

WMO STATEMENT AT THE 2010 AFRICA ENVIRONMENT DAY CELEBRATION

by

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Excellency,

Honorable Minister of State,

Distinguished Dignitaries and Representatives of International and National Organizations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to express the appreciation of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to the United Republic of Tanzania, for the kind invitation made through the Honourable Minister of State Dr. Batilda Burian (MP), to be present today at this key event celebrating the *Africa Environment Day*, which was established in 2002 by the seventy-sixth Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity and is being held under the aegis of the African Union.

I wish to seize the opportunity to thank the United Republic of Tanzania for the exceptional cooperation established since your country became a Member of WMO on 14 September 1962, as well as for your contributions to WMO's programmes and activities through the Tanzania Meteorological Agency.

I am pleased to note that this year the *Africa Environment Day* is dedicated to the theme of building African resilience to climate change and protecting Africa's unique biodiversity in the face of the mounting impacts of climate variability and change, which in recent years is increasingly being threatened by more severe weather, droughts and floods, among other hydrometeorological hazards.

However, Africa is well-endowed with outstanding natural resources that can contribute to transform the socioeconomic and environmental reality of your continent through appropriate sustainable development. As the specialized agency of the United Nations System with a mandate in weather, climate and water, WMO is firmly committed to support Africa's efforts in its areas of competence.

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The year 2009 will likely rank among the top 5 warmest since the beginning of instrumental records about 1850, while the decade from 2000 to 2009 has been the warmest on record. These findings are consistent with the 2008 WMO Greenhouse Gas Bulletin, which reported that globally averaged atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations reached new heights in 2008.

Various parts of the world are experiencing visible impacts of climate variability and change. The frequency and intensity of some extreme weather events are expected to increase, thus contributing to render populations more vulnerable, especially in the developing world. However, while natural hazards cannot be avoided, capacity building can prepare societies to significantly reduce death and destruction. Through the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) of its 189 Members, WMO sustains observational networks to provide them the appropriate weather, climate and water information for their disaster risk reduction and mitigation needs.

Furthermore, through its programmes and activities as well as those it shares with its partners, WMO supports regional actions like the African Centre for Meteorological Applications for Development (ACMAD) and the African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), in particular through Drought Monitoring Centres (DMCs), Regional Climate Outlook Forums (RCOFs), ClimDev Africa, the World Hydrological Cycle Observing System (WHYCOS) and other key activities, as well as the Nairobi Work Programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change.

In 1988, as a result of the 1979 First World Climate Conference, WMO and UNEP jointly established the IPCC which at the end of 2007 published its Fourth Assessment Report and received the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize. The Conference also led to the establishment of the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) by WMO with partners. In 1990, the Second World Climate Conference led to the creation of GCOS and provided decisive momentum to the establishment of the UNFCCC.

As you are aware, climate change will especially impact on the poorest countries, which are also the most vulnerable, since they have limited capabilities to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. Accordingly, the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and other vulnerable nations will be among those hit earliest and hardest by climate change, which United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has identified as the defining challenge of our era.

WMO's vision underscores the need to advance rapidly in greenhouse gas mitigation and adaptation to the local effects of climate change, as two essential and complementary pillars to meet these challenges, although additional actions will be needed: financial, technological, and the key contributions of the NMHSs of WMO's Members, since their observations, products and services shall be crucial to the successful formulation and implementation of the response strategies, policies and measures, and to evaluate progress being achieved.

Recognizing that every social, economic and environmental sector is sensitive to climate variability and change, last year WMO convened with partners the World Climate Conference-3 (WCC-3) under the overall theme of "*climate prediction and information for decision making*", in particular to promote further development of decision-supportive tools and capacity building in climate-related risk management. Many of those present today at this ceremony contributed significantly to the success of this key event, for which I would like to thank you once more on behalf of our Organization.

The Conference was also a collaborative effort of the United Nations System delivering *As One* in climate change, which supported the development of a Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS), to ensure that every country and every climate-sensitive societal sector will be better equipped to access and apply climate prediction and information services. For Africa, the GFCS will contribute to meet vital challenges in the areas of disaster prevention, food security and water management in a way fully compatible with the protection of the environment.

WMO is taking concrete steps to develop the GFCS in response to the WCC-3 mandate. Representatives of more than 100 countries, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations gathered in Geneva from 11-12 January 2010 to approve the terms of reference and endorse the composition of a High-level Taskforce of independent advisers, which held its first meeting last week in Geneva to begin addressing GFCS development and implementation by submitting proposals to the sixteenth World Meteorological Congress in May 2011.

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before concluding, I would like to inform you that by the kind invitation of Kenya, the First Conference of Ministers Responsible for Meteorology in Africa will be held in Nairobi from 12 to 16 April 2010. The main purpose of the Conference is to recognize and contribute to strengthen the role and the contribution of NMHSs in mitigating and adapting to the negative impacts of weather and climate.

In closing, I wish to congratulate the United Republic of Tanzania for hosting this key event and for enhancing climate awareness. In 2000, UN Members adopted the Millennium Declaration as a renewed commitment to human development, including the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with quantified targets and indicators for actions to improve the livelihood of impoverished sectors. However, climate change impacts will tend to offset progress being made to meet the MDGs by 2015, particularly in the areas of food security, water resources management and human health.

If humanity were unable to reach a propitious agreement, climate change has the potential to overwhelm our adaptive capacities within the coming decades. However, it is encouraging to note that key stakeholders have recognized the urgency of addressing the climate change issue which WMO has been announcing with mounting concern since 1976. WMO perceives this juncture as an opportunity to advance in sustainable development and international cooperation. Some changes are unavoidable, but it is not too late to prevent them from becoming an even more serious threat to our common future.

Thank you.
