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ASSEMBLY OF THE UNION
Seventeenth Ordinary Session
30 June – 1 July 2011
Malabo, EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Assembly/AU/12(XVII) Add.3
Original: French

**AFRICA'S PREPARATION FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (RIO+20): COMMON POSITIONS
AND STRATEGIES IN FACING THE CHALLENGE OF
THE GREEN ECONOMY AND INTERNATIONAL
ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE**
(Item proposed by the Republic of Congo)

AFRICA'S PREPARATION FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (RIO+20): COMMON POSITIONS AND STRATEGIES IN FACING THE CHALLENGE OF THE GREEN ECONOMY AND INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE
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Introduction

1. With the approach of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD - Rio+20), commonly known as Rio+20, to be held from 4 to 6 June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the Republic of Congo, aware of Rio +20 stakes for Africa and anxious to see the continent speak with one voice, considered it appropriate to introduce the following item on the agenda of the next Summit of the African Union (AU): *"Africa's Preparation for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD - Rio+20): Common Positions and Strategies in Facing the Challenge of the Green Economy and an Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development"*.

2. Bolstered by the experience acquired through its many initiatives to promote sustainable development in Africa, as illustrated by the holding in Brazzaville of the 6th Global Forum on Sustainable Development¹, the Republic of Congo calls on Member States of the African Union (AU) to seize the opportunity offered by the theme of the AU Summit in Malabo, namely: "Empowering Youth for Sustainable Development", to launch discussions on the issues raised by Africa's participation in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Indeed, this theme is more than relevant for Africa, and should, with the approach of Rio+20, be embraced by the whole continent, especially its youth. Youth who, as mentioned in the African Youth Charter, "... are partners, assets and a prerequisite for sustainable development and for the peace and prosperity of Africa"². The aim, following the deliberations, is to reach consensus among Member States so that an African Common Position can be adopted for Rio+20.

Objectives and Challenges of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

3. On 24 December 2009, the UN General Assembly decided in its Resolution 64/236 to organize the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD - Rio+20) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 4 to 6 June 2012, in the form of a High-level Summit bringing together Heads of State and Government.

¹ The 6th Global Forum on Sustainable Development held in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, from 27 to 30 October 2008, on the theme: "Africa, the Environment and Globalization" gave rise to the Brazzaville Declaration which contained important recommendations made by Heads of State and Government on sustainable development. Among them, two key ones were retained and adopted at the Twelfth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union held from 1 to 3 February 2009 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: the establishment of an African Permanent Secretariat for Sustainable Development and an African Fund for Sustainable Development.

² Extract from the Preamble of the African Youth Charter that entered into force on 8 August 2009. The Charter can be consulted at: [http://africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/Text/AfricanYouthCharter fr.pdf](http://africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/Text/AfricanYouthCharter_fr.pdf)

4. It also identified three main objectives for the Conference, namely (1) securing renewed political commitment for sustainable development; (2) assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of commitments already agreed upon; and (3) addressing new and emerging challenges.

5. To organize and stimulate discussion, it was further agreed that the Conference will focus on two main themes: a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication on the one hand, and the institutional framework for sustainable development on the other.

6. The Rio+20 Conference should be seen as a key step in the global political agenda, and in this context, it raises considerable expectations from the international community with respect to its underlying issues.

7. In this early XXIst century, following the numerous global crises experienced, be they food, climate, energy, financial, social or political, sustainable development, with its three pillars, namely economic, social and environmental issues, is increasingly becoming an option to be reconsidered. Indeed, why are we witnessing a resurgence of poverty in Africa while at the same time African economies, in their entirety, are experiencing their strongest growth rates? In this context of crisis, the green economy, taking into account natural capital³. of which African is richly endowed (forests, rivers, deserts, natural resources, renewable energy sources...) and which can be used to maximize the economic benefits of a country through inclusive growth and reducing social inequalities, (, seems to be a tool to appropriate in order to effectively achieve sustainable development and bring about broader reform of the institutional framework for sustainable development englobing, among others, International Environmental Governance (IEG) and the establishment of appropriate indicators for the measurement and appraisal of sustainable development.

8. In this context, the preparatory process leading up to Rio+20 is an appointment Africa should not miss, since it points to the priorities on which the continent has to focus and offers it the opportunity to reflect on how to both maximize its potentials and face future challenges.

Africa and Rio+20: Expectations, Prospects and Challenges

9. Considering its strengths, Africa is the continent with the most interest to strive to make Rio+20 a success and there assert its agenda and vision.

10. If it wants its interests to be taken into account and that its priorities for sustainable development should feature on the negotiating table, it must build on the time allowed it to develop a strong strategy and define a firm common position.

³ Natural capital includes all natural, environmental and ecosystem resources such as minerals, plants, animals, forests, rivers, the air, etc. considered as means of producing goods and services which, in the long term, are essential for the well-being of a country's environment, economy and population. For example, natural capital represents about 25% of the total wealth of low-income countries. For more information on the value of natural capital, see the UNEP Review *Our Planet: Natural Capital: The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity*. Available at http://www.unep.org/pdf/OP_sept2010/FR/OP-2010-09-FR-FULL_VERSION.pdf

11. The Africa preparatory process for Rio+20, coordinated by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in close collaboration with African regional and sub-regional organizations and some UN agencies, is already underway at expert level. This should indeed lead to the organization, at ministerial level, of a regional conference which should culminate in the adoption of an African common declaration on Rio+20 to be subsequently ratified by decision of AU Member States during the January 2012 Summit.

12. Today, it is essential for African leaders to take ownership of these issues, hence the need for Heads of State and Government of African countries to get involved in Africa's preparation for Rio+20 and digest the themes and goals of the Conference in order to define what should be the African Common Position and thus be able to refine it throughout the preparatory process.

13. The two main themes of UNCSO: the green economy and the institutional framework for sustainable development cover essentially two key issues: "How to achieve the transition to a green economy?" and "How to reform the institutional framework for sustainable development to facilitate this transition and to face new challenges emerging in sustainable development, and specifically on the environment?". These two issues must be placed at the heart of the deliberations of Heads of State and Government of African countries to enable them to confront their views on the green economy and its implementation on the continent, as well as on the institutional reform to be put in place for sustainable development in Africa and worldwide. It will also help measure the risks and opportunities that they imply for the continent and its countries.

14. The dynamics generated by sustainable development, such as the balance between its three pillars and sustainability of natural resources for future generations, provide many opportunities to African countries which must not only identify them but also and above all find ways to achieve them. The Rio+20 Conference should be seen by African States as a platform on which they must rely in order to accelerate the development of their countries and contribute to the establishment of a new world economic order where the economic and monetary value of natural capital would be taken into account⁴.

15. Africa today has to overcome enormous economic and social challenges to ensure its sustainable development. The continent has a number of developing countries and over three quarters of the least developed countries (LDCs) (33 African LDCs out of a total of 48 LDCs). Compared to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which it placed at the centre of national priorities, its results are still too inadequate and mostly quite uneven; in addition, all African countries are generally experiencing, as already mentioned above, a relatively high economic growth which has

⁴ In this meaning, the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), an initiative launched in 2007, aims to develop natural capital. Actually, TEEB is a study on the economics of ecosystems and biodiversity aimed at assessing the economic cost of ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss. The economic invisibility of ecosystems and biodiversity plays a major role in the loss of their services representing thousands of billions of dollars in natural capital losses annually. For more information, consult the TEEB website at: <http://www.teebweb.org/> and a UNEP report on the issue at: http://www.unep.org/pdf/OP_sept2010/FR/OP-2010-09-FR-ARTICLE5.pdf.

not however reduced poverty and unemployment nor fostered the development of national and regional socio-economic infrastructure.

16. "Managing Development in Africa", the theme of the Fourth Joint Annual Meeting of Ministers of Economy and Finance⁵ held last March, well demonstrates the priority that African leaders attach to the continent's development. The lack of concrete and efficient progress in this area has shown that it is time for innovation and change.

17. We must therefore not only seek to rethink the strategies, tools and even by extension frameworks governing African development policies, but also find innovative ways to strengthen African capacities by maximizing the assets available to it - hence the need to open the debate on Rio+20 and more specifically the continent's transition towards a green economy, an engine of sustainable development and the fight against poverty.

Green Economy: A Path to Sustainable Development

18. Africa is a young continent whose population has just exceeded one billion. It has a boundless natural capital, notably by hosting nearly 40% of global biodiversity, 20% of forest reserves and more than half the world's energy potential (solar, hydroelectric, wind). The fact that it has for four consecutive years experienced record economic growth of 5% per year, concentrated at 80% on three export commodities (oil, minerals and agricultural products)⁶ portends the possibility of stronger, more sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth should its economy be diversified. Indeed, the continent's vulnerability is primarily due to the fact that its economy is undiversified and highly dependent on its natural resources and hence the volatility of market prices. The alternative for the diversification of African economies seems to be answered through one of the central themes of Rio+20: the green economy, defined as a path and a vehicle for sustainable development⁷.

19. It should be noted that together, the AU, ECA, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) are laying the groundwork for converting Africa to the green economy⁸. Although some fifteen African countries (South Africa, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya,

⁵ This was the Fourth Joint Annual Meeting of Ministers of the Economy and Finance of the African Union and the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development of the Economic Commission for Africa that was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 24 to 29 March 2011.

⁶ Reference article « L'eldorado africain face à la nouvelle donne économique mondiale », Website of the African Capacity Building Foundation, 15 October 2010, available at: <http://www.acbf-pact.org/1%E2%80%99eldorado-africain-face-%C3%A9zéro-la-nouvelle-donne-%C3%A9conomique-mondiale.aspx>

⁷ Reference to the Report on the Green Economy: "Towards a Green Economy - Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication" Published by UNEP on 21 February 2011 in Nairobi. In this regard, consult the document « A Synthesis for Policy Makers" available at: http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/Portals/88/documents/ger/GER_synthesis_en.pdf.

⁸ Indeed many initiatives have laid the groundwork to boost Africa's transition to a green economy, such as the "Decision on the Report of the 13th African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN)" at the January 2011 Summit of the AU (Doc. EX.CL/624 (XVIII)) approving the recommendation to convene an AU Summit on the green economy, or the Seventh African Development Forum: "Acting on Climate Change for Sustainable Development in Africa" held from 10 to 15 October 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, focusing discussions on the green economy.

Uganda, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, etc.) are already experimenting with certain aspects of the green economy, the conditions of its implementation spark a debate: What are the positions of African States on the green economy (common points and differences)? How can the green economy foster the march towards sustainable development? Based on current experiences in some countries, how can a country realize the transition to the green economy and more broadly how can Africa transform its economy to a green economy? What are the obstacles to the development of a green economy in Africa? What are the sectors in which Africa must focus investment for the transition to a green economy? What agenda should it draw up in this regard?⁹ These are issues that Heads of State and Government have to address and to which they must provide responses in order to assert Africa's position at Rio+20.

20. African States have realized the potential and opportunities opened up by the green economy for them. Thus, discussions and exchanges on this new economic approach will not seek to determine whether Africa is "for" or "against" the green economy but rather will focus on the doubts and concerns it raises among African countries, namely: what concretely will be the conditionalities to be fulfilled to achieve a transition to a green economy and what are the benefits and sacrifices it may entail for Africa? Hence the need for an active and coordinated preparatory process involving the expertise of the whole continent to reach a common position, to be discussed and adopted at the January 2012 AU Summit.

The Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development: Stakes for Africa?

21. Africa, which holds a quarter of seats in the UN General Assembly and represents the bulk of the Group of 77 plus China, should use this important strategic and political capital to assert itself on the international stage as a key partner in reforming the institutional framework for sustainable development, the key issue of Rio+20 negotiations. The strength of its political clout is also an asset to leverage in order to dictate its agenda and influence decisions to be taken at the Conference, particularly by supporting those in favour of new approaches and projects conducive to its development.

22. As was the case during the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, which initiated the launch of the NEPAD Environment Initiative, Africa must renew contacts with the highest levels of world summits, and in this case those of Rio+20, to negotiate a new institutional architecture for sustainable development that is conducive not only to development but also to the emergence of its economy globally¹⁰.

⁹ As part of the Africa preparatory process for Rio+20, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) organized, from 7 to 9 March 2011, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a workshop on "Institutional and Strategic Frameworks for Sustainable Development in Africa" after which it has already identified relevant topics for Africa to be included on the Rio+20 agenda, such as education for sustainable development and the role of women and youth in sustainable development, as well as an agenda for the Africa preparatory process for Rio+20. The workshop documents are available on the website of Africa Preparatory Process for Rio+20 at: http://www.uneca.org/eca_programmes/sdd/events/Rio20/index.asp

¹⁰ Africa is the region that contributes least to global exports, with 3% in 1990 and in 2009. Data available at: http://www.wto.org/french/thewto_f/mdg_f/development_f.htm

23. Which are the means Africa needs to implement to strengthen its institutional framework for sustainable development and the institutional framework for sustainable development at global level to attract assistance and complementarity? What reforms would international environmental governance need to serve the interests of Africa? Which ones could be implemented through regional alliances? What are the technical indicators of sustainable development it must implement for a better assessment of its sustainable development? How can it strengthen the connection between the three pillars of sustainable development at the political level and the technical capacity of its institutions responsible for sustainable development?¹¹ These also are the issues on which Africa needs to reflect to enhance the weight of the region on the international scene for sustainable development and take advantage of decisions to be taken at Rio+20.

24. International Environmental Governance, a highly strategic issue for Africa, has in recent years undergone a profound transformation due to a proliferation of international treaties and agreements related to the environment as well as a duplication of institutions and programmes in this area, and this has notably led to a fragmentation of resources and confusion or even competition between them as to their legitimacy and allocation of funding. For example, in 1972, only UNEP, as mandated by Member States, was empowered to work on environmental issues, while today more than 44 UN Agencies are working directly or indirectly in the same area. Moreover, today there are nearly 500 agreements and 18 multilateral environmental treaties generating more than 5000 decisions on the environment that countries have to implement. This fragmentation has reduced the right of African States to speak because they lack the human and financial resources necessary to meet the increasingly busy timetable for International Environmental Governance. Indeed, in many cases, African delegations, by their size or composition, are not able to cope with the responsibilities assigned to them because of the increase and complexity of issues to be considered on environmental governance. Consequently, most African States that have ratified many Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) are not provided with the means to implement them for lack of sufficient resources, while the MEAs themselves do not have the means to help achieve their goals and recommendations. Moreover, capacity building programmes existing within the United Nations system are dispersed among different agencies. The result is that the main UN agency on the environment, UNEP, has no mandate or resources to operate on the ground even if it has relevant expertise and appropriate knowledge to assist developing countries. Indeed, it lacks tools such as regional offices and relays on the ground to enable it to implement the missions entrusted to it and fulfil country needs.

25. Africa, the continent most vulnerable to climate change and environmental challenges (desertification, deforestation, biodiversity, etc.) pays the heaviest toll for the multitude of organizations and the dispersion of resources. What should be done? The conclusions of the consultations of the last UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Forum on Environment (February 2011, Nairobi, Kenya) on International Environmental Governance, as reflected in the final document of the "Nairobi-Helsinki" process,

¹¹ Within the context of the second workshop organized by ECA on the theme "Framework for Sustainable Development Indicators in Africa", the identification of a framework for sustainable development indicators has already started. Workshop documents are found on the Website of the Africa preparatory process for Rio+20 at http://www.uneca.org/eca_programmes/sdd/events/Rio20/index.asp

suggest to Africa and the world, avenues for thought, and options on which the Heads of State and Government of African countries should decide. Africa must particularly decide on one of the following three options as to the form to be assumed by the new international body in charge of coordinating International Environmental Governance, namely:

- strengthening UNEP and transforming it into a specialized agency on the environment;
- establishing a new institution similar to UNEP on the environment with adequate resources; or
- establishing a World Environment Organization (proposal to which a majority of African countries committed themselves at the Africa-France Summit in May 2010 in Nice).

26. At the global level, there is general agreement that it is time for reform since contemporary challenges in sustainable development and the environment are beyond the powers vested in its present institutional framework. UNEP, originally the only international institution responsible for structuring International Environmental Governance, is no longer able to fulfil this role today. The continent should analyze the options outlined above. In its vast majority, Africa is mainly inclined towards the creation of a World Environment Organization (WEO) which seems to open up many opportunities for the continent. Indeed, firstly, the principle of universal membership "one country-one vote" reflects the democratic openness and fairness that each international organization should adopt in its fundamental principles. Moreover, this principle would place African countries, by virtue of their number, at the centre of the decisions of the new organization and would allow them to put African priorities on the global agenda. Then, a WEO would have more technical and technological capacities and is therefore more likely to support countries in meeting the Multilateral Environmental Agreements they have signed. Secondly, one of the corollaries of the African position on these issues is that whatever the scenarios described above, and more importantly that of WEO, the headquarters of UNEP or the future WEO will still be in Nairobi, Kenya, currently the only United Nations headquarters in the developing world. This status quo regarding the location of the headquarters of the institutional framework of global environmental governance is indeed of great symbolic and geopolitical significance, not only for African countries but also for developing countries in general. A World Environment Organization would be the first specialized agency of the United Nations in Africa. It is therefore important to consider this reform a key element of the African Common Position to be adopted for Rio+20.

27. Furthermore, Africa needs to consider international governance of sustainable development at par with international environmental governance. Indeed, it should envisage developing a common view on a new architecture of international governance for sustainable development that encompasses both international environmental governance and also that of the other two pillars of sustainable development, namely: social and economic factors without which strengthening the institutional framework for

sustainable development cannot be achieved. Africa must therefore ensure that international governance of sustainable development is not limited to international environmental governance in the position it will define and also in the debates that will animate Rio+20. Indeed, sustainable development will not be meaningful unless these three pillars are combined and used in a complementary and balanced manner.

Africa Preparatory Process for Rio+20

28. Coordinated at the technical level by ECA, the Africa preparatory process for Rio+20 involves many actors belonging to different levels of decision-making whose purpose is to assist and facilitate the implementation of consultation between countries and African sub-regions, in order to provide efficient and effective coordination of various activities undertaken under the Africa preparatory process for Rio+20. The ultimate aim is to achieve a consensus among African States on the continent's priorities for sustainable development in order not only to identify but also to consolidate them, so that they are taken into account in decisions ensuing from the Conference. Regional preparations are implemented by ECA and strongly supported by the commitment and participation of African regional and sub-regional organizations and UN agencies involved in this field, such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). These regional and sub-regional entities include, inter alia, the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Planning and Coordinating Agency of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Moreover, besides these bodies, other stakeholders such as representatives of civil society, the private sector, etc. who also participate very actively in the Africa preparatory process for Rio+20 should also be involved.

29. Among the activities planned for the coming months as part of Africa's preparation for Rio+20, the reports of the five African sub-regions on their overall situation regarding sustainable development (advances, delays, programmes implemented, projects, etc.) are particularly expected. Indeed, these reports will serve as a basis for the discussion of sub-regional consultations to be held between June and August 2011. Additionally, thematic reports will be prepared on new emerging challenges for Africa, the green economy in a context of poverty eradication and the institutional framework for sustainable development. Lastly, based on sub-regional reports and consultations as well as thematic reports, a regional summary report will also be produced. And to conclude the Africa preparatory process for Rio+20, a ministerial conference bringing together all African stakeholders will be held in October 2011 to adopt by consensus a Declaration on Africa's Common Position and Strategy for Rio+20, to be formalized by decision of the January 2012 AU Summit.

Prospects and Next Steps

30. Sustainable development seems to be the way forward to maximize the continent's wealth and generate inclusive growth combining economic, environmental and social issues. Rio+20 is a crucial step of this course not to be missed.

31. In the light of Africa's objectives, stakes, challenges and expectations for Rio+20, it seems imperative that the Heads of State and Government of Africa, and through them the whole of Africa, should be at the forefront by taking ownership of the Africa preparatory process for Rio+20 and guiding it towards the finalization of a common position and strategy. Africa's success at Rio+20 will depend on the involvement of its leaders in the preparatory process and their ability to agree on the adoption of a position, a mode of action and an African agenda for visibility and strengthening the continent's position as a strategic region at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

32. To achieve this, the Republic of Congo is proposing the attached resolution, which paves the way for the ownership of African 'leadership' in the preparatory process for Rio+20. It also contains the key steps to be taken in order to reach a concerted strategy and strong common position for Africa.

2013-01-27

The representation of local communities in organs of the African union (Item Proposed by the Republic of Senegal)

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