

Address by Minister Barbara Creecy, Minister for Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Republic of South Africa - African Circular Economy Alliance (ACEA) Annual Meeting, Governance Roundtable Session, 15 April 2021

His Excellency, Minister Muhammad Mahmood (ACEA Co-chair from Nigeria)
Co-chairperson Representative from Rwanda – Mr Marshall Banamwana
Chairperson of the African Circular Economy Network (ACEN) – Mr Peter Desmond,
Country Representatives,
African Development Bank (AfDB) – Mr Al Hamndou Dorsouma,
Global Environment Facility (GEF) – Mr Ibrahima Snow,
Regional Coordinator for UN Environment Programme (UNEP) – Mr Patrick Mwesigye,
Partnership for Accelerating Circular Economy (PACE) – Mr David McGinty,
World Economic Forum (WEF) – Mr James Pennington,
ACEA Secretariat,
Programme Director,
Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to extend warm greetings to everyone who is with us today in this virtual session of the 2021 African Circular Economy Alliance (ACEA).

Today is a unique opportunity to examine the ways in which circular economy initiatives are being mainstreamed and integrated throughout the African continent, as well as discussing the barriers, challenges and further steps to be taken in global and interregional cooperation.

The economies of the African continent have been severely affected by the global Covid 19 pandemic and as we recover, we will have to use all the innovative tools at our disposal in order to build back better. One of the important ways in which we can do this is by fully integrating circular economy initiatives into our nations' recovery plans.

Ladies and gentlemen

At a country level, the circular economy is consistent with South Africa's constitution, and our National Development plan both of which provide for environmental protection and sustainable use of our country's natural resources.

Our country's post-Covid 19 Reconstruction and Recovery Plan includes a green economy component, which promotes waste recycling, renewable energy generation, revitalizing our ecotourism and forestry sectors; and retrofitting government buildings to improve climate resilience and save on water and energy consumption.

Last year, our government approved a revised National Waste Management Strategy which includes the implementation of circular economy practices. One of the main pillars of the strategy is waste minimization and the diversion of forty percent of waste from landfills within five years.

In consultation with industry and other role-players, we have published the Extended Producer Responsibility Regulations for the packaging, electronics and lighting sectors, for implementation, starting on the 5th May this year. These regulations will establish producer responsibility schemes to lead in the reclaiming and recycling of waste in these three significant sectors.

A central focus of all our efforts has been to decrease plastic waste and enhance the recycling of plastics. This is in line with our commitment to reducing plastic waste in the environment and preventing this dangerous pollutant from entering our rivers and oceans.

Efforts here have spanned across the retail and fast food sector where we have seen significant initiatives by the Consumer Goods Council to eliminate single use plastics,

promote changes in product design to facilitate recycling; and invest in R and D to promote new products made from plastic recycle.

Government is also in the process of amending our plastic bag regulations. As a result, from the first of January this year, all plastic bags must be made of a minimum of 50% post-recyclate material, 75% recycled materials from the start of 2025, and must be comprised of 100% post-consumer recyclate by 2027.

These targets will be met by ensuring that post-consumer recyclate is made up of household, industrial and commercial waste diverted from landfills, thus further entrenching circularity in waste management and product development.

A key departure from the previous waste management strategy is the strategic shift to accommodate waste reclaimers and the informal sector, by addressing their role in the circular economy.

In many towns and cities in South Africa, waste reclaimers are important actors in diverting recyclable material from landfill. Investment here will be focused on the economies associated with transporting of recyclables to waste processing facilities, separation at source, and addressing the skills gaps within the sector. Central to our efforts is a commitment to ensuring we transition reclaimers from a precarious hand to mouth existence, to sustainable and dignified livelihoods.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to reflect, in closing, on circular economy initiatives on the continent.

The implementation of the Africa Green Stimulus Programme (AGSP) is at the forefront of the continent's response to the economic downturn caused by the Covid 19 pandemic. Central to this Programme are principles of the circular economy.

Africa is the first region to establish a regional forum for circular economy implementation. This is a significant development for a continent with a growing population and a large informal business sector.

There is a very high level of cooperation amongst the members of the ACEA, which is further strengthened by the fact that they are also members of African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) and members of the African Union.

Consequently, for both the AMCEN and the AU, the circular economy is high on the agenda. The first expert meeting on circular economy was held last year and work on the development of the AU Action Plan for Circular Economy has already begun.

South Africa and other members of the ACEA are also participants in a number of multilateral environmental agreements relating to the transboundary movement of waste and protection for the continent's people from dumping of hazardous materials.

At a continental level, we want to see recycling growing not only for effective waste management and resource use, but also to help us in addressing our challenges relating to unemployment and economic recovery. Incorporating informal economy actors such as waste reclaimers and recyclers is crucial, particularly in areas where there is limited government waste management capacity.

However it is important to end by stressing that circularity cannot be successfully integrated into our economies without enhanced access to massively scaled-up support, investment and capacity building from developed nations. Collaboration between developed and developing countries is the only way in which we will be able to make meaningful interventions in the implementation of the circular economy.

Allow me to thank our important partners who are already taking up this challenge including the World Economic Forum (WEF), Partnership for Accelerating Circular Economy (PACE), African Circular Economy Network (ACEN), Government of Finland, African Development Bank (AfDB), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Global Environment Facility (GEF), European Union (EU), amongst others.

This spirit of collaboration and mutual support is necessary, and will be the key to the ways in which African nations navigate the post-Covid 19 landscape.

I thank you.