

“Building Resilience in Nutrition on the African Continent: Accelerate the Human Capital, Social and Economic Development”

Key Remarks by H.E Ambassador Omar HILALE (10 minutes)

9:15 – 10:15 (EST): Building Resilient Socio-Agricultural Food Systems: The Key to Nutrition

-First and foremost, allow me to thank OSAA and the African Union for convening the African dialogue Series on the crucial topic of **“Food Security in the African Continent: Accelerating the Human Capital, Social and Economic Development”**. I also commend the virtual format of our dialogues, offering a timely opportunity for capitals to follow and to interact with the content of the sessions.

-Every year, my delegation gives particular importance to the African Dialogue Series, considering its growing role to call the world’s attention on current and emerging African issues. Morocco has been, and continues advocating for Africa, in the interconnected fields of development, peace and security.

-More importantly, and as we discuss today how to build **African Resilience in Agriculture and Nutrition**, I am pleased to share Morocco’s perspective on how to tackle the current Food crisis and what opportunities Africa has, to build its food sovereignty in the years to come, by focusing on main 3 pivotal ideas:

1. **In order to enhance preparedness against future crises, achieving resilience needs to become a priority in policymaking in Africa, which means that every policy initiative that is launched needs to look at how to promote African countries’ resilience on that matter.**
2. **Highlighting that resilient socio-agricultural systems, are pre-conditions to improve nutrition in a significative and sustainable way.**
3. **Pointing out that, despite the challenges and set-backs, Africa is moving forward, and providing some examples and one recommendations to implement this type of policies**

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

-When it comes to food, malnutrition and hunger in the world, the numbers are alarming. **Over 821 million people are hungry** and more than **two billion people are overweight or obese**. **Despite a 300% increase in global food production since the mid-1960s**, malnutrition in all its forms is the number one factor contributing to the global burden of disease and reduced life expectancy.

-In Africa, levels of extreme poverty persist in rural areas, with the majority of more marginalized populations relying on food production for their livelihoods. **Food security in Africa is off track: In 2021, more than one in five people in Africa faced hunger—more than double the proportion of hungry people in any other region**. In fact, the continent remains, unfortunately, a net food importer at an **annual cost of \$43 billion**.

-To a large extent, the COVID-19 pandemic, and most recently the war in Ukraine, have revealed the limits of our health systems, and I refer not only to national systems but also the capacity of international health institutions to ensure global solidarity in face of a global health crisis.

- However, both crises have also illustrated the fragility of our food systems, and how easily they can be disrupted. **They have shown that an external shock can hamper years of progress on food security in**

the continent. In sum, they had shed light on the central question of the resilience of food systems and its link to people's food and nutrition security.

-What we witness today, is that **the many independent initiatives of governments, private sector and civil society that have emerged in support of more sustainable food systems lack a common framing of the complex interactions, dependencies and trade-offs intrinsic to food systems.** This is constraining the ability of African societies, with different priorities, observing different trends and having different agro-ecological and institutional potentials, to identify and implement appropriate pathways towards more sustainable and resilient mechanisms of Agriculture and Food production.

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

-With the world's geopolitical tensions, Food security in Africa demands even more urgent and serious attention.

-Today, the war in Ukraine is battering a global food system weakened by covid-19, climate change and an energy shock. Consequently, We've seen how **wheat prices, went up by 53% since the start of the year, jumped a further 6%** on May 16th, after India said it would suspend exports because of an alarming heatwave.

-The widely accepted idea of a cost-of-living crisis does not begin to capture the gravity of what may lie ahead. **The UN Secretary General, Mr Antonio Guterres, has recently warned that the coming months threaten "the specter of a global food shortage"** that could last for years. The high cost of staple foods has already raised the number of people who cannot be sure of getting enough to eat by 440m, to 1.6bn. **Nearly 250m are on the brink of famine and most of them are Africans.**

-If, as is likely, the war drags on and supplies are limited, hundreds of millions more people could fall into poverty. Political unrest will spread, children will be stunted, and people will starve.

-All this is having a grievous effect on Africa. **Households in emerging economies spend 25% of their budgets on food, and in sub-Saharan Africa as much as 40%.** In many African importing countries, governments cannot afford subsidies to increase the help to the poor, especially if they also import energy—another market in turmoil.

Now let me move to the African window of opportunities, and i ensure you thay we have a few promising ones in our continent:

-Food aid cannot feed Africa. Africa does not need bowls in hand. Africa needs seeds in the ground, and mechanical harvesters to harvest bountiful food produced locally. Africa will feed itself with pride, for there is no dignity in begging for food.

-Today, Africa has its **Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Plan (CAADP), the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth**, which aim to end hunger by 2025. These are frameworks that exist, with Programmes such as the **Adaptation of African Agriculture Initiative, launched in COP22 in Marrakech, as well as the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel.** They all demonstrate Africa's determination to drive its own development, with sustainable and long-term stewardship of its resources.

-Before COVID-19, reports indicate that there are **huge economic and business opportunities in Africa**. These reports found that household spending is expected to grow to \$2.5 trillion in 2025, while spending by business would grow to \$3.5 trillion in the same period. In addition, **Africa could nearly double its manufacturing output from \$500 billion to \$930 billion; three-quarters of that potential would come from manufacturing within Africa of some of processed-agro goods that Africa currently imports.**

-This is to say that Africa has enormous agricultural potential, with the largest share of the world's uncultivated fertile land, abundant water resources and proximity to transportation links and regional markets. **The continent's youth bulge is also a golden opportunity to be exploited, including by engaging more of the youth into sustainable agriculture and agricultural related activities.**

- For example, in 2017, Ghana launched its Planting for Food and Jobs initiative. An initiative focused at improving crop seeds, livestock and leveraging technology and mechanization of agriculture while promoting job creation.
- Similarly, in 2020 my country, Morocco, launched its Generation Green 2020-2030 Strategy, an initiative sustained on two pillars: human capital and sustainability.
- The first pillar of the strategy seeks to strengthen the livelihoods of agri-producers, supporting rural youth and effectively contributing to the emergence of an agricultural middle-class that enhances equality and income distribution to underpin the countries' economic growth.
- The second pillar, looks at the elements that can support the transformation of the country's agricultural sector into a competitive economic actor that, at the same time, takes into account the country's natural resources and environmental conditions, ensuring its long-term sustainability.
- These are just some examples of how African countries are facing their challenges.

-With these success stories in mind, and With adequate investment, African agriculture can also contribute to intra-Africa trade; industrialization; economic diversification; sustainable consumption; environmental management; job creation, and shared prosperity.

-Additionally, **Climate change can also be seen as an opportunity, for innovation and adaptation.**

-In fact, recurrent food security crises in Africa provide stark evidence of the need to build Africa's resilience and ability to cope with climate change, especially that Africa's agriculture is very climate-dependent.

-In this vein, Morocco, like many other like-minded African countries, is determined to turn climate challenges into opportunities, especially to improve agricultural performance. Already, **Morocco is contributing to solutions for addressing climate change through various initiatives, including the Climate Smart Agriculture and the AAA Initiative, which aim to increase agricultural productivity and incomes as well as enhancing resilience of food systems and farming livelihoods.**

-What Africa needs is increased investment in agriculture, through mobilization of resources, both public and private. Moreover, there is a need to attract foreign investment, which is socially responsible, and one that benefits African local small-holder farmers.

-Trade restrictions and distortions prevent African from accessing the international markets. Morocco believes there is a need to address these and other bottlenecks, which inhibits Africa's sustainable agriculture development.

-While we are deliberating on agriculture, food security and nutrition, it is **equally important to address cross-cutting issues including the role of science technology and innovation.** Morocco emphasizes the need to scale up investment in infrastructure development, especially in areas of renewable energy, transportation and storage; with a view to remove the impediments for realizing agriculture's full potential inside our continent.

To Conclude,

-Africa should double its determination, especially in these difficult times, to achieve a continent in which people can produce sufficient food for domestic and external markets and restore its status as the world's net exporter of agricultural products, rather than a net importer of food.

-Realization of Africa's full agriculture potential will positively impact the livelihood of farmers, fishermen and members of their households; It will impact all Africans and has also the potential to feed the world.

-There is no "one size fits all magic formula" but African countries that have succeeded nationally to ensure their agriculture sovereignty and that are producing locally and depending less on external market shocks, are best placed to help their African peers, to achieve this ambition.

-This means further promoting green finance for Africa in the next decade; investing in a just and inclusive industrial transition and rebuilding the Agricultural sector inside the continent to depend less on food imports and to create local jobs for the current and future generations.