STATEMENT TO THE CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN HEADS OF STATES AND
GOVERNMENTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Your Excellency the Chairman of the African Union;

Your Excellency the Chairman of the Conference of African Heads of States and
Governments on Climate Change;

Distinguished Excellencies from various African countries;

Your Excellency the President of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment;

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The Pan African Climate Justice Alliance is delighted to address this important forum in such
an historic and important year as we marshal our troops to win a "double deal" in Copenhagen –
one that implements both the Climate Convention and its Kyoto Protocol, while assuring
vulnerable people in Africa the decent livelihoods and the bright future they deserve.

Agreeing outcomes under the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol that are fair, effective and
development-oriented will not be easy but is indispensable. Copenhagen, we are convinced,
is a key turning point for climate justice – a crucial milestone on the journey to stabilizing the
Earth’s climate and securing the rights and aspirations of all people.

A message of solidarity

We congratulate and send to you a message of solidarity as you lead the African continent to
deliberate a common position in the Countdown to Copenhagen. Over the years, African civil
society has called on our political leadership to demonstrate genuine commitment to address
the climate challenge and secure the continent’s aspirations for sustainable development.

This meeting, therefore, is timely. It will send a powerful signal to the rest of the world ahead
of the UN High Level meeting convened by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon that the continent
will not be a spectator on global affairs, but rather a critical partner whose views – particularly
on the crucial issue of climate change – can not longer be ignored.

Advancing Africa’s interests

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, the stakes in the climate
negotiations could not be higher. A North-South impasse over emission reductions and
responsibility for climate change is evident in the international dialogue on the future climate
change regime. Africa must therefore actively define and advance its interests.

By defining the discourse of the negotiations the North has left the South complacent. We are
only now beginning to understand that the negotiations are not merely about reducing
emissions, but rather about how to share among rich and poor the global atmospheric commons – a shared resource of tremendous value to all people and life.

Hanging in the balance is the renewed hope of vulnerable communities in Africa to rebuild livelihoods already shattered by the accelerating impacts of climate change – worsening droughts, grinding poverty, shifting seasons, drying up of rivers and biodiversity loss.

As the debate rages over historical responsibility and capacity to curb climate change, PACJA believes that the negotiations will only serve our interests when we advance a dialogue that reflects the specific context of our continent.

To advance its interests, Africa must therefore bring to the international negotiations “Africa-specific language”, which puts responsibility squarely on the big polluters in the industrialised North for their dominant role in causing climate change and its devastating impacts on Africa.

Instead of merely demanding the North to “transfer technology to the South to mitigate and adapt” to a problem we did not cause, we need to start demanding a more equitable and development-oriented approach. We must, among other things, call for the “repayment of climate debts” as this reflects our inalienable right of survival under the Universal Declaration of Human and Peoples Rights.

Sharing the atmosphere

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, the climate negotiations are in large part over how to share the Earth’s atmospheric space between rich and poor countries, and how to share the means – the financing and technology – required to live in this space.

The fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (as a starting point) confirms that the Earth has a limited capacity to absorb greenhouse gas emissions. This leaves the global community with a limited “emissions budget”, which economists – who often tend to place a price on everything – value in excess of a trillion dollars annually.

The climate negotiations are, in substantial part, about how to share this budget. It therefore arguably involves one of the biggest distributions of resources between rich and poor countries in modern history.

Rich countries are seeking to take a disproportionately large share of the budget without compensating developing countries. According to their current proposals, they would take around double their per-person fair share between now and 2050. This means that they, by contrast, want to lock us into a much smaller per-person share.

By accepting less than our fair share without compensation we will subsidize the industrialised countries to the tune of trillions of dollars. In addition, the North is seeking to create a global carbon market that would allow them to purchase more of the budget from us at low prices.

This raises equity implications since developed countries have largely caused climate change through their historically high emissions. It is also problematic because Africa needs its fair share of the limited emissions budget, as well as financing and technology, to build the roads, schools and other infrastructure to reach the same level of development as the North.
“Polluter profits and poor pays?”

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, the rich countries, which are primarily responsible for global warming, are seeking to set their “allocation” of the budget – i.e. their emission rights or “assigned amount” – based not on their fair share, but on their historically high emissions.

A major part of the Earth’s budget will be appropriated from poor countries of Africa without compensation, allocated to the developed countries, and passed through them to their wealthiest and most polluting corporations – including coal and oil companies, energy production and other polluting sectors.

This will, in effect, reward those countries and companies that have polluted most with a disproportionate share of the budget. It is difficult to reconcile such an approach with the polluter pays principle and other prominent environmental principles. Allocating polluters more than their fair share, while denying a fair share to the poor, could rather be characterized as “polluter profits and poor pays”.

“A land grab?”

As well as grabbing the Earth’s emissions budget through high “assigned amounts”, developed countries are seeking to buy for cheap a large share of the our remaining budget. The Europeans, for instance, plan on reducing only half of their emissions at home. They intend to pay developing countries to reduce the other half for them (i.e. effectively buying part of our share). Our budget will be bought and “banked” by the rich countries for their future use.

As with other resources – forests, minerals, land and so on – the North is seeking to grab a large part of a shared atmospheric resource by taking it up front for free (through high “assigned amounts”) and by “buying” further emissions rights for cheap (through a “global carbon market”). Before we understand the value of the atmospheric commons it will be appropriated by the rich for use by them in later periods once the price has gone up.

A more equitable alternative

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen the Earth’s atmosphere is a shared “global commons” that should be fairly used by all – including by the poor, by future generations and by all life. The poor in Africa and elsewhere have a right to a fair share of this commons and to the means to live well within it.

A number of developing countries have proposed that, instead of allocating the global atmospheric commons disproportionately to the richest countries, it should be allocated fairly based on considerations of science, equity and other principles and provisions of the international “constitution” on climate change – the UN Climate Convention.

PACJA believes that this is the way to go, and the allocations should be done on the basis of, among other things:

- The responsibility of Annex I Parties, individually and jointly, for current atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (i.e. for causing climate change)
• The historical and current per-capita emissions originating in developed countries (i.e. for their overconsumption)

• Technological, financial and institutional capacities; (i.e. for different capacities and abilities to address climate change) and

• The share of global emissions required by developing countries in order to meet their social and economic development needs, to eradicate poverty and to achieve the right to development (i.e. for the needs of developing countries to grow, subject to technology and other capacities).

In other words, Annex I countries must accept a share of the global resource that reflects the full extent of their historical responsibility. They must accept responsibility for the emissions that have contributed disproportionately to causing climate change, denying atmospheric space to us in Africa, and its adverse impacts on the poor.

Repaying climate debts and the basis of finance and technology transfers

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, by continuing to take more than their fair share, the rich countries increasing their debt to us, and so the compensation that should be paid. How should this debt be calculated and honoured?

In the view of PACJA, the difference between what developed countries “should do” (i.e. their assigned amount) and what they “actually do” (i.e. their actual domestic emissions in 2020) constitutes an increase in the debts owed to our countries and people, and serves as the basis for financial transfers and compensation.

With the agreement of other Parties, developed countries can compensate for not doing all they should do in terms of emissions reductions by paying money into a fund under the UNFCCC. At least this way, we will get a fairer share of the Earth’s emissions budget as well as the financing we need to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change.

The amount of this financing should fully compensate us for that part of the global emissions budget – both past and future – that will be excessively consumed by developed countries (and their rich corporations/consumers), and thereby denied to us.

Compensation for climate harms

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, excessive consumption by rich countries has not only denied access to a shared "emissions budget"; it has driven the adverse impacts of climate change. In addition to compensating us for excessive use of a shared resource, developed countries should compensate us for its adverse impacts.

Excessive consumption by Annex I countries of the Earth’s atmospheric space is already causing adverse effects on developing countries. These impacts should be compensated. Failure to provide compensation to developing countries constitutes an unpaid debt – i.e. an “adaptation debt”.

The extent of adaptation debt is difficult to calculate; but has two main components. It must include the costs of avoiding all avoidable climate harms and impacts. These can be
estimated based on proposed changes to national planning, project and programmatic initiatives. It must also include the costs of actual (unavoidable) harms, which should be compensated at full costs.

Annex I countries must be held accountable to the impacts of their historical and continued over-consumption of the Earth’s limited bounty. If they are not, then they are encouraged by a perverse incentive to continue harming others.

**The basis of a fair and development-oriented deal in Copenhagen**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, repayment of climate debt provides a means to ensure that developed countries honour their historical and current responsibilities, and it provides one source of financing to enable us to fulfil our obligations under the Climate Convention.

Asking for repayment of climate debt allows us to assert our moral right to a fair share of the Earth’s global commons – it’s limited “emissions budget” – and our moral right to be compensated for harms we did not cause.

The approach is both science and principle-based, as opposed to the approach proposed by developed countries (which is principally based on their own political constraints and economic opportunism). It also allows us to make a credible claim on financing and technology from developed countries without being characterized as beggars.

It is our right to receive technology and financing, in part as compensation for a shared resource that has been taken, and in part to live within the constraints of an emission budget that has been radically reduced by rich countries’ historical emissions.

The approaches set out by PACJA are not hypothetical ideas. They are concrete proposals already offered in the negotiations under the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol, including proposals for a shared vision by African and other Least Developed Countries. As African civil society, we call on you to consider and consolidate these proposals as the basis of a broad-based and authentic African shared vision for the climate negotiations.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, repayment of climate debt is not just a right – it is the basis of a fair and pro-poor development imperative.

Thank you.