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Statement by Secretary-General of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, H.E. Mr. Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti for the inaugural International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies

Brussels, 7 September 2020/OACPS: On behalf of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), the Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti, is honoured to celebrate the first International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies, established by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution, adopted on 19 December 2019.

Air pollution is a great environmental risk to human health and one of the main avoidable causes of death and disease globally, with some estimated 6.5 million premature deaths (2016) across the world attributed to indoor and outdoor air pollution. It is the fourth greatest risk factor for human health worldwide. In developing countries generally, and those of the OACPS in particular, air pollution disproportionately affects women, children and the elderly, especially in low-income populations, as they are often exposed to high levels of ambient and indoor air pollution from cooking and heating with fuel wood and kerosene. The negative impact of air pollution on ecosystems and biodiversity is also of great concern.

Furthermore, air pollution poses risks to, among others, the economy, work productivity, the environment, food security, healthcare and tourism. Therefore, the economic benefits of investing in air pollution control cannot be overestimated. As we strive to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDGs # 1, 3, 4, 7, 11 and SDG #13, which addresses climate action and the objectives of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Secretary-General emphasises the economic rationale to act now. On a global scale, he also addresses the need for all countries to work together to implement cost-effective solutions to address air pollution.

In order to improve air quality, efforts should be geared to strengthening international cooperation at the global, regional and sub-regional levels, including the collection and utilization of data, joint research and development, and the sharing of best practices. There is also urgency to increase public awareness at all levels and to promote and facilitate actions to improve air quality, for the benefit of health, lives and livelihoods.

Today, as the OACPS joins the International community to acknowledge the need for, and the benefits of improving air quality, Secretary-General Chikoti welcomes the effort to give prominence to this issue and commits to mainstreaming these issues in the programmes of the OACPS.

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