

## **Closing Address**

**Oliver Chinganya**

### **Sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**

**Victoria Fall, Zimbabwe.**

**24-27 February 2020**

**Ministers and representatives of Government,**

**Heads of Delegations,**

**Distinguished participants,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of Dr. Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary of UNECA and indeed on my own behalf, I am delighted to deliver the closing remarks at the 6<sup>th</sup> Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development Goals convened under the leadership of the President of Zimbabwe, His Excellency, E.D Mnangagwa.

The past four days of highly engaging, informative, provocative and interactive discussions focussed on how to deliver a transformed and prosperous Africa within a decade. Several ideas, solutions and cases were highlighted and strategies and plans for scaling up action revealed.

We have no doubt that Africa and the world has listened; and they will support us to ensure every child and adult has access to quality education, healthcare, food, energy, shelter, communication, peace, among others.

We may not be able to provide them today, but we must start today. For tomorrow is too late - and business as usual has no place.

The African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development has evolved into the single largest platform where Africa's voices are heard, and it also informs and shapes global discourse. The 2020 Forum has broken all records in many ways.

For the first time, the voices of the youths were loud and clear, and shaped the discussion. They put on notice the adults with the signature line – we are not just watching but ready to takeover. About 250 youths converged here for the first ever Youth Bootcamp of the Africa Regional Science, Technology and Innovation Forum on AI and Robotics from 22-23 February 2020. The Child President was one of the dignitaries and three-quarters of the trainers and coaches were youths. One can conclude that they have taken over.

We also set a record on the number of senior government officials as well as UN Programme Funds and Agency representatives. The Forum was also graced by the Deputy Secretary General of UN, Ms. Amina Mohamed. It gives confidence to all of us that our leaders are listening. They have heard our aspirations and ambitions – they have promised to take actions.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

This Forum has also set new records in terms of participants. Last year, we were glad that over 800 participants attended the 5<sup>th</sup> African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, which beat the records of previous Forum and I thought we had reached the peak until we came to Victoria Fall – the Mosi-O-Tunya – “the smoke that thunders”. Over 3000 delegates have been here. This Forum has lived up to the meaning of Mosi-O-

Tunya. It has thundered, the world has heard and seen the smoke!

It has also broken records in terms of partnerships. The Forum is one of the initiatives that galvanized the United Nations agencies and partners to plan, work and deliver as one.

It is my hope that the relationships and trust built will continue in our bid to scaleup efforts to support our member States to achieve targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Among others, the second Science, Technology and Innovation Forum was co-organized with the Department of Science and Innovation of South Africa; UNESCO and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development of Zimbabwe.

Similarly, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs supported the Major Groups and UNDP the Regional Coordinating Mechanisms, to highlight but a few. Others include the UN Technology Bank for LDCs, our partners the African Union and African Development Bank.

More importantly, we had a record number of national participants and senior government officials of Zimbabwe directly involved in organizing and in delivering the Forum. It is a clear demonstration of the commitment of the government to drive development not just in the country but beyond. For that we are grateful.

We count on all our partners and member States to build an empowered, inclusive, equal, transformed and prosperous Africa.

**Ladies and gentlemen,** This is a watershed moment for the continent: challenges and opportunities present themselves to

us in equal measure. Many of these challenges and opportunities are interlinked and interrelated.

For instance, reports of elephants dying not from poachers' bullets or traps but from consecutive droughts emerged this year. They are big and beautiful – we can easily tell when they die. We could be losing plenty of our biodiversity that is small and invisible but crucial to the ecosystem.

Similarly, we have seen the magnificent Victoria Falls and the hydropower power stations almost dry up with significant economic and social consequences for the livelihood of thousands of our people – the mines, farmers, manufacturers, hospitals, transport and telecommunication, among many others.

Integrated approaches that address conservation, diversification of renewable energy sources and alternative and efficient production processes could be part of the solution. No single entity could implement such efforts alone.

**Ladies and gentlemen,** In conclusion, the journey has just begun. We now have a Victoria Falls Declaration on the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development in Africa. Collectively, we should walk the talk by implementing the actions agreed here. We need targeted interventions and capacity development in transformational and employing appropriate resources.

We must act and act collectively. If we invest just part of our resource in in the many successful initiatives and programmes that governments, civil society, private sector and UN agencies are implementing, we could achieve the targets within a decade. We should, and we must combine forces achieve greater impacts of a scale that is meaningful to drive the desired change.

We need to ensure that our efforts are equal to or greater than the challenges we wish to address. We have over 220 million people classified as hungry, one-fifth of children out of school, youth unemployment continues to grow and over half of the population without electricity. We must work together to deliver actions that match the magnitude of the challenges our people face.

This Forum has demonstrated that we all need to revisit our approaches, seek way to scale up actions that work, bring on board new partnerships and seek strategic alliances to drive transformation. The current trajectory suggests 9 out of the 10 extremely poor people will be in Africa by 2030.

**Ladies and gentlemen,** I am pleased that the continent met here and in one and coherent message, agreed to ensure Africa meet the SGDs in ten years. Not a single person said we shouldn't, or we can't – we all agreed that when can. It is my hope that the same positive and confident spirit will help us work in a coordinated and integrated manner to implement and realise the transformation that we seek.

**Ladies and gentlemen,** ECA stands ready to work with the Chair and members of the Bureau to effectively convey the outcomes of the African regional forum on sustainable development to the High-Level Political Forum, in collaboration with our sister agencies and partners.

The outcomes of the Forum will also inform the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. We hope that our partners will also use the outcomes to inform their institutional arrangements to encourage uptake and effective implementation.

Join me in appreciating the support and hospitality extended to us by our hosts. Significant investment has been made to ensure

we have a successful meeting in a friendly environment. We can truly say we received a presidential reception. We can agree with Dr. Livingstone that the “Scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight”.

On behalf of ECA and all participants, I wish to thank you for all the support.

Let me thank the ministers, members of parliament, senior government officials and distinguished delegates that took time to be present here with us for the entire three or more days. This meeting would not be successful without you. Thank you for your interest and contributions.

I would also like to thank all our sister UN agencies, the AU, the private sector and other partners for their splendid support.

Great thanks my ECA colleagues for gallantly working to ensure a successful Forum...I ask that all ECA staff to stand please.... Give them a round of applause.

**Thank you, colleagues,**

**Ladies and gentlemen** for all shortcomings and inconveniences suffered, we promise to do better next time. We count on you to support us and your Bureau to ensure the next one lives up to your expectations.

Let me wish you safe travels home. God bless you all and God bless Africa.

Thank you.