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Special Session of Ministers Responsible for Environment and Natural Resources on the Challenges and Opportunities Presented by the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Convened under the auspices of the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment (ARDWE)
9-10 November 2020**

VIRTUAL Meeting

Special Session/MIN

REPORT

13 November 2020

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The High-level segment of the Special Session of the Ministers in charge of Environment and Natural Resources on the challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 Pandemic was held virtually on **13 November 2020**. The meeting was preceded by the meeting of experts and Senior Officials held from 9-11 November 2020. The Ministerial session was convened under the auspices of the African Union's Specialized Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment.

II. PARTICIPATION

2. Delegations from the following 42 Member States participated in the meeting: Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Gambia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Saharawi Republic, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, South Africa and Zambia
3. The Experts Session was also attended by delegates from the following Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Organizations: CENSAD (CILSS/AGRYMET), COMESA, ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD, IOC, SADC, UMA, Secretariats of the following Ministerial Committees: AMCEN, AMCOMET, and AMCOW, and the following invited partner institutions: the ACMAD, African Development Bank, African Risk Capacity (ARC / AU), African Wildlife Society, African Women Innovators for Sustainable Environment, Climate Change and Green Growth, East African Wildlife Society (EAWLS), European Union, IFRC, IUCN, Lake and River Basin Organizations (Lake Chad Basin Commission, Nile Basin Initiative and Volta Basin Authority), League of Arab States, Sanitation and Water for All (SWA), TRAFFIC, UN Agencies (CBD Secretariat, CITES, FAO, UNCCD, UNFF (UNFF/ UNDESA), UNDRR, UNECA, UNICEF, UNEP/GEF, WMO) and WASH Netherlands, WaterAid, World Vision – Water and WWF.

III. ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND PROGRAM OF WORK

4. The Senior Officials in attendance adopted the agenda and programme of work with amendments - i.e. to include a presentation on the Africa's Green Stimulus Programme in the Agenda.

IV. ELECTION OF THE BUREAU

1. The meeting being held under the auspices of the STC on ARDWE, there was no election of the Bureau. The session was Chaired by South Africa, the current Chair of the STC on ARDWE

V. OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

2. To enable the African Union Commission to report to the Ministers on the continental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and key mitigating measures undertaken to overcome the challenges, and capitalize on the opportunities presented by the pandemic; and
3. Ministers to review the continuing impacts of the pandemic, take stock of the challenges and opportunities and provide policy guidance on the way forward to ensure the full incorporation of the environment and natural resource sectors in COVID-19 recovery plans to build back better at national levels.

VI. OPENING STATEMENTS

4. **H.E Amb. Josefa Sacko, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture** welcomed the Ministers and delegates and thanked them for honouring the Commission's invitation. In her remarks, Commissioner Sacko highlighted the socio-economic and environmental challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic – the loss of lives, jobs and livelihoods, increased poverty, food insecurity and increased debt burden. She commended countries for their intervention and efforts to curb the spread of the pandemic, and extended condolences to Member States and families that have lost lives to the pandemic.

Commissioner Sacko further called for Africa to conduct a more profound analysis of the impacts of the pandemic and emphasized the need to set up strategies and frameworks for building back cleaner and better. This, she proposed, could be done by capitalizing on opportunities presented by the pandemic. In this regard, Commissioner Sacko highlighted the AU-UK Green Recovery Action Plan, developed by the Commission and the United Kingdom with the support of UNECA, the NDC Partnership and South Africa as Chair of AMCEN. The Action Plan, she explained, outlines priority sectors for investments to stimulate economic recovery in a sustainable manner for prosperity. These sectors include:- Supporting renewable energy, energy efficiency and national Just Transition programmes; Nature Based Solutions and Biodiversity – Sustainable land management, forestry, oceans and ecotourism; Resilient agriculture – focusing on economic development and green jobs; Green and Resilient cities – with a focus on water (flooding and water resources) and enhancing information, communication and technology; and Climate finance with a focus on increasing flows, efficiency, and impact.

In her conclusion, Commissioner Sacko emphasized the need to build on existing continental, regional and national initiatives as well as the work under the three regional Climate Commissions: the African Island States, the Congo Basin, and the Sahel. She thanked experts from member States, RECs and partners that have supported the development of the Africa Climate Change Strategy and urged them to continue providing input and contribute to the finalization of the Strategy.

5. **H.E Barbara Creecy, Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment of South Africa**, speaking on behalf of AMCEN, appreciated the importance of the meeting in view of the fact that the pandemic had exposed the continent's vulnerabilities and triggered new challenges towards achieving the Global Sustainable Development Goals and Africa's Agenda 2063. She also emphasized the need to seize the opportunities presented by COVID-19 to set recovery on a path of transformative sustainable development by safeguarding biodiversity through ecosystem management.

Minister Creecy urged countries to maintain the momentum on the response to the current climate crisis and uphold a strong Common African Position for the UNFCCC COP26. This position, she explained, calls for enhanced action and greater ambition from all Parties – ambition, with regard to improving Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs); and an Adaptation Goal and associated action and on means of implementation. The Minister highlighted the importance of access to water and sanitation services as the first line of defence in eliminating the spread of the virus while taking into consideration the special needs of women and vulnerable groups. She further highlighted the need for financial and technical resources to address, in a sustainable manner, the devastating socio-economic and environmental impacts of the pandemic. In this regard, she informed the meeting of the proposed African Green Stimulus Programme that was presented for consideration by the AMCEN Bureau as an innovative African led initiative developed to support the Continent's recovery.

6. In his remarks, the **Rt. Hon Alok Sharma, the UK Secretary of State for Business, Energy, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Minister for COP26** invited as a special guest, appreciated the pivotal role being played by Africa as many countries experience first-hand the impact of climate change and urged for a successful COP26. He called on countries to come forward with ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and Long-Term Strategies and welcomed countries to the upcoming climate change meeting scheduled for 12

December 2020, co-hosted by the UK, France and the United Nations to mark five years from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. He highlighted efforts by the COP26 presidency to include the voice of the youth in the climate discussions and the five campaigns that the UK Government is running – Nature-based Solutions, clean transport, energy, adaptation and resilience with climate finance as an enabler to the other priorities. In this regard, he reaffirmed commitment to working with the AU in the implementation of the AU-UK Green Recovery Action Plan and in particular, on a proposed task force on climate finance. Mr Sharma expressed optimism in the business community which he said is recognising the imperative of tackling climate change with shareholder value increasingly stronger in the green economy and market forces bringing down the price of renewables. This, he said would ensure that climate action is at the forefront of the thinking of both companies and investors.

7. The Opening Statement was delivered by **H.E. Thoko Didiza, Chair of the AU Specialised Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment**. Minister Didiza welcomed Ministers and delegates to the virtual meeting and took the opportunity to present her condolences to countries that have citizen to the pandemic. She called for solidarity for recovery to countries which are more vulnerable. Minister Didiza called for an increased agility and heightened responsiveness from African states and other agencies to intervene and contribute positively in a timely and meaningful manner as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds globally and on the continent. She highlighted environmental challenges, including the management of the COVID-19-related medical waste as well as loss of ecotourism value chains and related jobs. The Minister called for scaling up of responses to combatting illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products; development of strategies and mechanisms to conserve our wildlife and avoid unintended consequences of wildlife consumption, such as the emergence of zoonotic diseases; and sustainable financing for conservation programmes.

Minister Didiza emphasised the important role played by AMCEN in advancing the environment agenda and its positioning under the STC on ARDWE. She further encouraged countries to forge strong partnerships and coordination of Africa's preparations for key Conference of the Parties for key Multilateral Environmental Agreements, including Climate Change, the Biodiversity Convention, United Nations Environment Assembly and the 5th International Conference of Chemicals Management. In her conclusion, she called for unity amongst stakeholders to assist vulnerable communities within our countries to cushion them against the impacts of the pandemic.

VII. PRESENTATION OF THE EXPERTS' REPORT

8. Mr. **Ramasodi Mooketsa**, Chair of the Experts and Senior Officials session presented the report of the Experts. This was followed by deliberations on the Report and its adoption with amendments.

VIII. MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

9. In the country statements, Ministers expressed appreciation to the Commission for convening the high-level meeting. They highlighted the impacts that the COVID-19 had had on the environment and natural resources sector and shared on national efforts aimed at combatting the pandemic in the long and short term periods. Response measures highlighted include:- the creation of special funds to manage the Corona pandemic; economic stimulus packages with allocations for greening efforts; creation of new development plans and redefining sectoral plans and programs targeting renewable energy; combating pollution; protecting the natural environment; industry; health; education; sustainable agriculture; spatial development; and sustainable management of cities.

The Ministers noted that the vulnerability to Climate change continues and expressed concern over the way the challenges emanating from Climate Change have exacerbated the negative impact of COVID-19. Member States were encouraged to ratify the Montreal protocol and the Kigali Amendment.

The Ministers also noted that COVID-19 has had serious impact on the environment, with issues related to pollution and waste generation, exploitation of forest products and illegal trade and consumption of wildlife being highlighted as some of the effects of the pandemic.

Ministers highlighted the financial challenges, particularly the diversion of scarce resources from other sectors to the COVID-19 response efforts. They called for the mobilization of funds, including setting up environmental funds, to overcome the deficiency in aspects related to green financing and investment. These initiatives are meant to strengthen resilience, promote the creation of job opportunities in environment friendly activities and facilitate capacity building, especially in green energy, water management, new industries, smart agriculture and digital technologies.

They highlighted the critical role of water and sanitation in human health. In this regard, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) was identified as the first line of defence in eliminating the spread of the virus. Countries also called for the promotion of research on innovation water management to enhance agriculture. The resounding message was “Water is life; Sanitation is dignity” as the Ministers reiterated the need for aggressive policies and initiatives in the water and sanitation sector.

Ministers called for efforts to curb the loss of ecosystems and biological diversity through sustainable land management programmes, combatting desertification and climate change, restoration of natural habitats, strengthening the legal and institutional frameworks, including the monitoring and prevention systems. They called for support for ongoing African Initiatives including for Adaptation of African Agriculture to the impacts of Climate Change (AAA), the Initiative for Sustainability, Security and Stability in Africa, (SSS), The "Water for Africa" initiative, the "Blue Belt" initiative, the three climate Commissions created on the sidelines of the COP22 climate summit i.e. The Congo Basin Commission, chaired by the Republic of the Congo, Sahel Region Commission, headed by the Republic of Niger; and the African Island States Commission, headed by the Republic of Seychelles. Ministers also called for the operationalization of Bamako Convention and the organisation COP1 of the Maputo Convention on the Protection of Nature.

There were several calls for countries to explore the opportunities for a Covid-19 green recovery in the socio economic and development sharing lessons, capacity building, taking into consideration the special needs of vulnerable groups including the youth and women. Countries also emphasized the importance of digital technology, the crucial role of South-South cooperation and African solidarity in addressing the impacts of COVID-19. On sharing experiences, it was observed that there are several lessons that can be learnt and applied from the Ebola management plans to improve Africa's response to COVID-19.

Having deliberated on the Experts Report, the Ministers adopted the Report with the following recommendations:

METEOROLOGY, CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

On Meteorology (Weather and Climate Services):

10. **CALL UPON** Member States to recognize hydrological and meteorological services as essential services and support National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) to provide early warning information for early actions for disaster risk reduction and national development;
11. **URGE** Member States to move from crisis response to proactive actions, local-level targeted interventions, and management of the challenges in a holistic and integrated approach.

12. **CALL UPON** Member States to increase investment in hydrological and meteorological infrastructure, inclusive of computing and communication infrastructure and further support capacity development of their professionals including the youth.
13. **REQUEST** AUC, in collaboration with relevant partners, to facilitate initiatives that strengthen the capacities of hydrological and meteorological centres of excellence and regional training centres.
14. **REQUEST** AUC to strengthen collaboration between the African Union Space Programme and the NHMSs, national space programmes, and regional observatories to ensure informed development and utilisation of satellite meteorology.
15. **URGE** Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and Regional Organisations to ensure that NHMSs, Regional Climate Centres, the media and relevant stakeholders play their respective pivotal roles in ensuring adequate, timely and effective communication and dissemination of weather and climate information.
16. **CALL UPON** the AUC, RECs and Regional Organisations to facilitate initiatives aimed at increasing data exchange as well as reducing the gap between regional and national centres for enhanced cascading of regional meteorological (weather and climate) services to national levels.
17. **REQUEST** Member States to ensure that any COVID-19 Recovery Funds also support the operations of NMHSs in order to strengthen multi-hazard early warning systems and capacity development.
18. **URGE** Member States to strengthen or put in place strong policy and legal frameworks that promote mutually beneficial public private partnerships (PPP) and strengthen National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs).

On Disaster Risk Reduction:

19. **URGE** Member States to strengthen capacities of DRR/M Agencies and related institutions such as National DRR/M platforms with adequate human and financial resources in line with the additional target 3 of the Programme of Action (PoA) for the implementation of the Sendai Framework for DRR 2015-2030 in Africa¹
20. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to establish strong legal and institutional frameworks to guide and strengthen implementation of disaster risk reduction/management policies
21. **CALL UPON** Member States to ensure that response to emerging disasters such as COVID-19 does not overshadow routine Disaster Risk Management activities
22. **URGE** Member States to ensure integration of epidemics and pandemics in disaster management and risk profiles as well as inclusion of pandemics/epidemics prevention, preparedness, response and recovery planning.
23. **CALL UPON** the Regional Organisations and Member States to strengthen or establish Regional and National Disaster Risk Management funds to cover disaster prevention, preparedness, response, recovery and rehabilitation

¹ Target 3 of the PoA calls upon AU member states to “**substantially expand the scope and increase the number of sources for domestic financing in DRR**”

24. **URGE** the Member States to revise existing Disaster Response Funds to include endemics, streamlining the one health approach in a collaborative and inclusive manner. This includes widening the scope of existing risk financing mechanisms like the African Risk Capacity (ARC) to include epidemics.
25. **CALL UPON** Member States to strengthen data collection and reporting on the impacts of COVID-19 in the Sendai Monitor and request the AUC and partners to support capacity building on data collection and reporting on COVID-19,
26. **ENCOURAGE** Member States, AUC and RECs to mobilize financial, technical and human resources to address the recovery efforts from COVID-19
27. **FURTHER ENCOURAGE** Member States to set up effective Multi-hazard Early Warning Systems, including, inter alia, epidemics, and ensure establishment of functional emergency/disaster operations centres
28. **CALL UPON** Member States to mobilise technical and financial support to build capacity to develop DRR strategies and plans down to the local level

On Climate Change:

29. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to seize the opportunities in the recovery from COVID-19 to support the transformation of the continent towards a sustainable, greener and climate friendly future through well-designed economic recovery stimulus to accelerate the mainstreaming of climate action into development.
30. **REQUEST** Member States and partners to create specific financing mechanisms for mitigation and adaptation to climate change to complement and enhance initiatives being pursued as part of the Financing for Development in the era of COVID-19 and beyond as part of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda
31. **URGE** the Commission, Regional and National institutions to build on existing projects, initiatives and frameworks at the continental level such as the Africa Adaptation Initiative (AAI), the Africa Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI), the Adaptation of African Agriculture Initiative (AAA), the Great Green Wall Initiative among others and focus on supporting priorities already identified in countries' national or sectoral master plans, and in particular climate change adaptation plans and the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of the Paris Agreement.
32. **CALL UPON** member States to adopt and implement nature-based solutions to enhance climate resilience at the local levels, while also contributing to improved livelihoods, and allow countries to build back better through an immediate response to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, while also contributing to reducing the impact of climate change and addressing biodiversity loss. Support is needed to enhance such actions,
33. **URGE** Member States to scale up financing for climate change adaptation in all sectors especially agriculture (climate smart agriculture) and health as well as support institutional policy and investments,
34. **REQUEST** the Commission to ensure that the development of the Africa Continental Strategy on Climate Change provides for actions aimed at promoting low carbon development and green circular industrialization in the spirit of achieving the overall goals of the Africa Agenda 2063, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The AU Commission is also called upon to conclude the roadmap for finalising the AU Climate Change Strategy before COP26,
35. **NOTED** that green recovery initiatives have to include a balance between adaptation, mitigation and means of implementation in order to enhance climate action and infrastructure to face future challenges.

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES**On ENVIRONMENT****Waste Management:**

36. **CALL UPON** Member States to adopt best practices for safely managing health-care waste in line with the lifecycle approach, including assigning responsibility and providing sufficient human and material resources to segregate, recycle and dispose of waste safely. Ensuring awareness, evidenced-based and consistently applied waste management practices in communities, homes, schools, marketplaces, and healthcare facilities will help prevent human-to-human transmission of pathogens including COVID-19;
37. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to manage medical waste as part of the Circular Economy approach and to allocate adequate financial resources to support institutions dealing with waste management;
38. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to strengthen environmental research to show the full scale of the nexus between the pandemic and environment to guide future environmental policies and **REQUEST** the AUC to facilitate studies that seek to assess the impact of COVID-19 on environment and biodiversity;
39. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to develop Environmental Policies, Frameworks and Action Plans that take into consideration the emergence of epidemics and pandemics;
40. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to prioritize addressing biodiversity loss, climate action, circular economy including waste management and sustainable resource management in the post COVID-19 recovery phase;

On Water and Sanitation

41. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to prioritize access to potable and clean water by communities, homes, schools, marketplaces and healthcare facilities in order to prevent human-to-human transmission of pathogens including COVID-19;
42. **REQUEST** Member States and partners to adopt a multi-sectoral approach to address COVID-19 across the spectrum of water and sanitation;
43. **REQUEST** Member States, AUC, RECs and Regional Organisations to include Water, Sanitation and Hygiene as core parts of COVID-19 Resource Mobilization to advance Africa Water Vision 2025, achieve Transformation Agenda 2030 on SDGs-Goal 6-in realization of the aspirations of Africa's Agenda 2063;
44. **REQUEST** Member States and partners to broaden WASH Programmes to address emerging epidemics or pandemics to promote and motivate more frequent and regular hand hygiene by building a supportive environment to improve and sustain access to hand hygiene facilities and by using a multimodal strategy (referred to hand hygiene practices);
45. **URGE** Member States to provide hand-washing facilities at public places with foot operated taps; avail containerised ablution facilities in highly dense informal settlements; connecting it to existing municipal services for water supply and sewer collection.
46. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to provide health and hygiene products to the public in strategic areas of concern; which would contain soap, hand sanitizer, bucket, disinfectant, whilst there has also been disinfection of public areas close to the water supply schemes and sanitation facilities as well as water tankers especially in rural and informal settlements to ensure access to clean water for hand washing;

47. **URGE** Member States to ensure provision of adequate support to sanitation workers, including training workshops, professional exchange programmes, and access to personal protective equipment (PPE);
48. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to adequately treat wastewater and sludge to minimize the risks of Water-borne diseases including the potential presence of COVID-19 and to keep water supplies safe through education and awareness raising and strengthening monitoring systems;
49. **ENCOURAGE** Member States and RECs to work in collaboration with AUC and relevant water and sanitation institutions on data, knowledge and experience sharing among African States as well as learning from international experiences in the management of the pandemic in water and sanitation;
50. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to reprioritise resources to ensure that challenges of water and sanitation infrastructure and increased water access are dealt with in the context of controlling Coronavirus in Africa.

On Forestry:

51. **ENCOURAGE** Member States and partners to mainstream forestry and land management into the COVID-19 recovery and stimulus programmes at national, regional and global levels;
52. **CALL** for the adoption of integrated and landscape approaches to natural resource management to yield the maximum benefit for all stakeholders;
53. **REQUEST** Member States and partners to maintain budgets earmarked for the forestry and land management and provide additional budgetary support to sectors to enhance sustainable management of these vital resources;
54. **REQUEST** Member States to develop and strengthen their forest industry sector to ensure a steady supply of essential products, securing jobs and foreign exchange
55. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to expand Forest and land restoration to provide jobs especially in the rural areas to kick-start the economies and strengthen the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss;
56. **URGE** Member States to collaborate, and put in place adequate institutional, policy and regulatory mechanisms to address the illegal exploitation and trade in forest products, in particular the Rosewood, in collaboration with partners, civil society organizations and local communities
57. **REQUEST** Member States to mainstream the issues of trade in forest and wildlife products into the various partnerships, national and bilateral programmes to enhance international collaboration and resource mobilization for the sustainable management and utilization of Africa's forest and wildlife resources;
58. **URGE** Member States to enhance the implementation of the initiatives such as Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets and other Land Based Solutions through innovative financial instruments for restoration and rehabilitation of degraded landscapes to accelerate restoration of degraded land
59. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to build and strengthen synergies between and across sectors to enhance the resilience of food and natural resource systems to fight against future pandemic;
60. **CALL UPON** the AUC to accelerate the implementation of the AU Sustainable Forest Management Framework

On Sustainable Land Management and the Great Green Wall for Sahara and Sahel Initiative (GGWSSI):

61. **CALL UPON** Member States, AUC and RECs to systematically integrate education and awareness raising initiatives or campaigns to adequately profile Sustainable Land Management issues;
62. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to scale up research and investment in the use of sustainable new technologies and approaches in tandem with Nature Based Solutions on land management to enhance coherence and synergies and work with all stakeholders, in particular youth, women and people living with disability;
63. **ENCOURAGE** the use of inclusive decision support systems and the importance of innovation driven information sharing;
64. **CALL** for post economic recovery measures that will address social and environmental challenges brought by the pandemic through the rehabilitation, conservation and restoration of degraded landscapes;
65. **REQUEST** Member States to increase investments in Sustainable Land Management and Restoration in the dry lands of Africa during the recovery period as the inhabitants of the region constitute the most vulnerable in many aspects;
66. **URGE** Member States to make sure that the urgency to combat COVID 19 is not at the detriment of land restoration. Rather, land restoration should be an integral part of the post COVID-19 plans;
67. **REQUEST** the AUC, RECs and Regional Organisations to develop multi-country projects covering multiple sectors to be able to mobilize resources on a large scale.
68. **REQUEST** the Commission to reposition the Great Green Wall Initiative as a flagship programme under the AU Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want;

On Conserving Africa's Wild Fauna and Flora and Biodiversity:

69. **URGE** Member States to understand and map the risks, with input from specialists on aspects of wildlife trade that link to zoonotic diseases such as markets, hubs, routes, companies involved, species of concern, transport methods, exposure to domestic animals, and practices that increase risk (such as stress in animals due to lack of welfare provisions);
70. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to implement an integrated approach, identifying the public and animal health regimes that need to be integrated with wildlife trade controls, as well as the connections needed to integrate responses in these different sectors in line with the One Health principle;
71. **URGE** Member States to develop a new agenda that also focusses on addressing and integrating public health risks into biodiversity and wildlife policies and activities;
72. **REQUEST** AUC to facilitate the development of a continent-wide, multi-agency and multi-disciplinary response to the challenges of the impact of COVID-19 on wildlife trade and consumption of wildlife products;
73. **CALL UPON** Member States to allocate appropriate emergency funds to cushion Rangers and wildlife conservation activities and build economic resilience through encouraging domestic tourism to increase revenue that supports wildlife conservation;
74. **URGE** Governments to appropriate funds for restoration of dwindling wetlands resulting from climate change as these support critical ecosystems for wildlife and livelihoods;

75. **CALL UPON** Member States to develop policies aimed at reducing pandemics emanating from wildlife trade and related biodiversity loss;
76. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to engage with bilateral and multilateral partners under the different cooperation framework agreements to secure funding for the wildlife sector;
77. **ENCOURAGE** community participation in Natural Resource Management and Environmental Management to ensure implementation of conservation projects to mitigate effects of COVID 19;
78. **REQUEST** the AUC to accelerate the implementation of the AU Strategy to Combat Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora;
79. **URGE** Member States, AUC, RECs and Regional Organisations to monitor, assess and implement effective ecosystem conservation measures and programmes including protected areas and ecosystem restoration programmes that can reduce pandemics, and trade-offs where disease spill over risk may increase;
80. **ENCOURAGE** Member States to mitigate against the destruction of ecosystems and encroachment of humans and livestock into biodiversity ecosystems as this provides new pathways for pathogens to spill over and increase transmission rates;
81. **CALL UPON** Member States to promote ecological restoration, which is critical for conservation, climate adaptation and provision of ecosystem services, which should integrate health considerations to avoid potential increased disease risk resulting from increased human-livestock-wildlife contact;
82. **REQUEST** Member States to safeguard and ensure fair and equitable access and benefit sharing derived from genetic resources, including pathogens, to facilitate more equitable access to vaccines and therapeutics, and broader engagement in research;
83. **CALL UPON** Member States to promote the valuing of local communities' engagement and knowledge in pandemic prevention programmes;
84. **CALL FOR** the enhanced implementation of compliance mechanisms, law enforcement and effective policy reform and development to address illegal, unregulated and unsustainable wildlife trade;
85. **CALL FOR** upscaled education and awareness at all levels of society including urban, peri-urban and local community on emerging infectious diseases hotspots regarding the health risks associated with wildlife that are known to pose a pandemic risk.

PROPOSED AFRICAN GREEN STIMULUS PROGRAMME

86. **WELCOMED** the proposed African Green Stimulus Programme (AGSP) which will be presented at the next Special Session of AMCEN for consideration. The initiative was developed to support the Continent's recovery response in a sustainable manner to the devastating socio-economic and environmental impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

87. The Ministers **ADOPTED** a Declaration on the Special Session of the African Ministers of Environment and Natural Resources on the Challenges and Opportunities Presented by the COVID-19 Pandemic (**ANNEX 1**)

Annex 1: ACRONYMS

AfDB	African Development Bank
AMCEN	African Ministerial Conference on Environment
AMCOMET	African Ministerial Conference on Meteorology
AMCOW	African Ministers' Council on Water
UMA	Arab Maghreb Union
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
CAADP	Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Plan
COMESA	Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa
CoP	Conference of Parties
CST	Committee on Science and Technology of the UNCCD
DREA	Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EAC	East African Community
EAWLS	East African Wildlife Society
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of the Western African States
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GGWSSI	Great Green Wall for Sahara and the Sahel Initiative
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
LDN	Land Degradation Neutrality
MEAs	Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements
MESA	Monitoring for Environment and Security in Africa
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NFP	National Focal Point
REC	Regional Economic Community
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STC	Specialized Technical Committee
SWA	Sanitation and Water for all
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene