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KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON
AFRICA CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA (AfCFTA) – A QUEST FOR TRADE IN SAFE FOOD

(Delivered by Dr. Jean Kamanzi, Consultant to FAO/WHO/WTO)

This year on the 30th of May, a new and important chapter of the African Union on its journey towards unity as dreamed by its founding fathers in 1963 and by all pan-Africanists was written when the Agreement of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) came into effect after the ratification by 22 countries considered as the minimum threshold of ratification required under Article 23 of the AfCFTA. It creates a single continental market for goods and services as well as a Customs Union with free movement of capital and business persons.

This will be one of the world's largest free-trade areas in terms of the number of countries, covering more than 1.2 billion people with a combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of more than US\$3.4 trillion. One of the central goals of the AfCFTA is to boost African economies by harmonizing trade liberalization across subregions and at the continental level.

For your reference, the agreement establishing the AfCFTA has the following Annexes that link food safety and the continental free trade:

- I. Annex 3: Customs co-operation and mutual administrative assistance
- II. Annex 4: Trade Facilitation
- III. Annex 5: Non-Tariff Barriers
- IV. Annex 6: Technical Barriers to Trade
- V. Annex 7: Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

What in practical terms will be the impact of the establishment of this free trade zone for our sector of interest, the Agriculture?

I would like to remind the delegates that the roadmap for the Agriculture sector has been set at the African Union Summit held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, in June 2014, where the Heads of State and Government adopted a remarkable set of concrete agriculture goals to be attained by 2025, and which are contained in what is now known as the "Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods". Of particular interest to food safety are: target 3 on ending hunger; and target 5: Commitment to Triple Intra-African Trade in Agricultural commodities and services by the year 2025. A very important target if one considers the current reality where African countries are trading more with countries beyond the continent than with their own neighbours. In fact, according to UNCTAD, intra-African exports represent just 11% of total exports, compared to 50% in Asia and 70% in Europe.

Now the obvious question which comes to mind is: can African countries meet this goal of tripling intra-African trade set in the Malabo Declaration by 2025? There are challenges but also opportunities. Allow me to start with challenges:

Challenges

One of key challenges will be the need to establish an efficient and effective system for managing Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures, in particular Food Safety across the continent as its borders open for trade.

The Several RECs and Partner states to the AfCFTA are at different levels in terms of their regional and economic integration, regulatory frameworks for managing SPS, transport and communication infrastructure as well as quality infrastructure and technical capacities for food safety enforcement.

Today, the leading impediments to food safety and food security on the continent include the following: Aflatoxin contamination affecting grains; mainly maize which is a staple food in the region, the invasive fall army worm that attacks most crops and microbial contamination in meat and meat products. Moreover, there's the inherent risk of trans-boundary diseases as well pesticide resistant pests and chemical residues in food (pesticides residues).

We are cognizant of the rather alarming situation prevailing on the continent with respect to food safety. As a matter of fact, the World Health Organization FERG report published in 2015 and which is the most comprehensive report to date gave us a good indication on the situation of food safety in Africa. Africa with its 91 million annual foodborne illnesses and 137000 deaths has the highest burden of foodborne diseases and the highest death rate in the world.

This is as a result of the consumption of unsafe food produced and marketed by producers and traders often unfamiliar with basic food safety concepts. Further, the existence of incapacitated and fragmented national food safety control systems, the predominance of a huge and unregulated informal food sector versus a very small formal and regulated sector for exported food products. In fact, we have in many African countries a dual system where more care is given to food destined for export markets out of the continent as opposed to what is consumed locally. All these combined factors expose African consumers to immense risks.

With the current food safety situation prevailing in many African countries and without a massive investment and a paradigm shift on how food safety is viewed and prioritized on the continent, one can argue that it will be impossible for African countries to meet the goal of tripling intra-African trade by 2025 as set in the Malabo Declaration.

Opportunities:

All this being said, we do know that with challenges come also opportunities and if African countries can seize current available opportunities and built on the current momentum in food safety, chances are that they can meet the current set goal.

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

With respect to existent opportunities, and there are many, allow me just to mention few.

- Recalling the Maputo and Malabo Declarations, I would like to remind this Assembly that the Malabo Declaration was a recommitment to the principles and values set at the meeting held in July 2003 in Maputo where African Heads of State and Government endorsed the "Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa". The Declaration enacted the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). A prominent item in the CAADP was the "commitment to the allocation of at least 10 percent of national budgetary resources to agriculture and rural development policy implementation". I urge you to remind your leaders about this resource commitment which is essential to the work ahead.
- There are new tools which have been developed and are now available to guide countries on the use of available resources in food safety. One of them is the FAO/WHO Assessment tool of national food control systems. After its trial period, this tool is now ready for use by countries and will allow not only to identify gaps but will also provide guidance and a roadmap on how to build a strong national food control system.
- Another tool worth mentioning is the new African Food Safety Index, which has been developed this year (2019) by the African Union. Under the Malabo Declaration, member countries are required to report on a biennial basis progress made on the road to achieving the targets set in the Malabo Declaration. Realizing after the first biennial report that an important indicator on food safety was missing, the AU decided to develop, this year, the African food safety index. With this index and the obligation for countries to report on progress made in food safety at country level, food safety authorities have now a powerful tool to prioritize food safety and negotiate resources both in their national budgets and with development partners once integrated into National Agricultural Investment Plans (NAIPs).
- The recent decision by the AU to create a Food Safety Agency; as announced by the Chair of the AU Commission in his opening speech of the first international conference on food safety held in Addis-Ababa in February; will bring a new key player which can make a difference in food safety on the continent; if it is given the appropriate mandate, staffed with competent officers and is given the financial resources needed to do its

work. CCAFRICA will have in that Agency an excellent partner to work with on major food safety issues of interest to the whole continent.

- The Partnership for Aflatoxin control in Africa (PACA) Program is another example of opportunities. With this program funded by the Bill and Melinda foundation, currently piloted in six African countries and which has been transferred to the African Union, Africa has developed a successful model on how to manage one of the most important food safety risks of the continent. Lessons learnt during the piloting phase could be used to refine the model and scale it up to other countries continent-wise and to help develop similar projects for other risks of interest to the continent.
- There is the recent developments of a closer working relationship and partnership between Codex and the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI), which has the potential to open up new and interesting avenues and opportunities for both the private and public sectors to improve food safety and facilitate trade. We do know that in Africa many food business operators use accredited third-party certification programmes for their exported products while at the same time food safety authorities spend much of their limited resources in monitoring these exported products. We hope, that the new guideline under development at CCFICS on how governments could use data and information from these private certification schemes in national official food control systems and the results from the pilots that will be conducted in Africa and Latin America funded by the STDF will lead to the development of a new agreed upon framework for a better use of inspection resources targeting high risk food business operators and a better recognition by importing countries of accredited third-party certification programs. It is worth noting that the USFDA is working with GFSI to recognize any operator certified under a GFSI recognized certification program as meeting the FSMA (Food Safety Modernization Act) requirements. The CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency), the Netherlands, Australia and China have already recognized GFSI and accredited third-party certification.

Finally, there are recent high-profile events in food safety which have created a momentum and if used efficiently and strategically can help turn around the current situation of food safety in Africa. We had this year in February the first international food safety conference jointly organized by FAO/WHO/AU in Addis Ababa-Ethiopia. Followed by the second one organized in Geneva by FAO/WHO and WTO. These meetings have contributed to raising the profile of food safety at the highest level and African food safety authorities can use the current momentum to secure the resources needed to build strong national food control systems and build capacity for the private sector.

The adoption by the UN General Assembly of June 7 as the World Food Safety Day is another excellent opportunity provided to food safety authorities to highlight the work done to improve food safety in their own countries, create awareness and sensitize the populations on their important role as consumers in preventing foodborne diseases.

Only such sustained mobilisation can help secure the massive resources and investments that will be needed by the private and the public sectors to improve food safety if African countries are to meet the objective of tripling intra-African food trade by 2025.

However, all these initiatives to improve food safety will not be sufficient if they are not coupled at a continental level with strong SPS and custom related initiatives to allow a seamless and free movement of food products between countries. In this regard, CCAFRICA will have a critical role to play in easing border controls using new technologies such as the use of e-certifications supported by harmonized regulatory and policy frameworks, harmonized testing methodologies, harmonized risk assessment processes and risk management frameworks at a continental level. In particular, the following areas will need to be addressed in order to manage the continental trade as well as food safety aspect:

- Development of food safety standards for products that are highly traded in the region; or foods that have high market potential for trade.
- Harmonization of already existing food safety standards within the RECS
- The need to establish cross-border coordination and cooperation frameworks for eliminating non-tariff barriers to trade and to ensure that the implementation of technical barriers to trade do not pose unnecessary barrier to trade.
- Focus on awareness creation, trainings and other capacity building initiatives for all stakeholders along the value chain: the farmers, SMEs, the informal sector, food distributors and traders including street food vendors.
- Develop technical cooperation arrangements among the RECs and the Partner States on the management of Sanitary and phytosanitary measures.

Last but not least, we should always bear in mind that governments do not produce food and that their role is to create an enabling environment for the private sector to produce safe food. Massive investments will be required for capacity building activities to ensure that all the actors along the value chain from the farm to folk have the trainings and the know-how needed to allow them to contribute to the provision of a safe food supply both for the domestic and intra-African markets.

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I conclude, I want to take this opportunity to say that the agenda items included in this 23rd CCAFRICA could not have been timelier. I wish to urge the delegates to deliberate on the pending issues including the proposed Food Safety Law Guidelines and possibly establish a common approach, going forward.

I urge the CCAFRICA to strongly support the establishment of the Food Safety Agency by the African Union and partner with it to improve food safety on the continent.

I would also like to encourage the Delegates present today to urge the leaders in their capitals who are yet to sign and/or ratify the Agreement to join the AfCFTA so that Africa can move ahead more integrated, more united, sharing the prosperity for its people and by this fulfilling the dream of its founding fathers 56 years ago.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you fruitful deliberations