

**UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
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**High-level segment on “Harnessing science, technology, and innovation to
accelerate progress on the SDGs and addressing COVID-19”**

Statement submitted by

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**STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICA – DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND
INNOVATION ON THE OCCASION OF THE UNCSTD HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT ON
“HARNESSING SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION TO ACCELERATE
PROGRESS ON THE SDGS AND ADDRESSING COVID-19”**

10 JUNE 2020

14:00-15:30

VIRTUAL PLATFORM

Thank you, Mr Chair,
Ladies and Gentlemen

We all agree that Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) is recognised as one of the central drivers that foster productivity increases and a key long-term lever for economic growth, development and environmental sustainability. With regard to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), STI is expected to play an even more central role. As such, STI features strongly both in Goal 17 and on Means of Implementation.

Alignment of National Development Plan with the SDGs.

In the case of South Africa, the National Development Plans (NDP) and the 2030 Agenda (SDGs) are aligned and they both recognize the critical role, cross-cutting nature and contribution of science, technology and innovation in eliminating poverty, reducing inequality and unemployment by 2030. The realization of both these development agendas is informed by the principles of inclusion, cooperation and collaborative partnerships, and they prioritise society (people’s well-being), inclusive economic growth

(prosperity) and the planet (sustainable and resilient planet) in a manner that promotes partnerships in achieving inclusive development.

The role of science, technology and innovation in achieving the goals of the National Development Plan and sustainable development is based on investments in research, technology development, technology piloting and ensuring equitable access to the knowledge infrastructure. The investments are aligned to the call of National Development Plan's for South Africa to "draw on the energies of its people, growing an inclusive economy, building capabilities, enhancing the capacity of the state and promoting leadership and partnerships throughout society". These investments also reinforce the fact that no country can develop and achieve inclusive growth without sound investment in science, technology and innovation.

The implementation of science, technology and innovation activities prioritises gender inclusion through programmes such as the Women in Science and support youth with the Youth Technology Innovation Fund and Grassroots Innovation Programmes just to name a few. The current science, technology and innovation investment respond to the NDP and the SDGs.

With regard to COVID -19,

Similar to many nations around the world, South Africa is affected by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The pandemic is affecting countries in many ways including socially and economically. Science Technology and Innovation (STI) will be an answer to reduce the adverse impact of the COVID 19. In response to curb the spread of the virus, President Ramaphosa has declared a state of Disaster and put in place a risk adjusted strategy lockdown process to promote social distancing and directed that science be at the forefront of the national fight against COVID 19. On Monday, 8 June, South Africa reached the 1000 deaths due to COVID-19 and 50,000 total confirmed cases, we are still to reach the peak of the pandemic in the next few weeks and we continue to work hard to reduce the impact of the Covid-19.

Regional and global solidarity have emerged as key elements in the fight against COVID-19. The UN Secretary General has reiterated that history will judge the efficacy of the response to corona, not by the actions of any single government actors taken in isolation, but by the degree to which the response is coordinated globally across all sectors for the benefit of humanity. In this regard, I would like to share the following 3 new initiatives that South Africa plays a role in, as part of its contribution to the regional and continental COVID-9 response:

1. Covid-19 Africa Rapid Grant Fund

From a Science and Innovation perspective, South Africa's National Research Foundation (NRF) working with the Department of Science and Innovation and the Science Granting Councils Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa (SGCI) with its fifteen (15) science granting councils in sub-Saharan Africa has leveraged funds from partners in Canada, Sweden and the United Kingdom to launch a Covid-19 Africa Rapid Grant Fund to support Covid-19 research cooperation in Africa, capacity-building for science engagement and communication, as well as scientific advice for Governments. The Fund will have a total budget of R90 million and the call opened on the 18 May 2020 and will close on the 17 June 2020.

This call covers three strands:

- 1) research;
- 2) science engagement - call to science and health journalists and communicators; and
- 3) science engagement - call to science advisers in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Applications from women applicants, people living with disabilities and first responders to COVID-19, as principal investigators are encouraged. In addition, diversity, including sex and gender differences, exist across all COVID-19 dimensions. Researchers and science engagement practitioners from the following countries are eligible to apply: Botswana, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia,

Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and in the context of the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) Nigeria and South Africa.

2. EDCTP

South Africa as the current chair of the African Union, aims at leading by example and has co-invested in the European Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) in supporting African regional health research networks to fight the pandemic. The EDCTP launched on 3 April an emergency call to support research activities in sub-Saharan Africa to manage and/or prevent the spread of the current COVID-19 outbreak. Two other calls, with a budget of EUR 23 million in total, were launched on 10 April to strengthen EDCTP's Regional Networks (more specifically their clinical research capacity to conduct multi-country clinical trials), and to, in collaboration with the Africa CDC, increase capacity development for disease outbreak and epidemic response, namely by establishing an African cohort of epidemiologists. The emergency call for expressions of interest launched by the EDCTP on 3 April to support COVID-19 research activities with a total budget of EUR 10 Million (EUR 2.25 from H2020 and EUR 7.75 million from European Participating States) received 153 applications, of which 63 proposals (with a total budget of EUR 31.5 million) have been considered very good. The current available budget can only support around 20 proposals. Around EUR 21.5 million are needed to be able to support the 43 proposals in the reserve list.

President Ramaphosa had announced these national investments as part of the Coronavirus Global COVID-19 Pledging Conference organised by the European Commission.

3. Africa COVID-19 Innovation and Investment Forum 2020

We are also working with partners across the globe, the continent and the region to support innovations that can assist countries to respond to the pandemic. The DSI, in partnership with the UNECA, UNESCO, the AU and other partners will showcase African

innovations that support national responses to COVID -19, at the first **Africa Innovation and Investment Forum 2020 with a focus on COVID-19, from 15-19 June 2020**. The Innovation Challenge 2020 of the Forum seeks to identify and showcase some of the top technologies and innovations from across Africa and beyond; explore investment and market needs and; identify business opportunities in the following areas:

- i. *Affordable rapid testing;*
- ii. *Enhance medical devices and personal protection gear design and fabrication*
- iii. *Alternative tools for efficient and effective contact tracing and isolation*
- iv. *Development and production of potential drugs and vaccines in Africa*

I would like to call upon the UNCSTD, to focus its attention in supporting regional efforts to support the use of STI to respond to the attainment of the SDG's, and responses to crises and pandemics such as COVID-19.

I thank you.