Report of the ministerial segment

I. Introduction

1. The ministerial segment of the fifteenth session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) was held at the Dusit Thani Lakeview Hotel in Cairo from 4 to 6 March 2015.

2. It was attended by representatives of AMCEN member States and of African regional and subregional organizations, United Nations agencies, secretariats of various environmental conventions and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The full list of participants may be found in document UNEP/AMCEN/15/INF/.

II. Opening of the meeting

3. The opening ceremony began at 4.40 p.m. on Wednesday, 4 March 2015, with an introduction by the master of ceremonies and welcoming remarks by Mr. Khaled Fahmy, Minister of Environment, Egypt, who welcomed the participants to the fifteenth session, saying that Egypt was privileged to be hosting the session 30 years after the beginning of AMCEN in Cairo. The work of AMCEN was truly impressive, especially with regard to its role in bringing together countries to face challenges linked to the environment and sustainable development, and the impressive attendance at the meeting was testimony to its impact and importance.

A. Welcoming remarks

4. Welcoming remarks were made by Mr. Binilith Mahenge, Minister of State for Environment of the United Republic of Tanzania and outgoing President of AMCEN; Ms. Olushola Olayide, who read remarks by Ms. Rhoda Peace Tumusiime, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, African Union Commission; and Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

5. In his statement, Mr. Mahenge expressed appreciation on behalf of AMCEN to the Government and people of Egypt for hosting the meeting and to all member States, UNEP and the African Union Commission for their support for the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania during its presidency of AMCEN. Reviewing the work of AMCEN since its fourteenth session in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, he highlighted the guidance provided to the African climate change negotiators in developing the key messages and common position of Africa that were taken to the climate change negotiations in Doha, Warsaw and Lima; work in the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change that culminated in the adoption of the High-Level Work Programme on Climate Change in Africa; the publication of the first Africa’s Adaptation Gap Report, the third Africa Environment Outlook report and the Africa Mountains Atlas, among others. Several decisions adopted at the fourteenth session of AMCEN had been implemented or were in the process of implementation, although many issues such as the development of regional flagship programmes, active participation of African countries in preparing the post-2015 development agenda, implementation in Africa of the Nagoya Protocol on access and benefit sharing of genetic resources, and steps to achieve more sustainable use of natural capital and to combat the illegal trade in wildlife, remained high on the agenda at the current session and in the period ahead. He stressed that the meeting was taking place against a backdrop of unprecedented challenges in the areas of climate
change, food insecurity, poverty and environmental degradation, but at the same time a number of forthcoming events in 2015 would provide opportunities to address those challenges, including the climate change conference in Paris, the adoption of the sustainable development goals by the United Nations General Assembly in September and the third international conference on financing for development to be held in Addis Ababa in July. African environment ministers had the possibility of influencing the course of sustainable development on the continent and should work towards achieving sustainable development with the continent’s own resources.

6. In her remarks, Ms. Tumusiime conveyed the gratitude of the African Union Commission for the support of member States for events held in the 2014 Year of Agriculture and Food Security to raise awareness of key issues for Africa. Their collective efforts had culminated in the adoption of the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity during the twenty-third session of the African Union Assembly in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, in June 2014, thus maintaining the momentum of the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme. The fifteenth session of AMCEN was taking place shortly after the adoption of Agenda 2063, with its emphasis on sustainable development, at the twenty-fourth session of the African Union Assembly held in January 2015 in Addis Ababa. She expressed her conviction that the current session would enable the consolidation of preparations for the twenty-first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change in Paris in December 2015. Singling out several issues of particular interest to Africa, she said that it was essential to act quickly in view of the multiplicity of challenges facing the continent. Science-based information was essential for effective negotiations; to that end, in Malabo the African Union Assembly had adopted the High Level Work Programme on Climate Change Action in Africa and in January 2015 had urged all member States to implement the programme. She noted that the African Union Commission had continued to achieve progress in a number of areas, including the African Climate Change Strategy, the Africa Environment Day and the draft guidelines on the Nagoya Protocol. In conclusion, she thanked the United Republic of Tanzania for its recent coordination of the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change.

7. In his statement, Mr. Steiner said that it was inspiring to be in Cairo, the city that had given birth to AMCEN 30 years earlier, especially as that anniversary coincided with Egypt assuming the presidency of AMCEN in a symbol of the renewed engagement of Egypt with issues of sustainable development and environment in Africa. It was fitting, on that occasion, to recognize the pioneering work of Moustafa Tolba, a son of Egypt and former Executive Director of UNEP, who had played a key role in the early evolution of AMCEN, the Montreal Protocol and the environmental agenda generally. When the first session of AMCEN was convened, the world had not had the environmental institutions, legislation and policies that it had currently, and the environmental agenda had been considered marginal to the core objective of development. Today, Africa was at the forefront of the global environmental agenda, demonstrating that the environment was central to development and showing boldness, innovation and reform in integrating the three pillars of sustainable development. The challenges were daunting, including the energy gap, ecosystem degradation and particularly climate change, the economic and social consequences of which were becoming all too visible. Climate change, however, could be viewed not just as a threat, but as an opportunity to tap renewable energy resources to leapfrog a generation of energy infrastructure and avoid the hugely damaging 20th-century fossil fuel path followed by much of the rest of the world.

8. Other major challenges threatening Africa’s ability to make full use of its natural capital included deforestation, charcoal burning and illegal trade in wildlife. Those were not only sectoral issues, as they had massive social and economic implications for the peaceful and efficient functioning of society as a whole, for example as the source of funding for large-scale criminal activities that threatened peace and security. Returning to the matter of climate change, he stressed that adaptation needed to be given the same prominence as mitigation, and it was incumbent upon Africa to ensure that that point was strongly made, and the voice of Africa clearly heard, in the forthcoming climate change deliberations, including the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to take place in Paris in December 2015. He praised the part that Africa had played in phasing out ozone-depleting substances under the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and called for similar efforts in facing the next major challenge under the Protocol of how to deal with hydrofluorocarbons. In conclusion, he saluted AMCEN for its efforts to support the transition towards an inclusive green economy in which environmental issues were addressed in a way that was compatible with sustainable development and healthy societies.
B. Recognition ceremony

9. There followed a ceremony in which the Prime Minister presented Mr. Moustafa Tolba, former Executive Director of UNEP and former Minister for Scientific Research of Egypt, Mr. Steiner and Mr. Mounkaila Goumandakoye, Director, UNEP Regional Office for Africa, were presented with sculptures in recognition of their long and effective service on behalf of the environment and sustainable development.

C. Remarks by the Prime Minister of Egypt

10. Mr. Ibrahim Mahlab, Prime Minister of Egypt, welcomed the members of AMCEN and other participants to Egypt. In the struggle for independence, he said, the countries of Africa had shared their pains, and they now shared their common hopes for a brighter future for the continent. He congratulated the ministers for all they had achieved over the 30-year existence of AMCEN in directing the environmental policies of Africa towards conserving natural resources while supporting the development process. Policymakers needed to adopt a common vision to respond to the challenges facing the continent, particularly climate change, which would have profound implications for production and consumption in the coming decades. It was important to mobilize resources to create new job opportunities for young people and enable them to fulfil their potential to contribute to the development of the continent. Women, too, should be empowered, and their roles and needs taken into account in the development of environmental policies for Africa.

11. Of crucial importance to the development of the continent, he continued, were the three elements of water, food and energy. The three were closely interrelated and of critical relevance to the challenge of climate change. It was vital, in that regard, to strike a balance between the development needs of African countries and the conservation of natural resources. There was wide consensus that the sustainable use of natural resources would help to eliminate poverty, achieve development objectives and ensure peace and security. Efforts should be made to maximize the benefits that could be derived from natural capital, including through transboundary cooperation, without infringing on equity and justice. Traditional knowledge had helped the people of Africa over hundreds of years and resources had been used wisely to combat disease and assist food security, and lessons could be learned from that tradition. Finally, he said there was a need to cooperate with partners to mobilize the required resources, including through technology transfer, to finance regional and subregional projects and establish institutions that could empower the people of Africa to move the sustainable development agenda forward.

D. Opening remarks

12. Opening remarks were made by Ms. Annick Girardin, Minister of State for Development, France; Mr. Prakash Javadekar, Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India; Ms. Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; Mr. Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity; Mr. Tom Makela, Representative of the European Union Commissioner for Development; Mr. Anthony Nyong, African Development Bank; Mr. Husam Abudagga, World Bank Acting Country Director for Egypt; and Mr. Augustine Njamnshi, speaking on behalf of civil society organizations.

13. Ms. Girardin, in her remarks, said that two key meetings would be held in 2015 to build a world without carbon and without poverty: the first was on the sustainable development goals at the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September, and the second was on climate change at the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change in Paris in December. Those in developing countries, although largely not responsible for climate change, could not focus only on poverty and not on saving the planet; conversely, a failure to address poverty by developed countries could doom the climate change negotiations to failure. Reducing emissions and supporting renewable energy and water initiatives on the African continent would lead to a more sustainable world, and the vision of a world without carbon and poverty was a shared one. At the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties, the responsibility of France would be to foster dialogue to enable a binding agreement to limit the temperature rise of the planet to 2 degrees celsius. Progress had been made to date, and confidence and transparency would be key to the achievement of a successful outcome. Stressing that France would listen to and stand by African States, she said that the climate alliance in Paris must involve all States and stakeholders. Possible agreement in Paris would entail four key pillars: the agreement should be legally binding on all; should involve nationally defined emissions reduction contributions by all countries consistent with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities; should deal squarely with the means of implementation, in particular financing; and should emphasize solutions that could be put in place immediately to achieve the goal of limiting the temperature rise to 2 degrees. The four pillars could
lead to a balanced agreement but would be impossible to achieve without Africa, a continent that had always played a constructive role and could help to build bridges between countries. Success at the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties needed Africa, and Africa needed success at the twenty-first session.

14. In his statement, Mr. Javadekar said that he was honoured to be invited to the current session of AMCEN. India, he observed, echoed the aspirations of Africa; it had stood with Africa in its struggle against colonial rule and apartheid and it was ready to take that spirit of cooperation to a new level. There were several parallels between the Indian subcontinent and the African continent: although Africa was much larger, the populations of the two were of a similar magnitude, and both had huge potential for the development of renewable energy resources. In addition, both India and Africa placed great emphasis on the proper management of natural capital for sustainable development and poverty eradication, as well as on intergenerational equity. Many of Africa’s proposed sustainable development goals resonated with India’s national objectives, and the country was making great strides in such areas as water and sanitation provision, financial support for the poor and gender equity. On the matter of climate change, he said that negotiations under the Framework Convention on Climate Change should be firmly based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. There should be equitable sharing of the carbon space, with the developed countries vacating that space to accommodate the emerging economies and respecting the right of developing countries to achieve development while moving to a greener growth trajectory. India, cognizant of its responsibility to future generations, had been proactive in taking action to fulfill its obligations under the Montreal Protocol ahead of schedule, but there was a pressing need for technology transfer to enable India and other developing countries to maintain their progress in combating climate change and global warming. Leveraging the necessary resources, however, was very difficult, especially as pledges to the Green Climate Fund had been inadequate for the task. Time was short, and it was essential to sort out those issues before the climate change conference in Paris.

15. In her opening statement, Ms. Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, said that Africa must take timely action to address climate change to prevent further increases in food insecurity, water stress and negative health impacts that could otherwise lead to catastrophic losses of lives and livelihoods. She called for a two-pronged response: accelerated adaptation at the national and local levels through holistic national adaptation plans, together with deep and rapid emissions reductions based on the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and equity. Concurring with the Executive Director of UNEP that Africa’s need to change its ways was an opportunity to reshape its future, she said that the international climate change framework could serve as a platform for investment and future prosperity. In enhancing its agricultural practices, for example, Africa could become the “food garden of the world”, and its efforts to provide energy-deprived populations with electricity could stimulate a renewable energies boom that would play a central role in sustainable development. In regard to the latter, she drew attention to some of the many initiatives already launched by African countries to convert their energy-generating capacity to both off-grid and on-grid renewables, a complete list of which would be available through the Green Growth Africa initiative proposed by Morocco. The United Nations climate summit in Paris the following December would be a major opportunity for Africa to reshape its future, and she called for the continent’s leaders to streamline their draft negotiating text to ensure the adoption of a beneficial agreement. In the meantime, she suggested that African countries should begin to identify any additional financial vehicles that they might require at the seventh Africa Carbon Forum in April 2015; that they develop their intended nationally determined contributions; that they ensure ratification of the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol; and that they submit adaptation and mitigation projects for the 2015 Momentum for Change Awards.

16. In his remarks, Mr. de Souza Dias commended the consideration being given to the draft African Union guidelines for the coordinated implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Saying that the Protocol could contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity as well as broader issues such as poverty eradication and sustainable development, he congratulated the African Union for spearheading its ratification and implementation, noting that 27 of the 59 countries that had ratified it to date were African. At its first meeting, in October 2014, the Conference of the Parties to the Protocol had established a firm foundation for its operationalization, and the African Union guidelines could further contribute to that end. The maintenance of biodiversity, he said, should not be perceived as a problem but as an opportunity to support the achievement of broader social and economic goals, and he called for the promotion of the sustainable use, restoration and conservation of biodiversity in all aspects of sustainable development, stressing that investment in biodiversity was the true measure of biodiversity as natural capital. Other means of strengthening the implementation of the Convention included the adoption of more
integrated and regional approaches, and he urged AMCEN to prepare at its next session for the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, strengthening the involvement of regional and international organizations. In conclusion, he welcomed the interest expressed by the Government of Egypt in hosting the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 2018.

17. Mr. Makela, in his statement, welcomed the first opportunity for a representative of the European Environment Commissioner to take part in a session of AMCEN. The European Union and Africa shared a number of concerns regarding the environment, notably with regard to climate change, the post-2015 development agenda and illicit wildlife trafficking, and several key issues had been identified for cooperation between the European Union and AMCEN. Increasingly, environmental issues had a global dimension and it was in the interests of all parties to address them together. The European Union had undertaken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 per cent between 1990 and 2030 and hoped that African countries would similarly develop ambitious intended nationally determined contributions as a strong signal to other regions with higher emissions. He said that the European Union was aware of the importance of adaptation to African countries and supported their aim of achieving strong provisions on adaptation under a new climate change regime. The European Union was proposing a global partnership for poverty eradication and post-2015 sustainable development with appropriate and ambitious commitments for all member States, while taking account of levels of development and national contexts and addressing the needs of the least developed countries. On the issue of wildlife trafficking, the European Union was ready to intensify cooperation with African countries and had defined a new strategy for supporting wildlife conservation in Africa.

18. In his statement, Mr. Nyong expressed appreciation on behalf of the President of the African Development Bank for the invitation to attend the current meeting, and he welcomed the Conference’s return to the site of the founding of AMCEN thirty years previously. He applauded the outstanding achievements of the Conference in the time since then, and he expressed confidence that through collective efforts, African countries would address outstanding and critical environmental and sustainable development issues. The African Development Bank had established the African Natural Resource Centre to support efforts to harness Africa’s natural capital for sustainable development. It had also invested over six billion dollars to support climate resilient and low carbon development in Africa, and it would continue to support the active participation of the African group of negotiators in the negotiations leading up to the Paris climate change conference.

19. Mr. Abudagga, in his opening statement, drew attention to the World Bank’s flagship TerrAfrica partnership of sub-Saharan environment and agriculture ministers and international partners, co-chaired with NEPAD, which formed part of the Bank’s efforts to address Africa’s continuing vulnerability by building the resilience of ecosystems and livelihoods within the framework of its mission to eradicate poverty and to sustainably boost shared prosperity. The partnership, he said, had secured some $3 billion for sustainable land and water management projects and had brought land degradation, climate adaptation and resilience linked to development to the forefront of the dialogue in national and global policy forums. He requested AMCEN to support the new TerrAfrica business plan for 2015–2020 and to endorse the African Landscapes Action Plan as a basis for collective action to achieve concrete solutions through, among other things, policy changes, institution-building and technological development.

20. In his remarks Mr. Njamnshi called upon the member States of AMCEN to bring pressure to bear on rich countries to honour their unfulfilled commitments and change the unsustainable production and consumption patterns that contributed to Africa’s increasing vulnerability. He urged them to ensure that those countries presented emissions reduction targets as intended nationally determined contributions at the Paris summit in December 2015; monetized transfers of finance and technology transfers via strengthened institutions; took steps to ensure the meaningful implementation of adaptation and low-carbon development strategies that included risk management and efforts to address the rights and needs of populations displaced as a result of climate change; and agreed to the full participation of African environment and climate change experts in the negotiations to finalize the post-2015 development agenda. He furthermore urged member States to ensure the sustainable and equitable utilization of Africa’s natural capital by Africans for the benefit of Africa while investing in the transformation of African genetic resources on the continent and fast-tracking the development of an African common strategy for combatting illegal trade in wildlife. Meanwhile, he said, civil society was also keen to see the adoption of an African regional convention on Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, ensure that citizens had access to information and an effective participatory role in decision-making, which was crucial to sustainable development, as well as in the work of the United Nations Environment Assembly, with regional representatives of the major groups and stakeholders, especially women and youth, granted speaking rights at sessions of the Committee of Permanent Representatives and the Assembly itself. It was crucial, he said, not to ignore the capacity of African civil society.
E. Launch of publications

21. Following the opening remarks a brief ceremony was held to launch the second Africa Adaption Gap Report and the Africa Mountains Atlas.

III. Organizational matters

A. Election of officers

22. The following countries were elected to serve on the Bureau of AMCEN for the period 2015–2016:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subregion</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Africa</td>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>Vice-President and Rapporteur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Africa</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>Vice-President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Africa</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>Vice-President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>Vice-President</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23. Upon assuming office as President, Mr. Fahmy expressed appreciation to his predecessor for his efforts of the previous two years and pledged to follow in his footsteps in working with fellow ministers to move from project design to implementation in order to tackle the problems and challenges confronting every country in Africa. Although AMCEN was a gathering of environment ministers, those problems and challenges, whether in the realm of climate change or biodiversity, were economic in nature. The countries of Africa were rich in culture and resources, yet their resources had not yet translated into financial wealth commensurate with their abundance, and only by standing united could the ministers rectify that situation.

B. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

24. The representatives agreed to add to the agenda for the session an item on biodiversity. The representatives accordingly adopted the following agenda on the basis of the provisional agenda (AMCEN/15/1/Rev/1) as orally amended:

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Organizational matters:
   (a) Election of officers;
   (b) Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
3. Consideration of the report of the meeting of the expert group.
4. Ministerial policy dialogue:
   (a) Managing the natural capital of Africa for sustainable development and poverty eradication;
   (b) Post-2015 activities, including sustainable development goals;
   (c) Outcomes and analysis of the twentieth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and preparations for the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
5. Matters related to the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment
   (a) Operationalization of the specialized technical committees of the African Union and its implications for the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment;
   (b) Development and implementation of the regional flagship programmes;
   (c) Trust Fund of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment.
6. Consideration of draft declaration, draft decisions and key messages.
8. Adoption of the report of the ministerial segment.
9. Other matters.
10. Closure of the session.

C. Organization of work

25. The President of AMCEN introduced the draft programme of work and the list of documents for the ministerial segment contained in annexes I and II to the annotations to the provisional agenda (AMCEN/15/1/Rev.1/Add.1).

IV. Ministerial policy dialogue

26. [To be completed]

A. Managing the natural capital of Africa for sustainable development and poverty eradication

27. [To be completed]

B. Post-2015 activities, including sustainable development goals

28. [To be completed]

C. Outcomes and analysis of the twentieth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and preparations for the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

29. [To be completed]

V. Matters related to the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment

30. [To be completed]

A. Operationalization of the specialized technical committees of the African Union and its implications for the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment

31. [To be completed]

B. Development and implementation of the regional flagship programmes

32. [To be completed]

C. Trust Fund of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment

33. [To be completed]

VI. Consideration of draft declaration, draft decisions and key messages

34. [To be completed]

VII. Venue and date of the sixteenth session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment

35. [To be completed]

VIII. Adoption of the report of the ministerial segment

36. [To be completed]
IX. Other matters

37. [To be completed]

X. Closure of the session

38. [To be completed]