



Remarks by UN Resident Coordinator George Wachira

10th Retreat of the Association of Senates, Shooras and Equivalent Councils of Africa and the Arab World (ASSECAA)

The Royal Swazi Convention Centre, 11 May 2023

Y.E. the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Cleopas Dlamini,

President of the Senate of the Kingdom of Eswatini, Pastor Lindiwe Dlamini,

ASSECAA Chairman and Speaker of House of Councillors of Morocco, H.E. Na'am Mayara,

Secretary General of ASSECAA, H.E. Mr. Abdulwasie Yusuf Ali,

Honourable Ministers and senior government officials,

Honourable Senators, Shooras and Members of similar councils from Africa and the Arab World here present,

Your Excellencies members of the diplomatic corps,

Distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen.

Sa-ni-bo-na-ni e-ku-se-ni, Wasalaam aleikum! Good Morning!



I am honoured to join you this morning and make remarks on behalf of the United Nations Family in the Kingdom of Eswatini as you commence your 10th Retreat of ASSECAA. Thank you, Madame Senate President for the invitation and honour.

I would like to congratulate His Majesty King Mswati III, Parliament and Government for hosting such an important international retreat. Hosting such a big international meeting of delegates from two is no doubt a major boost to our local economy and showcases the beauty of the Kingdom to the world.

I should like to commend ASSECAA for its mission as a platform for strengthened diplomacy and parliamentary cooperation on economic, political, social and cultural matters in Africa, the Middle East and the rest of the World.

ASSECAA's values, which are premised on the promotion of peace, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, fully resonate with the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In addition, the unique blend of experiences, perspectives, cultures and opportunities that you represent offer an additional and strong building block for the values of global solidarity, sharing, community and multilateralism that are so critically needed in our world today.

So, on behalf of the UN, and indeed on behalf of the Secretary General whom I represent in the Kingdom of Eswatini, I congratulate you for convening here and for the work that you do.

Rt. Hon. Prime Minister, Excellencies,

I have noted that the retreat is underpinned by two very important themes:

1. *"The Impact of the Multifaceted International Crises on the Economies of Africa and the Arab World"*
2. *"The Significance of Green Economy in Achieving Sustainable development in Africa and the Arab World"*

These are indeed important issues of our times and are clearly interrelated. I am aware that the organisers have lined up experts,



including from the United Nations, who will speak authoritatively on these subjects. I will only make general remarks for the sake of emphasis.

In various communications, UN Secretary General Mr. António Guterres has incessantly drawn our attention to the multifaceted international crises that humanity. He has particularly highlighted 7 crises:

1. **COVID-19 pandemic:** The current pandemic has affected the world in many ways and has resulted in significant loss of life, livelihoods, and economies.

2. **Climate change:** The world is experiencing increasingly severe weather patterns, rising sea levels, and extreme temperatures which are devastating the planet and its people. Despite its minimal contribution to the crisis, Africa is the most vulnerable continent to climate change impacts under all climate scenarios above 1.5 degrees Celsius.

3. **Economic inequality:** The gap between the rich and poor is widening, leading to societal division and instability. This is worsened by a sharp rise in global inflation, higher borrowing costs which affect the capacity of countries to respond and recover.

4. **Political instability:** Wars, conflicts, and political crises are continuing around the world, resulting in the displacement of millions of people and significant humanitarian challenges.

5. **Human rights abuses:** Violations of human rights continue in many parts of the world, affecting vulnerable groups, including women, children, and minority communities.

6. **Technological and cyber threats:** The rapid development of technology poses new and evolving threats to national and international security, including cyber attacks and other malicious activities.

7. **Global migration:** The world is experiencing large-scale migration due to conflict, political instability, economic inequality, and climate change, leading to significant societal and humanitarian challenges. A 2021 World Bank study, Groundswell, argues that climate change migration will continue to involve significant internal displacement of people and mostly affect developing nations. The report estimates that 216 million people



across the six regions could be forced to migrate within their countries by 2050, with Sub-Saharan Africa alone accounting for 86 million internal climate migrants.

As the UN, we can attest that the impacts of these crises are very real: An estimated 88 – 155 million people around the world have been pushed into poverty.

In 2022, the average public debt on the African continent increased to over 60 per cent of GDP and will likely remain at this level in 2023.

Such a magnitude was last seen in the early 2000s, just before the launch of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.

Labour market conditions remain challenging in many parts of Africa, with high rates of informality, gender gaps and rising youth unemployment.

Our efforts to avert the climate catastrophe remain inadequate, often contradictory and unconvincing even as we continue to gallop, as the SG says, at full speed to a climate hell.

The crises are affecting the most vulnerable populations, countries and economies and have unevenly worsened the plight of women and girls.

Importantly, this situation has created greater vulnerability to subsequent shocks and significantly increase the obstacles that Africa and the Arab World face to achieve the SDGs by 2030. **Crises have ways of birthing other crises and we need to do all we can to prevent this from happening, including the possibility of new conflicts.**

Our responses will need to be multifaceted, strong, cooperative and coordinated.

Far from despairing at the magnitude of our challenges, the onus is on us to marshal the responses at par with the challenges. Indeed, throughout history, humanity has demonstrated its capacity to overcome the most severe challenges. We can also draw confidence from the fact that we have never had access to so much knowledge, technologies and resources.



YE the Prime Minister, allow me to congratulate His Majesty's Government for two achievements in the last two weeks that I have had the honour to witness, and which speak directly to the kinds of responses that we must focus on:

- On the climate crisis, a few days ago, the Kingdom of Eswatini launched an ambitious \$1.3 billion implementation plan of the Nationally Determined Contributions within the framework of the Paris Agreement. I warmly congratulate the Government for this commitment.
- On increasing trade and investments: Eswatini launched last week validated its National Strategy and Implementation Plan for the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement.

As we know, the future of development has shifted from donor aid to trade and investment, led by a strong private sector and a facilitative policy environment. Intra-Africa trade has remained at around 18%, compared to intra-Europe at over 70%. Thus, Eswatini's step to tap into intra-Africa trade offers a great opportunity to tap into the 1.2 billion people market.

Congratulations to Eswatini for the steps it is taking to respond to the crises! I also commend Eswatini for its Commonwealth Champion Role, along with Kenya, on Energy Literacy and Geothermal Power.

Lades and Gentlemen, I would like to conclude by suggesting some actions that this forum is well placed to spearhead.

I would like to frame these suggestions within the reality that this year marks the midway point in the Agenda 2030 of sustainable development. Currently, thanks mostly to the crises that we are discussing at this forum, all indications are that we will miss the headline targets to end poverty, reduce inequality and protect the environment.

Six Points of Action

First, as parliamentarians, I urge that we stay abreast of the developments around the crises and be present about what we can do in our countries to advise governments and draft progressive laws and policies that are



responsive and improve the human condition. We must continuously lift up our heads, read the broader context, and act locally.

In particular, attention is needed to ensure the current crises do not generate new ones such as conflicts, massive migrations, human rights abuse.

Second, I urge that we pay attention to and amplify the UN Secretary-General's call for reforms to the international financial architecture. In the face of rising debt distress, our current international financial architecture is not only incapable of addressing the current financial crisis and inequalities, but it is, plainly, immoral – in the words of the UN Secretary General. He has proposed an SDG Stimulus Package to help tackle the high cost of debt and rising risks of debt distress; scale up affordable long-term financing for development; and expand contingency financing to countries in distress.

Third, you can help put in place national policies to better align all financing flows with the SDGs and the focus on People and Planet, using such instruments as the Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs). You, as lawmakers represented in this retreat, at the very forefront of debate and policy-making have a key opportunity to strengthen the architecture that benefits countries and the most vulnerable.

Fourth, as we prepare for the COP28 Summit in the UAE later this year, we need to renew our commitment for driving global transformation towards a low-emission and climate-resilient world. I urge in particular that, in all ways possible, you join hands in not only ensuring that commitments to save the Planet are upheld and executed, but also be the voice for climate justice to ensure that those most responsible for carbon emissions also shoulder the responsibility of cushioning those most affected. This must be framed not as charity, but a requirement of justice.

Fifth, I urge that you all take note of and strongly support the SDG Summit that the UN Secretary-General is hosting in September as a key moment of reflection to help find solutions for rescuing the SDGs and renewing our commitments.



Finally, I urge Eswatini, being the host of this important meeting, to remain engaged and become a champion of taking the greening of development agenda forward. The UN is already working with your various governments in implementing NDCs, we now need to scale up commitment and action in order to meet our SDG targets by 2030.

Hon Prime Minister, Senate President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to leave you with a final thought. Long ago, the legal scholar Oliver Wendell Holmes said that, “For the simplicity on this side of complexity, I wouldn't give you a fig. But for the simplicity on the other side of complexity, for that I would give you anything I have.”

We are dealing with a very complex reality that we must not underestimate. Neither must we underestimate the possibilities that lie before us if we are united, focused and dedicated to finding solutions that work for People and Planet. Dealing with complexity requires equal complexity in organising, focus, unity and patient dedication.

As leaders, legislators and policy makers, we have the responsibility to help our people to negotiate the complexity that we face, to be the interpreters, so to speak, between the global and local realities and ensure that we are doing the best we can so that, together, we can arrive to the simplicity this side of complexity – which is better lives for our people.

It is a call to a new imagination – a moral imagination.

The UN remains committed to walking shoulder to shoulder with all countries in this pursuit, noting that we only have a few years remaining to 2030.

I wish you fruitful engagements and hope that you will find time to experience this beautiful Kingdom.

Ngi-ya-bo-nga be-ku-ne-ne! Elif Shukran! Je vous remercie! Asanteni sana !

I thank you.