

Remarks by Rwanda Environment Minister Vincent Biruta at GCCA+ 2019 Regional Conference

Climate Smart Africa: Harnessing Growth and Protecting the Gains

Kigali Convention Centre | October 15 – 18, 2019

It's a pleasure to be with you for today's Global Climate Change Alliance Plus Initiative regional conference. For those who have travelled from abroad, I warmly welcome you to Rwanda and hope you enjoy your stay in Kigali.

We have gathered to affirm the strong partnership between the Global Climate Change Alliance and countries in the region and work together to raise our ambition on climate action. This conference is also an opportunity to learn about the many programmes that are scaling up climate resilience and what lessons we might share with each other.

As the focus of this conference suggests, we need to harness and green the growth that is already underway, and protect the gains we have made under the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Today's conference comes at an important time if we are to achieve these objectives and build on the momentum of the UN Secretary-General's recent Climate Action Summit in New York and the upcoming annual UN Climate Talks in Chile in December.

For African countries, our challenge is to pursue climate-smart development in a way that harnesses socio-economic growth while protecting the gains we have made.

This will not be an easy task, and requires us to build new partnerships and ensure the investments we make are green and resilient.

Despite the good work that is underway in Rwanda, there are some major challenges that we need to address if we are to achieve our NDCs, ensure Rwandans live in a healthy and biodiversity rich environment and meet our obligations under the Paris Agreement.

While a recent survey indicates that we have achieved the target of 30% forest coverage in Rwanda, far too many people continue to depend on biomass for cooking. This is hampering our efforts to rehabilitate our lands and best utilise our forest resources. It is also negatively impacting the health of Rwandans, especially women and children.

Related to this is the continued loss of fertile soil due to land degradation and erosion. While a number of programmes have successfully reforested degraded areas and implemented soil erosion control measures, an increase in extreme weather events is undermining these efforts.

Through our NDC Climate Action Plan, border-to-border landscape restoration efforts under the Bonn Challenge and commitment to green growth, we are confident that we can address these issues and continue to improve the lives of Rwandans while also protecting our environment. However, this will only be possible if we work with partners and if the functioning of international climate finance improves.

Around the world, public and private climate finance is predominantly invested in mitigation interventions. We must balance this investment so that adaptation plays a greater role. The work being done by the Global Climate Change Alliance is important because it aims to do just that.

As one of the largest contributors to climate finance in Africa, through the European Union, we recognise the important role of the Alliance in building resilience in climate vulnerable nations.

This conference is an opportunity to recognise this work, affirm the partnerships built through GCCA+ programmes across this region, and discover where successes and learnings can be applied as we move toward 2020 and the next critical scaling-up of global action.

The Global Climate Change Alliance Plus Initiative represents an important part of the solution to build climate resilience in our region. It's a powerful approach to inspire new areas of research, strengthen ambitions, and build partnerships for a fast implementation of the Paris Agreement and other major commitments to protect our planet.

To conclude, I wish to thank the organisers of today's conference, the Global Climate Change Alliance and IUCN, as well as the European Union for their continued support as we strive to build a green and climate resilient Rwanda, and indeed Africa at large.

I wish all participants fruitful conversations and learning over the next four days.