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Remarks to the Meeting with African Regional Economic Communities

Building the resilience of African countries, regional and sub-regional institutions to prevent and respond to humanitarian crises and disasters

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As delivered

On behalf of OCHA, I am very honoured and pleased to be co-chair. Thank you to the African Union and the Office for the Special Advisor on Africa for bringing us on board as co-organizers and co-chairs in this important event today. Thanks also to the Regional Economic Communities, the building blocks for Africa's economic integration, and Member States China, Turkey, and Brazil for sharing their experiences.

Today we will hear firsthand about the efforts being made in African communities, to build capacity and forge partnerships that will enable people to adapt and respond to different types of crisis, address risks, break the cycle of dependency and reduce the need for humanitarian assistance.

Africa's economic growth, and its future potential, are changing the narrative, both on the continent and outside. Traditional and emerging powers are seeking stronger partnerships on the continent. African Governments and their partners are taking ownership of growth and reconstruction. There are high hopes for the African transformation embodied in Agenda 2063. But economic growth and outward engagement have yet to be matched by social development. High rates of poverty, unemployment, and vulnerability to natural and man-made shocks persist in many parts of the continent, while humanitarian needs are increasing due to changing weather patterns and urbanization.

One key to building resilience is by developing innovative and broader-based partnerships involving public and private sectors, Governments and local authorities, national and regional institutions and others. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can help bridge different approaches by uniting around a common goal. Regional Economic Communities have a very important role to play here, by bringing the expertise and innovation of the private sector into crisis prevention and response.

For example, OCHA and several African Governments are connecting with mobile phone operators and service providers to give Africa's 750 million mobile phone users information quickly so that they can act before a crisis hits. This has already been used for flood warnings in countries including Kenya, Nigeria and Benin, saving lives and money.

The other key to translating economic growth into sustainable development is African leadership of programmes that link immediate humanitarian relief with longer-term development programming.

OCHA's work in Africa is firmly based around supporting national strategies to build the resilience of people and communities to economic and climate-based shocks. These strategies include for example the Government of Niger's flagship food and nutrition programme called the 3Ns: Les Nigériens Nourissent les Nigériens (*Nigériens feed Nigériens*) and the Operation Bondafa in Burkina Faso, which supports farmers to address long-term food insecurity. OCHA very much also recognizes and supports regional strengths, such as the AU's Africa Risk Capacity as presented and IGAD's Drought Resilience Platform. Earlier this year, OCHA supported a cross-regional meeting of East and West Africa to discuss the topic of resilience.

The UN Integrated Strategy on Resilience Building in the Sahel offers guidance for such programmes, and various UN agencies and Governmental departments are collaborating on resilience projects in Chad, Niger, Ethiopia and Sudan, among other countries.

But resilience programming has yet to attract the funding it should, even though all the evidence shows that it is life-saving and cost-effective. For every dollar spent on preparedness, we save six on expensive disaster response. Resilience protects development gains and ensures better and faster recovery from shocks and crises. We are exploring new approaches towards mobilizing resources, including multi-year strategies and appeals and financial tools based on insurance.

Regional planning across borders around preparedness and resilience is also improving. For example, we have seen joint planning for countries around the Niger River in case of a cholera outbreak, and plans in countries bordering Mali for a possible influx of refugees.

Regional Economic Communities have a vested interest in this work and a clear role to play. Safeguarding investment in staff and infrastructure across borders must be a priority for sustained economic growth.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

I hope these two elements – multi-stakeholder partnerships and supporting national resilience strategies – will be fully explored in today's discussions.

I look forward to hearing your experiences and personally engaging with the Regional Economic Communities in Africa.

Thank you.