

**The 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment  
AMCEN, Bamako, Mali from June 20-25**

**Africa Must No Longer Be A Passive Recipient Of Global Decisions On Climate  
Change**

**Bamako, Wednesday—23 June 2010:** Mali President His Excellency Ahmadou Toumani Toure officially opened the 13th Session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) at the Centre International de Conférences de Bamako amid calls that the continent can no longer be a passive recipient of global decisions on climate change.

The urgency for Africa to snap up the initiative was poignantly captured by President Toure when he stated: “Africa must be at the heart of the climate change movement because our continent is the most fragile. Climate change isn’t only taking away our land, rivers and crops; it’s also dispossessing us of our heritage, our myths and beliefs.”

Welcoming the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of AMCEN, the Mali Head of State said the meeting could not have taken place at a more opportune time, coming after Copenhagen and well ahead of Cancun later in the year. The conference, whose theme is, “Enhancing the interrelationship between climate change, biodiversity and desertification for sustainable development” also marked AMCEN’s twenty-five years since its establishment.

The opening ceremony also witnessed the handover of the AMCEN presidency to Mali by South Africa, which has held the presidency for the last two years.

In her speech, out-going AMCEN President Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, the South African minister of Water and Environmental Affairs asserted that Africa can no longer be the passive recipient of global climate change decisions. She stated: “Africa must engage within the context of the challenges facing the continent. It must interpret matters (climate change) as understood by Africans.”

Outlining the progress realized since the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of AMCEN, she noted that adopting and strengthening its single negotiating position should be the continent’s biggest asset on the negotiation table. “While Africa acknowledges and embraces the fact that the world is increasingly becoming a global village, there are pertinent issues that require common, united and coordinated approaches for the sake of our rich continent and its people. Allow me therefore to reflect briefly on some of these issues,” she added.

| Ms Sonjica [Buyelwa](#) said that in order to achieve the millennium development goals (MDGs) Africa must embrace and make a reality the principle of sustainable development. In this regard, the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of AMCEN presented a useful approach to

expanding the strategic focus of AMCEN to include other important environmental issues facing the Continent— in addition and in relation to the challenges posed by climate change. She called for more creative ways to transform challenges into opportunities in climate change be explored.

| The Speaker of the Pan African Parliament observed that although Copenhagen didn't live up to Africa's expectations it provided the critical lesson on the importance of a common African approach to climate change negotiations at the international level. He said climate change must be integrated in the development agenda in order to address the twin problem of poverty and how it's exacerbated by climate change.

In his keynote address, UNEP Executive Director Dr Achim Steiner pointed out that issues of the environment have increasingly moved to the center of economic development decisions. He said Africa has huge potential to pioneer a green economy revolution and regretted the state of paralysis that has characterized climate change negotiations at the global level, noting: "We cannot continue with this state of paralysis at the multilateral negotiations level." Dr Steiner, however, was positive that Africa's voice at Cancun would be much stronger.

| The African Union commissioner of the environment noted that the effects of climate change on the continent were getting more complex by the day and called for affordable technology that would hasten the shift towards a green economy in Africa.

### **Note to Editors**

Today the ministers deliberated on and adopted the report of the high level experts meeting, which preceded the ministerial Session of the 13<sup>th</sup> AMCEN conference. Thereafter they engaged in ministerial policy dialogue on international climate change regime beyond 2012 international climate change regime beyond 2012 and international regime on access and benefit sharing in the context of ongoing negotiations on biodiversity and enhanced implementation of the UN Convention to combat desertification.

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