

African Ministers Adopt the Nairobi Declaration on Climate

Nairobi, 2 June 2009 - On 29 May, ministers from more than 30 African countries adopted the Nairobi Declaration on climate at a weeklong special session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) in the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme in Nairobi, Kenya.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of UNEP which hosts the AMCEN secretariat, told the meeting: "Africa's environment ministers have today signaled their resolve to be part of the solution to the climate change challenge by forging a unified position, within their diversity of economies, in advance of the crucial UN climate convention meeting in Copenhagen in just 192 days' time."

The landmark document highlighted the major challenges and opportunities that African countries face in the upcoming negotiations in Copenhagen on a climate agreement that will succeed the Kyoto Protocol. The Declaration urges all parties - and particularly the international community - to base increased support for Africa on the priorities for the continent, which include adaptation, capacity-building, financing and technology development and transfer.

The Declaration could not have come sooner. "Africa is in peril. The continent faces disease, limited food security and more," warned Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in a press conference on the last day of the meeting.

Climate change is clearly impacting Africa in every way. According to the latest indicators, globally the climate is changing more rapidly than estimated. Today, nine out of every ten recorded disasters are climate related. Rising temperatures and more frequent and prolonged floods, droughts and storms are impacting millions of people's lives. And Africa is feeling the brunt of the changing weather patterns. Increasing numbers of natural disasters have left people grappling with drought, flooded houses and growing poverty.

Home to some of the major ecosystems in the world, climate change is also threatening some 20-30 per cent of species in Africa which now face the danger of extinction if global warming continues. According to a detailed study by Mozambique's national Disaster Management Institute, over the next 20 years and beyond the country will be overwhelmed by more natural disasters like cyclones, floods, droughts and disease outbreak as a result of climate change.

"Africa is one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change and has no means to respond to climate change," said Buyelwa Sonjica, President of AMCEN and Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs in South Africa, in her statement to the meeting.

"Climate change is the most serious threat to humanity," warned Erik Solheim, Minister of Environment of Norway, in his address to the AMCEN participants. "And Africa is facing this major threat and must rise to the occasion," he stressed.

Africa has to adapt to climate change but must also be compensated for having been the victim of the industrial pollution that it did not create. The continent has the lowest per capita emissions, and yet it is bearing the highest impact of climate change ? with projections showing that by 2020, in some African countries, yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50 per cent.

"Africa has today shouldered its domestic and global responsibilities. It is now time for other Continents and countries, especially the developed economies, to now seriously shoulder theirs," said Steiner.

Endemic poverty, limited access to capital, including markets, infrastructure and technology; ecosystem degradation; and multifaceted disasters and conflicts have all contributed to Africa's struggles. The continent represents less than 10 per cent of the carbon trading in the world even though its forests absorb a huge amount of the carbon emissions. These in turn have contributed to Africa's weak adaptive capacity, increasing the continent's vulnerability to climate change.

Adaptation therefore emerges as the most immediate priority. Since the Kyoto Protocol was drawn up in 1997, there has been some progress in acknowledging the need to support adaptation in developing countries. But most of the work remains to be done, particularly with the cost of adaptation in Africa estimated between \$1 billion and \$50 billion per year.

As existing financial mechanisms have proven inadequate, complex and fragmented, African countries have not yet been able to gain full access to these resources. The Declaration highlights the need for a coherent financial architecture for climate change and simplified access procedures.

In the run-up to the meeting in Copenhagen, it is clear that Africa needs a detailed strategy for combating climate change in a way that helps achieve sustainable development, particularly in terms of alleviating poverty, with an emphasis on the most vulnerable such as women and children who are bearing the brunt of the impact from climate change. "Africa's vote will be considered and that's why a strong African vision is crucial," said Mr

de Boer.

"Africa must be united for Copenhagen," added Jean-Louis Borloo, French Minister of the Environment. "The world cannot refuse anything in Copenhagen but African countries must be ready," he stressed.

The AMCEN meeting took place six months before the critical climate meeting in Copenhagen where the global climate agreement will be negotiated. As Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, which oversees the talks in Copenhagen, de Boer in an interview in Nairobi warned of the challenges ahead: "The scientists have also told us that if we don't get emissions under control quickly and if we don't adapt to the impact of climate change quickly, then things are going to get worse and worse."

He highlighted three points that need to be met in Copenhagen:

- clear and ambitious reduction strategies for rich countries, who have to show leadership;
- major developing countries have to limit the growth of their emissions;
- significant financial support must be mobilized for developing countries to limit their emissions and adopt to the impact of climate change.

While debates marked the elaboration of the Nairobi Declaration, the AMCEN participants were clear on one issue: time is running and action is needed. Having adopted the Nairobi Declaration, African Ministers are now hoping there will be similar consensus in Copenhagen. "We the African countries endorse the efforts of the UN Secretary General to combat climate change and to encourage governments around the world to 'Seal the Deal' and support a fair, balanced and effective climate agreement in Copenhagen in December," said John Michuki, Minister of Environment in Kenya, in his address to the AMCEN gathering.



© United Nations Environment Programme | [privacy policy](#) | [terms and conditions](#) | [contacts](#)
support UNEP