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Dear Madam President,

Thank you for your letter reporting on the seventh meeting of the EU-Africa Economic and Social Stakeholders' Network, as well as for the Final Declaration of the event.

Let me first of all congratulate you on your excellent work in organising this important forum at such a timely and significant moment for EU-Africa relations.

The upcoming EU-African Union Summit will be of utmost importance to renew the relationship between the two continents, building on long-lasting cooperation in strategic areas. Along with the successor Agreement to Cotonou, this Summit will provide the opportunity to agree on an ambitious and transformative agenda to address global challenges and to advance our common interests, in a spirit of partnership and solidarity.

In this respect, I value your views and those of the networks, employers and workers' representatives you brought together. I attach to this great importance, as a key priority of my mandate is to strengthen the engagement of the EU with non-state actors.

I welcome the fact that the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy "Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa" has served as a basis for your discussions. The recommendations set out in the Final Declaration are aligned with the work that the EU as a whole, and particularly the Commission, has been doing and intends to carry forward.

First, the EU has made considerable efforts to **respond to the COVID-19 pandemic**. To this end, the EU and its Member States are supporting with EUR 3 billion the COVAX initiative, which provides vaccines to the poorest 92 countries. This is complemented by substantial support in the vaccine roll-out, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, the work on a Team Europe vaccine sharing mechanism to complement COVAX deliveries is continuing.

Over a longer-term perspective, the EU is continuing to strengthen health systems worldwide through global initiatives, such as GAVI and the Global Fund, as well as by making our relations with the World Health Organisation and with the private sector in both Africa and Europe even stronger. In parallel, partner countries' capacities in pandemic preparedness and response are being enhanced. The partnership between the European Centre for Disease Control (CDC) and the African CDC will be instrumental in this regard.

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As you know, we are launching a Team Europe initiative on manufacturing and access to vaccines, medicines and health technologies in Africa, with a view to boosting a sustainable pharmaceutical sector. This also implies contributing to overcome the existing bottlenecks, including limited access to finance, regulatory frameworks, production facilities, need for technology transfer, skills development, and know-how.

Secondly, the **European Green Deal** is the blueprint for our sustainable recovery and growth strategy. It will help to promote an integrated way to address environment and climate change issues throughout the whole socioeconomic system.

Since the Green Deal has a strong external dimension, its principles will apply to the EU's international partnerships. The EU Strategy with Africa prioritises climate change and sustainable energy with a key emphasis on establishing "A Partnership for the Green Transition and Energy Access". To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the EU and Africa would need to opt for a low-carbon, resource-efficient and climate-resilient future in line with the Paris Agreement. Under this partnership framework, we plan to launch the 'Africa-EU Green Energy initiative' that aims at developing an integrated approach to address the large energy access deficit in Africa.

Thirdly, the **African Continental Free Trade Agreement** establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), highlighted in the Final Declaration of the EU-Africa Economic and Social Stakeholders' Network, is a flagship initiative of the African Union benefitting from strong political momentum. If implemented successfully, it has the potential to become a major catalyst for African economic and trade integration.

As a key partner of Africa, the EU has the added value, the expertise and the experience to support the operationalisation of the AfCFTA, and stands ready to continue its support to it. The implementation of the AfCFTA is a landmark opportunity for our two continents to work together for deepening trade and inclusive economic integration, accelerating sustainable development, driving the green and digital transitions, boosting investment and inter-regional cooperation and tackling the post-COVID-19 socio-economic recovery, within and across Africa.

I look forward to continuing our fruitful cooperation, notably in the run-up to the next EU-AU Summit and related activities and events.

Yours sincerely,



Jutta URPILAINEN