

**THE SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND BI-ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE AFRICA PLATFORM FOR REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN
FISHERIES, AQUACULTURE AND AQUATIC SYSTEMS
(APRIFAAS), 28 - 29 October, 2024, Casablanca, MOROCCO**

Welcome Address

Director of AU-IBAR - Dr. Salih Huyam

Your Excellency the Executive Secretary; The Ministerial Conference on Fisheries Cooperation Among African States Bordering the Atlantic Ocean (COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO), Mr. Taoufik Elktiri;

Representatives of The Government of Morocco;

Representative of CEO of AUDA-NEPAD Agency;

Representative of the Executive Secretary of UMA, Dr Faouzia Chakiri

Representatives of COEs – Rhodes University and University of Cape Coast

Representatives of Regional Economic Communities;

Representatives of Regional Fisheries Bodies and other Regional Organizations;

Development Partners; Distinguished Experts, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen;

It gives me great pleasure to address you all in the context of this important strategic coordination meeting which marks the **7th General Assembly of the African Platform for Regional Institutions for Fisheries, Aquaculture and Aquatic Systems (APRIFAAS) here in Casablanca, Morocco**. On behalf of HE, Ambassador Yosefa Sacko, the Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, Environment and Sustainable Development, I wish to express sincere appreciation to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Morocco for granting this privilege to African Union to organize this event in this beautiful city of Casablanca. This is a demonstration of this country' commitments to the African Union of "An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global arena.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, A report produced by the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2016 stated that Africa is immensely rich in biodiversity whose living organisms comprise around a **quarter** of global biodiversity and it supports the earth's largest intact assemblages of large mammals, roaming freely in many countries. However, species abundance is in decline, habitat degradation, and the pressures to species are increasing such as IUU fishing, climate change amongst others. AU-IBAR, with support and funding from the Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation (SIDA), is implementing a project on "**Conserving Aquatic Biodiversity in African Blue Economy**" with a Vision to place conservation of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems at the heart of Africa's Blue Economy Development Agenda, which is a key goal in AU agenda 2063. AU-IBAR is supporting AU MS to

ratify and/or align relevant international/regional instruments related to protecting and conserving biodiversity.

In addition, AU-IBAR is implementing phase two of the EU-funded on Fisheries Governance project whose objectives is to improve food security, livelihoods and wealth creation in sustainable fisheries and aquaculture aligned with the African Union Agenda 2063. One of the project achievement centered around this meeting theme was Mechanisms to encourage and facilitate the domestication of global instruments and initiatives related to fisheries and aquaculture at continental, regional and national levels through identification and analysis of priority instruments in AU MS a step towards their domestication for improved fisheries governance

Thus Therefore, the choice of the theme for this 7th General Assembly Meeting of APRIFAAS “**The global instruments on biodiversity: Opportunity for enhancing regional intersectoral cooperation and coordination**” cannot be more appropriate than in this auspicious occasion today. The outcomes of the meeting would without no doubt contribute towards enhance the Policy environment, Regulatory Frameworks and Institutional capacities of AU Member States and Regional Economic Communities to sustainably utilize and conserve aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems as well as Environmental Management.

A report produced by AU-IBAR on the Status of Ratification or Implementation of the Identified Continental and International Instruments for AU-MSs Aquatic Biodiversity Conservation and Environmental Management. The study identified 55 existing instruments, 37 of which were global while 18 were developed within the region and or at sub-regional level. The study established that although the AU-MSs are largely aware of the existence of the instruments, and majority have gone as far as signing to the instruments, however, the rate of ratification, adoption and implementation and relatively much lower, especially with the global and regional instruments. Majority of MSs had high performance for the sub-regional or REC level instruments.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Several recommendations are suggested to enhance the ratification, adoption and implementation of the existing identified instruments including such devising a new financing framework beyond the national traditional sectoral based financing; setting up regional or sub-regional technical support unit (within RECs, Specialized Institutions (RFBs, RFMOs, WBC, RCSs etc) to support AU-MSs in the processes of ratification, adoption and implementation of selected key instruments as well as finding means to boost the technical capacity of AU MS in management and conservation of aquatic resources and BE development issues. The core reason we are meeting here today as members of APRIFAAS to work collaboratively in supporting AU MS in meeting the targets of these instruments.

AU-IBAR is currently implementing the recommendation of this study by establishing biennial forum for regular consultations on monitoring compliance on domestications of global and continental instruments within the framework of African Fisheries Reform Mechanism (AFRM). A biennial forum on the domestication of the global instruments mainly set to discuss AU MS progress made and activities undertaken towards domestication of priority instruments. Reporting would include challenges encountered over the period. The reporting will be done by the national multi-sectoral committee.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, The Seventh General Assembly likewise the previous ones have been organized with full partnership with the COMHAFAT. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Taoufik Elktiri the Executive Secretary of COMHAFAT for spearheading this course. I believe is in acknowledgement and recognition of the importance of the ongoing collaboration between COMHAFAT and the AU-IBAR with the goal of enhancing fisheries, aquaculture and blue economy development for the benefits of the African continent. It also shows that the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two organizations to support the implementation of the Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (PFRS) and the Africa Blue Economy Strategy is truly in force and effectively functional.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, Cooperation and coordination in Fisheries and Aquaculture is very fundamental in Africa's food security transformation, sustainable economic progress, and inclusive development for enhanced livelihood, such as through gender mainstreaming, food and water security, poverty alleviation, wealth retention, and jobs creation. Institutional Coordination emphasizes interconnectedness with other sectors, ensures cost-efficient approach to resource management and contribute to better management of shared stocks.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I look forward to a successful outcome of this meeting with key strategic actionable points for a follow-up and immediate implementation by the platform which will pave way for enhanced information and knowledge sharing Strategies to strengthen APRIFAAS in cognizance of regional projects and programmes and Strengthening the African Voice among others. I wish to affirm AU-IBAR's commitment to support Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs), Regional Sea conventions, and AU MS to achieve desirable outcomes in fisheries, aquaculture and blue economy while working together with our usual partners. We are looking forward to working jointly with other development partners to mobilise and provide more technical support to the Member States.

I thank you very much for your attention and wish you a very productive 7th General Assembly Meeting of APRIFAAS.