

Opening speech by HE Ms Marie Odile ATTANASSO, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Benin - President of the Council of Ministers of WASCAL

First of all, I would like to thank all the brotherly people of Ghana, headed by His Excellency Nana Akufo-Addo, President of the Republic, for the warm and fraternal welcome extended to all the delegations present at this Council.

Excellencies Ministers, Distinguished Guests, the subject that brings us together today is one of the major challenges facing the world in general and the West African States in particular in the 21st century, I have named CLIMATE CHANGE. This challenge is all the greater for sub-Saharan areas in that many serious studies indicate a spatially variable progressive warming reaching 0.5°C per decade in recent years.

This situation requires a strong political decision, which in turn requires great solidarity and frank international collaboration. It is therefore in this sense that ten of our West African States, with the invaluable support of the Federal Republic of Germany, had the foresight to create in February 2012 the West African Centre for Scientific Services on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL).

After seven good years of existence, WASCAL has without any doubt achieved commendable results in terms of both technical and

human capacity building and scientific research, which is the foundation for the development of climate services. However, Ministers, honourable guests, the tree must not hide the forest. While it is true that WASCAL has been successful in demonstrating its importance in less than a decade of existence, the fact remains that the organization has faced and continues to face a number of difficulties, certainly inherent to most young organizations, that could threaten the sustainability of this strategic organization.

I therefore take this opportunity to pay a special tribute to all those who, explicitly or implicitly, have contributed through their ingenuity, generosity and wisdom to keep WASCAL operational, productive and visible in the West African landscape and beyond. I am thinking of the students who have passed through the doctoral schools, the African and German researchers, the various Executive Directors who have succeeded one another at the head of the organization, the members of the Scientific Advisory Board, the members of the Board of Directors and you, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Council of Ministers. On this subject I would like to mention with insists on the recognition of the entire West African region to the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), whose financial and technical support has been the cement that has kept this beautiful entity functional and efficient. Without the commitments of all concerned, their wise advice and guidance we

might not be here today at this third session of the Council of Ministers of WASCAL Member States.

Moreover, we are proud to note that our common organization is even expanding, and the Council wishes, through me, to welcome the enthusiasm and clear desire of the other ECOWAS member countries to join WASCAL.

One of these countries, Cape Verde in particular, will see its official accession examined at this session. The Council encourages other countries currently in observer status to continue their efforts to meet the conditions for membership of this excellent scientific cooperation body in the West African region.

Excellencies Ministers, honoured guests, as you know, the economy of almost all countries in the West African region is still dominated by the primary sector and rainfed agriculture remains the main source of livelihoods, employing more than 60% of the population, but with low productivity, contributing only 35% of GDP. Excellencies, Ministers, dear members of the Council, these expectations of WASCAL are in turn expectations of our august Council, since it is the strategic steering body and the highest decision-making body of WASCAL. I therefore invite all Members of the Council and all official delegations to carefully examine all the documents and files that will be submitted to us, bearing in mind that the lives of more than 350 million people could depend on the conclusions and decisions of our work.

On behalf of all WASCAL Member States and our Regional Economic Organization ECOWAS, I would like to thank once again

the Federal Republic of Germany for the efforts already made in establishing the WASCAL Centre of Excellence for Capacity Building and Research in the Field of Climate Change. We will also be delighted to see this strategic and essential partner continue in this same vein so that the objectives we have set ourselves by mutual agreement, in particular the construction of the Competence Centre in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, can be achieved.

In my capacity as President of the WASCAL Council of Ministers, I urge you, Excellencies, Ministers, to invest yourself personally so that our respective States fulfil their duties and obligations towards our precious common organization, WASCAL. It is only on this condition that we could together ensure the sustainability of this essential strategic monitoring organization for the West African region, which is close to our hearts.

It is on these calls for greater commitment from Member States and more solidarity and scientific cooperation at regional and international level that I declare open the 3rd Meeting of the WASCAL Council of Ministers.

THANK YOU .