

Remarks by Fatina MUKARUBIBI, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources

Opening Ceremony | 12th EUMETSAT User Forum in Africa

13 September 2016 | Kigali, Rwanda

Your Excellency, Director General of EUMETSAT,

Assistant Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organisation,

Commissioner for the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture at the African Union Commission,

Assistant Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Commission,

Representatives of technical and development partners,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning to you all.

It is a pleasure to be with you for the opening ceremony of the twelfth European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites User Forum in Africa. On behalf of the Government of Rwanda, I warmly welcome you to Kigali – Murakaza Neza.

Rwanda is honoured to host this year's forum and we are grateful to EUMETSAT for placing your trust in Rwanda. Thank you. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish the organisation a happy 30th birthday – all the best for the next 30 years.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With the climate changing at an ever-faster rate, there has never been a more important time to come together to share knowledge and experience. We know that Africa is especially vulnerable to the impacts of a warming planet and Rwanda is no exception.

We felt the severe and tragic consequences of climate change in May when 56 of our citizens were killed in floods and landslides in the northern and western parts of the country. This extreme weather event also left many homeless and is a clear illustration of the high level of vulnerability we face.

Across the region and further afield, similar climate related disasters are increasing in frequency and severity, including floods in East Africa. But vulnerability to climate change does not mean we must sit by and wait for disaster to reach our doorstep. There is a better way, and it requires us to work together.

One of the major challenges the continent faces is our ability to harness the power of technology for green growth. We know already existing technology could transform our economies - from energy development and agriculture production to natural resource management – but we have not yet begun to take advantage of it. Satellites are just one example of such technology.

Another challenge is utilising the vast amount of data and information to support our citizens to build sustainable and climate resilient lives and economies. For many of our governments and our people, we simply do not access and make use of what's already available – including climate data.

These two challenges may seem daunting, but they can be overcome if we work in partnership, not just between Africa and Europe, but within the continent as well.

Over the next few days, this forum will focus on the application of meteorological information and satellite data for green growth and climate resilience. It is exactly this user-focused approach that is needed.

In 2011, Rwanda introduced our Green Growth and Climate Resilience Strategy – a cross cutting development plan to ensure the environment is at the heart of everything we do. Our goal is to become a developed, climate resilient and low carbon nation by 2050.

A key part of this strategy is putting people and the planet first. By involving our citizens at the beginning, middle and end of development, and incorporate environmental protection, we will ensure our development can be sustained for generations to come. It is this approach we must continue to encourage when dealing with satellite data and meteorological information.

Our citizens – farmers, business people, scientists or practitioners – all depend on accurate and reliable climate information. By finding the best ways to reach these and other end users of climate and weather data, we can ensure the information they are accessing is understandable and useful to them in their daily lives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by thanking our partners for their invaluable support over many years. Africa's meteorological services, and in particular Rwanda, have benefited immensely from the support of EUMETSAT and its partners including the European Union Commission.

We look forward to continuing these strong partnerships, and working alongside the World Meteorological Organisation and other international institutions to boost technical and scientific cooperation.

In doing so, we will better prepare ourselves for the impacts of climate change and reduce our vulnerability. Our citizens deserve nothing less.

Finally, I hope that all delegates enjoy their time in the land of a thousand hills. I invite you to visit our national parks and historical places to learn more about our country and our efforts to build a green Rwanda.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and declare the 12th EUMETSAT User Forum in Africa open.

Thank you for your kind attention.