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OPENING REMARKS BY PROF. JAMES NKANSAH-OBREMPONG

VIRTUAL AAW CONFERENCE, 7-10 SEPTEMBER 2020

Distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen.

Stakeholders, partners, practitioners in academia, government, community, and civil society representatives: we gather today in one of the largest forums of animal welfare in Africa; the 4th Africa Animal Welfare Conference (AAWC). I am honoured and privileged to welcome you all as the Patron of the conference, and the Board Chair of Africa Network for Animal Welfare. We are indebted to the collaboration between United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Africa Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) and Africa Network for Animal Welfare (ANAW) in ensuring that this conference is successful. This collaboration is a success story of how civil society can work with governments and international organizations for a worthy cause such as animal welfare.

This year's conference is different in that it is a virtual conference, a situation that has been necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which to a great extent is related to how we treat our animals. If the Covid-19 pandemic were not there, we would all be in Accra, Ghana attending the conference. Nevertheless, ladies and gentlemen, the nature of the conference does not take away from us the great opportunity we have to discuss issues that relate to animal welfare and more particularly, those in line with the theme of the conference: *Animal Welfare, Environmental and Wildlife Conservation for Sustainable Development in Africa: Enhancing Nature-Based Solutions*. The challenges affecting animals, both domestic and wildlife, the environment and people across the world can and will be solved by looking up to nature and adopting nature-based solutions to these challenges.

This conference, in the next four days, must come up with ways and solutions to enhance and protect animal welfare nurtured from nature. With this, I encourage you to look back to our indigenous knowledge and see how nature was part and parcel of our day to day animal welfare practice and environmental protection.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Looking at the participants and speakers list, I see an impressive wealth of knowledge and experience from across Africa and the world participating in this conference. This gives me hope that we will be in a position to do justice to our theme by discussing topics that range from food security, factory farming, animal health, education and training, wildlife and environmental conservation; just to mention a few. During these discussions, I am sure that we will bring out our different perspectives on the issues before us. However, I urge you all to agree on a common ground on some of these issues by a way of conference resolutions that will help us to advance the cause of animal welfare.

The previous conference deliberations have attained great strides and resulted in many resolutions, with some being implemented, while others are on implementation stage. For instance, the resolution to engage the Africa Union through AU-IBAR has been implemented by having them as a co-host of the conference with high representation of member states through the Chief Veterinary Officers and other government officials. Further, there was a resolution to lobby the member states for policy and legislation enactment or amendment to improve implementation and enforcement of animal welfare standards. This is ongoing in many African countries where policy and legislation are either being implemented or enacted. Another such stride is the resolution from last year's conference that mandated the Secretariat of this conference to draft and table for adoption a resolution at the United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA), with the sole aim of bringing animal welfare at the centre stage of the world environmental agenda. Later in this conference, we will be asking you to commit in giving hand towards this process, which will enable animal welfare to be part and parcel of environmental and sustainable development agenda.

In conclusion, let me point out that all the efforts each one of us has made is appreciated, especially your time in front of your screens from all parts of the world at different times of the day. However, your commitment will be needed when this conference concludes because you will be the foot soldiers to take the message and resolutions of this conference back to your countries for implementation. This may require advocacy, lobbying, education, and public sensitization; an area that many of you in civil society have perfected. I am delighted that there is a great representation of governments, from Africa alone 35 out of the 54 countries with 864 registered delegates. This is positive since we are all responsible for the implementation of the conference resolutions.

As we sit in this conference as governments and civil society, let us do the same in our respective countries for the cause of animal welfare.

As the Conference Patron, I welcome you as we look forward to enlightening presentations, fascinating discussions, and interactive feedback in the next four days.

Once again, welcome.

Prof. James Nkansah-Obrempong

Welcome Remarks delivered on 7th September 2020