiations to ensure that its needs and aspirations were satisfied. In that regard, some representatives said that there was a need to simplify and clarify the current draft of the agreement to be concluded in Paris so that it gave concise guidance on the way forward in addressing global and regional climate change. A number of representatives drew attention to the climate-induced challenges facing Africa, including drought, desertification, flooding, threats to biodiversity and loss of livelihoods, and expressed the hope that the particular vulnerabilities of the continent would be recognized in any agreement reached in Paris.

**19.** The representatives emphasized that any agreement adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change at its twenty-first session, to be held in Paris in December 2015, should be in accordance with the principles and provisions of the Convention, in particular the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities and equity. It should enhance the implementation of the Convention and its annexes, be consistent with science and equity, and further enhance a multilateral rules-based system in a balanced and ambitious manner. It should ensure parity in the content and legality of mitigation and adaptation activities, and their means of implementation.

**20.** There was a consensus that both adaptation and mitigation should be given equal prominence in any agreement emanating from the Paris meeting in December. Several representatives said that adaptation would facilitate mitigation and that the key to adaptation was sustainable development, including the preservation of biodiversity and forest resources, the development of renewable energy and other measures. Many representatives stressed the importance to Africa of adequate funding for climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, both in the period 2015–2020, following the adoption of a new agreement in Paris in December 2015, and in the period beyond 2020, when the new agreement would take effect.

**21.** The session also encouraged all African countries to consider adaptation and mitigation components when communicating their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) and invited developed countries and other partners to make available to African countries the support needed for preparing and communicating their INDCs. The session also welcomed the guidance prepared by the African group of negotiators in its report on INDCs and invited all African countries to consider the recommendations of the report, as appropriate, when elaborating their INDCs.

**22.** The session finally took note of the draft comprehensive African strategy on climate change prepared by the African Union Commission which needs to be circulated to member States for comments and further input and mandated the Bureau to consider

the draft strategy for approval and onward transmission to AMCEN at its next session for possible endorsement and consequent approval by the Summit in January 2017.

**ii) Declaration and Decisions of the 15<sup>th</sup> session of AMCEN**

**23.** The Ministers adopted the Cairo Declaration on “Managing Africa’s Natural Capital for Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication”. They also adopted nine Decisions.

**The Cairo Declaration**

**24.** The Cairo Declaration recognizes that Africa’s natural capital is crucial to supporting human, animal and plant life, in addition to its considerable capacity for wealth creation. It recommends that the status of natural capital in national planning and financing be elevated to that of strategic national resources and be managed and used in that context in order to secure its sustainability and contribution to economic development and environmental stability.

**25.** The Declaration called for development of a number of strategies on (i) governance of oceans and seas (ii) shared mountain agenda (iii) environmental law and institutions as part of the instruments to enhance value of natural capital. It requested the Assembly to mandate the High-level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa to make recommendations on how to (a) reverse the illicit flow of financial resources arising from natural resources and (b) industrialize and add value in harnessing natural capital.

**26.** The Declaration also reaffirmed that poverty eradication is the greatest global challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. It reiterated that the success of the post-2015 development agenda will largely hinge on the provision of adequate, predictable, sustainable, new and additional means of implementation and continued development assistance to the developing countries, and that delivery on the means of implementation will require broad and deep cooperation through the revitalization and strengthening of the global partnership for sustainable development.

**27.** The Declaration agreed on (i) A phase down of production and consumption of Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), (ii) Implementation of the Africa Sustainable Transport Forum Action Framework to address road safety, reduce vehicle emissions, (iii) Enhancement of air quality management on policies, legislation, institutional framework, management systems, public awareness, capacity-building and networking.

**28.** The Declaration welcomed the work of the African Group of Negotiators on Climate Change (AGN) on the preparation of the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Paris from 30 November to 11 December 2015.

**29.** The Declaration agreed to support the work of Member State missions of the African Diplomatic Corps in Nairobi, the Permanent Representative Committee (PRC) in Addis Ababa and the Africa Group in New York to develop and implement a coordination mechanism for collaboration on effective engagement of all African Diplomatic Mission in the African Union and United Nations processes through effective interaction, collaboration and exchange of information.

### **Decisions**

**30.** Nine (9) Decisions on key environmental issues requiring a strong commitment by African Ministers of environment were adopted at the meeting:

- Decision 15/1: Sustainably harnessing Africa's Natural Capital in the context of Agenda 2063;
- Decision 15/2: African Common Strategy on Combating Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora;
- Decision 15/3: African Union Guidelines for the Coordinated Implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS);
- Decision 15/4: Strengthening African leadership in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification process;
- Decision 15/5: Draft African Strategy on Climate Change;
- Decision 15/6: Report on the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) of the United Nations Environment Programme and activities of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment;
- Decision 15/7: Africa Environment Outlook and Africa Environmental Information Network;
- Decision 15/8: Intended nationally determined contributions;
- Decision 15/9: Climate Change and Africa's preparations for the 2015 Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

### **iii) Venue for the Sixteenth session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment**

**31.** The Sixteenth session of AMCEN will be held in Gabon in 2017 along with the African Environment and Wangari Maathai Day.

**32.** The Conference also received an offer from the Government of Algeria to host the Sixth Special session of AMCEN in 2016 along with the African Environment and

Wangari Maathai Day. The Special session will consider the outcomes of the global conferences that would have taken place in 2015 including new Climate Change Agreement, Post 2015 Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, Conference on Financing Sustainable Development and UN Conference for the adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, among other items.

**iv) Closure of the session**

**33.** After the customary exchange of courtesies, a closing statement was delivered by H.E. Dr. Khaled Fahmy, Minister of Environment of Egypt and President of AMCEN. Congratulating the participants on the success of their work at the session, he observed that countries of Africa were rich in resources, yet their resources had not yet translated into financial wealth commensurate with their abundance, and stressed that only by standing united could the ministers rectify that situation. The Ministerial segment and the Fifteenth session of AMCEN ended at 3.00 p.m. on Friday, 6 March 2015.

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# Report on the fifteenth session of the African ministerial conference on the environment (AMCEN), Cairo, Egypt, 2 - 6 March 2015

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