Statement by
Her Excellency Mrs. Margarida Izata
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Angola
on Behalf of the African Group
at the Sixty-Seventh Session of the Trade and Development Board

General Debate

Geneva, 7-9 September 2020
Palais des Nations, Room XX

President, Ambassador Federico Villegas,
Secretary-General of UNCTAD Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi,
Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD Madam Isabelle Durant,

Distinguished delegates,

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the African Group. The African Group aligns itself with the statement made by Zambia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and would also like to take this opportunity to thank the President of the TDB for his able leadership in steering our discussions during this Session as well as the Secretary General and his team for all the work done in ensuring that we have a successful TDB.

Mr. President,

This Session is being held at a crucial time when we observe a lot of uncertainties about the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, due to the combination of several factors including the persistence of inequalities in many areas aggravated by the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic on the African countries already experiencing a lot of challenges. The Group is referring particularly to the Public External Debt, Climate Change effects, lack of Digital Infrastructure and increasing Digital Divide, Weak Health Systems, and inequalities in Trade related activities.

This Session is, also, an opportunity for Member States to consider the efforts already being made in reducing the Covid-19 effects in trade disruptions and the gains achieved in fostering development in the developing countries. It is therefore, through this
session and other appropriate platforms of which a call is being made to our Partners on the commitments made in helping developing countries tackle the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative impact on the attainment of the SDGs through the Official Development Assistance (ODA).

Mr. President,

Overall, the impacts of the COVID-19 vary across African countries both within and across sectors. The fall in global demand for exports and a slump in prices of major commodities including fuels are the main concerns for Africa. There has also been a fall in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which is closely linked to the extractive sector and hence the commodity price cycle, according to the World Investment Report.

Recent food security estimates suggest that 73 million people in Africa are acutely food insecure. This alarming situation is being exacerbated by current COVID-19 crisis through its direct impact on trade and trade logistics as well as on production and value chains. Administrative restrictions imposed by governments such as lockdowns, travel restrictions and physical distancing measures have also added to the situation.

The trade-related impacts of COVID-19 highlight the longstanding underutilization of the regional markets by African countries. Commodity price volatilities continue to dictate the direction of economic progress, yet the diversification of exports and increased value addition could help build resilience to shocks in African countries.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for international support for African countries to effectively respond to the crisis as only a few countries have the capacity to put in place economic stimulus packages to ease the burden on people and businesses. In the long term, countries should be supported in the implementation of structural reforms to enable them to build capacity and generate sufficient domestic resources or fiscal buffers to effectively manage pandemics. However, the COVID-19 emergency calls for financial resources to be made available immediately, including from external sources.

The African Group appreciates the work UNCTAD continues to deliver in assisting African countries in their efforts to remain on track in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Group assigns particular importance to the policy analysis and recommendations arising from the research and analysis pillar in new and emerging areas of work such as on the widening Digital Divide, trade facilitation, climate change, investment, commodities, e-commerce, as well as illicit financial flows and illicit trade.

Mr. President,

The African Group remains concerned about the persistence of illicit financial flows from Africa and their extreme negative impact on the development of our countries. These financial flows deprive Africa of its resources that should be used to finance essential public services, such as Health, Education, Infrastructures, to name a few. The
African Group strongly encourages Institutions such as UNCTAD as a development Institution, to continue its work in ensuring that the plight of the African countries is addressed in this regard.

The international community may also need to extend reprieves on debt and increase other external flows that impact the ability of African governments to extend and deliver effective public health services. Although COVID-19 has affected countries worldwide, it will be particularly important to extend the existing debt moratoria and grants for the Least Developing Countries (LDCs) and to ensure that they continue to access current levels of ODA. This should be exceptionally targeted on essential public services to help eradicate the threat of a global COVID-19 recurrence.

Mr President

The full implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) which will provide countries with opportunities for growth and economic diversification, particularly through industrialization and manufacturing, could help Africa’s growth. Hence the call for UNCTAD to continue its work in ensuring that the potential envisioned of the AfCFTA is realised amongst African Countries.

To conclude the African Group would like to urge and call upon Institutions such as UNCTAD to intensify their actions in a concerted manner in order to halt and correct the rise in inequalities and protectionism and unilateral measures which constitute a serious threat to the 2030 Agenda principle of living no one behind and the achievement of the African Union Agenda 2063.

I thank you, Mr. President.