CLIMATE COMISSION
SAHEL REGION

CCRS

Executive Secretariat

SPEECH BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE CCRS

HE. Issifi Boureima

COP31 - SIDE EVENT

Feeding the future in the Sahel

"Proactive action and the transformation of food systems to protect children and other vulnerable groups from climate shocks"

Antalya, Africa Pavilion, 13 November 2026

Ministers,

Distinguished guests, in your respective roles and capacities,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to begin with a face.

That of a little five-year-old girl. She lives somewhere in the Sahel, on that strip of land that stretches across Africa from west to east, from the Atlantic to the Red Sea, from Senegal to Djibouti. Whilst we are gathered here in Antalya and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of the Republic of Türkiye for its hospitality her day has already begun. Her mother set off at dawn to fetch water and collect firewood. She is waiting for a meal that may never come.

She does not read our statements. **And yet, it is for her that we are here.**

This little girl is not alone. Among children under five alone, **11.3 million** are suffering from acute malnutrition in West Africa and the Sahel, according to the Harmonised Framework, the regional food security analysis tool.

Eleven million. Eleven million souls.

If these children were to line up, holding hands, they would form a human chain stretching from Senegal to Djibouti, and far beyond.

Together with the whole of Africa, we are working to build the Great Green Wall. **Let us ensure that this chain of children is not a wall of vulnerability, but a wall of hope.**

These children did not start the fire that is warming our planet. Yet they are the ones paying the heaviest price.

Nelson Mandela, our Madiba, reminded us: ***'There can be no clearer revelation of the soul of a society than the way it treats its children.'***

Here in Antalya, it is the soul of the international community that is at stake.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The hardest thing to accept is that, in the Sahel, crises are almost never a surprise. Thanks to our early-warning systems, supported by our sub-regional and regional technical and scientific institutions, we know – often months in advance – where there will be a lack of rain and where famine will strike.

According to the special climate bulletin published last October by the African Centre for Meteorological Applications in Development (ACMAD), based in Niamey, **an El Niño of historic intensity is currently underway and is expected to peak in December.** Its effects are already being felt: September in the Sahel was hotter than 99 per cent of all Septembers on record, and the heatwave warning remains in place until January.

We know this. And yet, all too often, we arrive too late. After the livestock has been lost. After the farmer has exhausted his reserves, right down to the seeds for the next farming season. After the child has dropped out of school.

The challenge is no longer about knowing. The challenge is to act in time.

That is the whole point of proactive action. Acting before the crisis strikes means enabling the herder to keep his herd, the mother to feed her children, and the school canteen to remain open. It means protecting communities and their livelihoods.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have not come to speak to you about a Sahel that is merely suffering. I have come to speak to you about a Sahel that is taking action.

Our governments are determined to build the resilience of their people.

The Sahel Climate Commission embodies this shared ambition: to coordinate regional action and bring partners together around proactive measures and resilience. Our conviction is simple: resilience is built from within, under the leadership of our governments. Partners are there to strengthen our systems, never to replace them.

I commend the commitment of our Member States. In a moment, the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Djibouti will speak on their behalf. I also commend our partners, whose support for this event demonstrates their commitment.

Our collective commitment is genuine. But it must now be scaled up, as adaptation needs far exceed the available funding. **It is our children who will pay the price for this shortfall.**

We therefore call for funding that flows through our national systems and is channelled via our sub-regional and regional institutions. Predictable funding that arrives before a crisis strikes, not after.

Finally, we call for resolute investment in human capital, for feeding a child today means building the Africa of tomorrow.

We wish to translate these calls into commitments: this is the purpose of the Antalya Appeal, which will be read out at the close of our proceedings, and of the partners' round table that our Commission will organise next year to finance the Sahel's National Contribution Documents (NCDs), centred on a regional portfolio of bankable projects worth nearly 2.9 billion dollars.

May the Antalya COP be the starting point for concrete and measurable commitments. And may the next COP, in Addis Ababa, be one of African solutions, already being implemented on the ground.

Come, not just to listen to the Sahel, but to invest alongside it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us return to that little girl. Next year, when Africa welcomes the world to Addis Ababa, she will be six years old: the age to start school.

If we act in time, she will start school in good health, nourished by her village's canteen. If we wait any longer, alas, she will be just another statistic in a report on forgotten children.

Between these two futures, there is only one thing: our decision.

I have made mine: our Commission will turn every alert into action.

In the Sahel, we know. So let us act before it is too late.

Thank you!