

**SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE AFRICAN INSURANCE ORGANISATION,
MR. BENHABILES CHERIF, AT THE OPENING OF THE 50TH CONFERENCE AND
ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE AIO FROM THE 1ST TO 5TH JUNE IN
WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA.**

The Right Honourable Prime Minister

The Honourable Minister of Finance

Honourable Ministers and other Members of Government

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Executive Committee Members of the AIO

Invited Guests

Dear Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Executive Committee and members of the AIO, I wish to heartily welcome you all to this 50th Conference and Annual General Assembly of our cherished pan-African Organisation.

I would like to start with words of gratitude to the Government and people of the Republic of Namibia for accepting to host this event. In fact, this is the first time Namibia is hosting the AIO Conference and I am proud to say the country has done it with distinction. We are happy to announce that a total of 1360 delegates registered for this conference.

Last year, we had a very hectic and successful conference in Algeria. During the handing over of the AIO flag to Namibia, we were optimistic that the flame was not going to die down. Today, we are impressed with the work done by the host country to uphold the standards. Such a huge success can only be the fruit of a very supportive government, and hard-working Local Organising Committee and a very devoted and committed AIO Secretariat.

When one hears about unsavory events happening around the world, the tendency is to shrug them off as things that can happen elsewhere only. Such is the case when the subject of climate change is broached. Some even think it is a hype! Indeed in 2008 when the 35th AIO conference in Algeria examined the subject, it seemed like something quite distant from our continent. The contrary is the case today.

Today, we are all gathered here in Namibia to discuss on the theme **"COPING WITH RISING NATURAL CATATROPHES IN AFRICA"**

The increasing number of natural catastrophes is more than an answer to sceptics on the effects of climate change on Africa. To say the least, Africa has been more than hard-hit by this devastating phenomenon.

In recent years, Africa has suffered from several natural catastrophes which resulted to the loss of several human lives and property and a resultant misery and suffering to millions of survivors.

Barely a few weeks ago, several lives were devastated by floods and flash floods in Kenya. Since March, Kenya has been battered by above-average rainfall, exacerbated by climate change and the effects of the El Nino weather pattern, which is typically associated with increased heat worldwide and leads to drought in some parts of the world and heavy rains in others.

We remember cyclone Freddy in Mozambique, the devastating earthquake in Morocco, the floods in South Africa and Libya, the wildfires in Algeria, heavy rains and floodings in DR Congo and Rwanda.

The low-income levels of most of our populations makes it difficult to cope in the face of these major catastrophes, be they earthquakes, floods and droughts.

The rise in these disasters has therefore prompted questions about the under-insurance and uninsurance levels across the continent.

Natural disasters, including earthquakes and severe storms, caused global economic losses estimated at \$194 billion in the first half of 2023, with only 27% covered by insurance, according to a new report from Aon, an insurance broker and professional services firm.

The World Risk Report of 2023 identifies Africa as the most vulnerable continent to natural disasters. The same report indicates that drought and flood reduced GDP per capita by 0.7% and 0.4% respectively (between 1990-2019).

Moreover, despite low emissions, Africa is highly vulnerable to global warming above 1.5°C, with its agricultural sector exposed to extreme weather. Climate change has reduced Africa's agricultural productivity by 34% since 1961, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the United Nations, IPCC.

These anthropogenic or natural disruptions strongly threaten, among others, the resilience of agricultural systems and the vulnerability of rural populations in developing countries including those in Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The picture definitely looks very dark. Yes, indeed as we think of future climate changes, we equally have widespread poverty, social conflicts, population growth, generalised inflation and rapid urbanisation to worry about

Africa depends mainly on agriculture and is particularly vulnerable to climate change due to its weak ability to adapt, due to insufficient financial and technological resources that can enable her to stand the challenge.

What adaptation strategies should be adopted in the face of all these? Moreover, what solutions can African insurers propose to this situation which is in no small way aggravating the continent's low insurance penetration?

Honourable Prime Minister, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

The AIO Secretariat and the Local Organising Committee have brought together some fine brains and seasoned professionals to lead the reflection on how Africa can cope with the rising natural catastrophes.

I wish to heartily thank all our speakers for accepting to share their knowledge and experience with the participants of this conference.

I equally wish to thank our sponsors for their immense support towards the organisation of this event. Permit me cite AFRICA RE, W-SAFE RE, NAMIB RE, WAICA RE, CICA RE, ZEP RE, TAN RE, MUNICH RE, FM RE, NEM INSURANCE, CONTINENTAL RE, APEX, GN RE, SCR MAROC, FBS RE, AVENI RE, GHANA RE, EAST AFRICA RE, MAWDY, TUNIS RE, SANTAM, PROTECTION RE, MAINSTREAM RE, GIC RE, AFREXINSURE, NASRIA, HOLLARD, MAKSUR, AM BEST, ETHIOPIA RE, LLOYDS, AGRIBANK, SANLAM & SANLAM/ALLIANZ and OLD MUTUAL.

Dear delegates, use this golden opportunity to network, exchange and create business partnerships to promote the African insurance industry.

Enjoy the beauty of Namibia.

Thank you for your kind attention.