

**Opening Statement by H.E. Ambassador Collen Vixen Kelapile,
President of the Economic and Social Council**

**AU capacity-building workshop on Africa's Voluntary National Reviews for
the HLPF 2022 and domestication of Agenda 2063**

***28 March 2022
Abuja, Nigeria (hybrid)***

***Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,***

- 1.** It is my pleasure to provide opening remarks to this annual Capacity Building Workshop on the Voluntary National Reviews and Domestication of Agenda 2063, convened by the African Union's African Peer Review Mechanism. Accordingly, I would like to thank the APRM for all the excellent work they are doing in the region.
- 2.** I also wish to thank all the partners involved in co-organizing this workshop, including UN DESA, the SDG Centre for Africa, the African Development Bank, the African Union Commission, and the UNDP Regional Centre in Addis Ababa.
- 3.** Special thanks also to Nigeria's Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs for hosting this gathering in a hybrid format. I regret that am unavailable to participate in-person.

Excellencies,

- 4.** I commend and fully support the aim of this workshop in building the national capacities of AU Member States to present their Voluntary National Reviews at the upcoming High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) from 5 to 15 July, under the auspices of ECOSOC.

5. The theme of this year's HLPF is: ***“Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”***.
6. Under this theme, the HLPF will provide an important high-level platform for Ministers, heads of UN agencies and stakeholders to discuss the policies and measures that have been successful in responding to the current crises, how the international community can overcome shared challenges, and how, together, we can strengthen and achieve the SDGs and ensure a better future for everyone.
7. The High-level segment of ECOSOC this year will also address the shortcomings in multilateral cooperation that were revealed by the response to COVID-19, and efforts to ensure fair and equitable access to the vaccines, especially for vulnerable populations living in low-income countries. The vaccines are crucial to recovery of our countries.
8. As President of ECOSOC, my top priority is to ensure equitable distribution of the vaccine. I have pledged to utilize the full strength of ECOSOC, as well as the HLPF held under its auspices, to maximize its role to identify policy solutions to act and take implementation of its decisions seriously.

Excellencies,

9. This year, the VNRs will cover the implementation of the whole 2030 Agenda, but also take up the theme of the HLPF by showcasing how each country is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and whether the responses support progress toward the SDGs.
10. We are looking forward to hearing about the many different policies, initiatives and solutions that countries are implementing, and to support peer-learning to ensure a resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, while supporting sustainable development.
11. The VNRs have increasingly become more evidence-based and more inclusive, and have been broadening their reach to incorporate the work at local levels through the Voluntary Local Reviews, which in turn are helping to domesticate the 2030 Agenda along with Agenda 2063.

12. I am therefore excited that, over the course of the next two days, this workshop will provide a regional platform for peer-learning on best practices to integrate and implement the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, as well as implementation of the Principles for effective governance adopted by ECOSOC, the utilization of monitoring and evaluation tools, as well as data collection and harmonization, and institutional capacity building.
13. In addition, I note with enthusiasm and appreciation the inclusion of sessions dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as a session focused on youth. These are matters at the heart of ECOSOC's work. I congratulate APRM for an impressive programme.
14. The sharing of success stories and lessons learned will propel progress in Africa. It will help provide support for those countries who need it, so that no country is left behind. I hope this meeting will also serve as a useful opportunity to enrich the VNRs of the countries presenting this year -- 21 of which are African countries.
15. I also want to take this opportunity to encourage you to engage with the Group of Friends of VNRs, co-chaired by the Permanent Representatives of Morocco and the Philippines in New York. The aim is for each country presenting a VNR to benefit from the advice of another country, serving as a "friend", in preparation for the interaction at the HLPF.
16. I would like to call on all African VNR presenting countries to identify "friends" to ensure that your VNRs benefits from an in-depth review by one or more other countries.
17. In closing, I want to thank you all again for being a part of this workshop. I am certain its outcomes will enrich the preparatory process, as we head towards the HLPF in July.
18. It is gatherings such as this one that give momentum to efforts to gear national policies and strategies towards the integrated implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda, so that we reach those furthest behind.

I Thank You.