

**Deputy Secretary-General**

**Opening Message on the occasion of the**

**Great Green Wall Ministerial Meeting**

**7<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

**Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests,  
Dear Colleagues,**

**A notable proverb says: if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.**

**This is the promise that the Great Green Wall holds for 11 countries of the Sahel region.**

**The opportunity to act in solidarity to end poverty and hunger, fight climate change, and bring peace to a region ravaged by conflict.**

**To empower a strong diverse people, especially our women and youth, with the resources to forge new economic pathways bringing sustainable development into all lives and communities across the Sahel and beyond.**

**It is a call to African leadership for collective action to realize the promise of the Great Green Wall.**

**I would like to humbly proffer 3 reflections to inform this important gathering of African leaders and partners as we shape the next decade of action to achieve the Sustainable development Goals. These reflections are underpinned by a sense of urgency, potential and much needed action.**

**Excellencies,**

**In the spirit of urgency let me underscore the imperative to approach the Great Green Wall as a development response in the short, medium and long term. A response that must attract and sustain investments in projects and programs within and across the borders of the 11 countries it covers. Investments that must be leveraged by genuine partnerships from business to the public sector and civil society.**

**A ‘must and can do’ initiative that can build on the work of the past years while raising the ambition and scale of the endeavour that we must have now.**

**We *must* grow and build the Great Green Wall to confront the existential threats facing the people we serve and represent. These real threats of climate and conflict are running faster than the efforts to which we are making to realise the opportunity the GGW brings in stemming the crises.**

**Africa stands on the frontlines of the climate crisis.**

**The climate crisis is expanding deserts, shrinking biodiversity, exacerbating water and food insecurity and hunger, and it is increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events - placing the lives, jobs and livelihoods of hundreds of millions of Africans at risk.**

**The IPCC in its special report on the 1.5 degree goal estimates that even if the world is successful in achieving this goal, climate stress could still force a further 100 million people into poverty across Africa and other parts of the developing world. The world is**

**currently on a three-degree temperature increase pathway.**

**These are sobering numbers, but they are much more than that. This is the lived reality of hundreds of millions of people across our region. Our women, girls and young people carry the burden of this crisis every day, every hour.**

**We simply cannot surrender to a lived reality of suffering, starvation and extinguished hope for hundreds of millions of our people. More especially if there is an alternative solution.**

**Which brings me to the potential.**

**The Great Green Wall can – and will - change the lived reality of millions of our people. More jobs, better health, greater stability. More resilient and cohesive communities and stronger inclusive economic growth.**

**As we survey the wreckage of COVID-19, and make our plans to rebuild through robust stimulus packages, it would be a missed opportunity not to see investing in the Great Green Wall as an integral component of an**

**inclusive sustainable economic response and recovery to COVID.**

**New business opportunities in sustainable food and land use have been estimated at US\$320 billion annually by 2030 across sub-Saharan Africa alone. Why not re-imagine the GGW as an economic corridor bearing the fruit of decent jobs, green energy and smart agriculture.**

**By putting nature-based solutions to work across supply chains and energy systems, the Great Green Wall will create up to 10 million greener jobs in the region by 2030.**

**In doing so, it can join communities especially our women and youth, together creating an ecosystem of sustainable development, transforming whole industries within and across our borders reinforcing the implementation of Africa's CFTA.**

**As we weigh up the social and economic dividends of harnessing healthier ecosystems, women and young people stand to benefit most, bringing with it a much-**

**needed environment of peace, stability and human dignity.**

**The Secretary-General has urged all countries to use the opportunity of the Covid-19 crisis to recover better. Excellencies the Agenda 2030 and 2063 Agenda are the blueprints and the GGW an investment waiting to be fuelled. It's time to make the promise a reality now.**

**Which brings me to the much-needed action.**

**Since 2007, the initiative has made great progress, which I heartily applaud. Significant gains can be seen in Senegal, Nigeria and Ethiopia with hectares of land reclaimed and restored, millions of trees planted and the creation of thousands of jobs.**

**But this must be just the start. If we are to meet our target of 100 million hectares and 10 million jobs by 2030, we need to do much more.**

**For the next ten years, 8.2 million hectares of land will need to be restored every year. This will require investment estimated at around \$3.6 billion a year.**

**These investments must come from both public and private sources, both international and domestic.**

**International solidarity will be essential, and so I join the Secretary-General in thanking all multilateral and bilateral partners of the initiative, and in urging you to do more. We know this ask is significant, coming at a very difficult time, and so we urge you to also tap into your networks, and leave no stone unturned.**

**Equally important, we need to work together better. So I urge all partners to redouble your coordination efforts, across the African Union, its Development Agency, the Pan African Agency for the Great Green Wall; the Member States involved; and others like the European Union, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility.**

**To the Honourable Ministers here today, my former esteemed colleagues, I urge you to embrace this opportunity with the highest degree of urgency and ambition. I encourage you to embrace the proposed 2030 GW targets and ensure that they are fully integrated in your national plans and strategies including your COVID- 19 economic recovery measures; as well as in the international commitments you will make to the Paris Agreement, and within the UNCCD.**

**You have my assurance and commitment that no effort will be spared to mobilize the UN System and the wider international community in support of the implementation of the GW.**

**Excellencies,**

**Finally, As the UN launches The Decade of Action for Agenda 2030, it must be much more than an aspiration. We will be measured by whether we deliver real and measurable improvements, across all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. It means ending poverty and**

**hunger, ensuring basic services in education, health and water& sanitation, creating jobs in a green and inclusive economy, growing our cities and infrastructure for peace and prosperity, strengthening our local institutions and access to justice, partnering in solidarity.**

**In the the Great Green Wall we have an opportunity to do just that: deliver very real and tangible benefits for all the people we serve by making the necessary decisions now.**

**Driven by urgency, we must realize the vast potential of the GGW and that means stepping up our action and ambition, starting here today. As Nelson Mandela once said, “It only seems impossible until its done”.**

**Excellencies,**

**The UN will accompany you every step of the way. “Let us go far together”**

**I thank you.**

**[END]**