

**7th Africa Ireland Economic Forum
RDS Concert Hall
Thursday, 30 June 2022**

Remarks by Minister of State Brophy

Closing the Africa Ireland Economic Forum

President Adesina, Ambassadors, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my privilege to be here this afternoon to bring the 7th Africa Ireland Economic Forum to a close.

I want to talk to you about the importance of people-to-people connections and the key opportunities and areas for strengthened partnership highlighted today.

I will also announce the winners of the inaugural Irish Aid Enterprise Fund for International Climate Action.

With more than 300 delegates attending today, the Africa Ireland Economic Forum has once again shown that it is a crucial date in the calendar.

I am hugely encouraged and indeed energised by the level of engagement in evidence here at today's event.

Nobody could have envisaged at the last Forum in 2018 that it would take almost four years for us to gather again like this.

But good things come to those who wait. I am glad we took the decision to defer the Forum until it was possible to hold it in-person.

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As I look around the room, I can feel the sense of enthusiasm and opportunity.

Even in the face of global challenges, so much potential has been highlighted at today's Forum. Connections have been made, and relationships have been cemented.

As Minister with responsibility for the diaspora, I understand the importance of people-to-people connections.

These connections drive partnerships in trade, investment, politics, culture and much more.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Irish diaspora in Africa, who have established connections between Ireland and Africa for generations.

I would also like to acknowledge Ireland's African communities, and Irish People of African Descent.

There are many of you in the audience and you are building new connections between Ireland and Africa that will be to the benefit of us all.

Last month we celebrated Ireland's largest ever Africa Day.

All across the country, we saw the enthusiasm across our communities, a truly wonderful celebration of the rich links between Ireland and Africa.

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Throughout today, we have heard from a series of outstanding speakers, including President Adesina.

Thank you for your participation and our very productive meeting today. I look forward to working with you in our collaboration with the African Development Bank

I would like to thank all our speakers and panellists for such engaging and insightful discussions.

In the morning sessions, our panellists explored the recent trends, opportunities and challenges for businesses setting their sights on future trade and investment.

I am particularly struck by the incredible potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area and how it can help to transform Africa.

Ireland can play a part in this and share our own hugely successful experience of regional integration as an EU member state.

The backdrop to today's discussions has been the positive trend in trade and investment between Ireland and Africa.

Both Irish and African businesses have shown us the potential to build on this positive momentum.

The challenging global context has also been present throughout today's discussions.

We have heard today about the unprecedented strain on global food and energy markets.

This is why committing to green growth and sustainable food systems, both here in Ireland, and globally, has never been more important.

Our second panel discussion explored how Irish and African firms can adapt and respond to these challenges.

It also considered how Ireland's ambitious approach to sustainable food systems can support green growth in Africa.

A conversation about green growth, innovation and economic transformation would not be complete without looking at the critical role of women in building economic prosperity and driving opportunities for trade and investment.

That discussion has brought up a number of exciting ideas on how to further support female entrepreneurs.

A commitment to gender equality underpins Ireland's foreign policy.

We will continue to work with our partners in Africa to bring down the barriers holding back women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses.

I hope that this Forum has facilitated connections between women in business in Ireland and Africa, and that we will see new partnerships driven by women in the future.

The discussion on leveraging technology, innovation and entrepreneurship for Africa's growth, which concluded just now, was particularly interesting.

It was great to see Armin Lalui [La-loo-ee] of Vanguard Economics open that discussion. I last met Armin in Kigali last October and it is a great pleasure to see him here in Dublin.

On that visit to Rwanda, I saw first-hand the potential of Africa's young people when I presented prizes to the national winners of the AfriCAN Code Challenge.

This is a coding competition for children aged between 8 and 16 run by Africa Code Week.

Ireland is very proud to be a strategic partner of Africa Code Week.

It is Africa's biggest digital skills programme and has reached over 9 million children and trained more than 100,000 teachers in 40 countries.

Ireland is proud to support initiatives that give young people in Africa the skills needed to flourish in the 21st century.

Africa's next generation of entrepreneurs and innovators will play a critical role in responding to global challenges.

We are committed to stepping up this support, and in linking Irish private sector expertise with African entrepreneurs and innovators.

I was therefore delighted to launch the new Irish Tech Challenge South Africa while on a visit to South Africa earlier this year.

The Tech Challenge will incentivise mutually beneficial partnerships between Irish technology expertise and South African entrepreneurs.

It targets businesses that address the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly climate change, and prioritise women, youth and entrepreneurs from historically disadvantaged communities.

I am delighted that the group of winners of that Tech Challenge are here with us today.

They are a hugely impressive group of innovators and it was great that Mukundi Lambani, CEO of Ambani, and one of those winners from South Africa, was able to participate also in our final panel discussion this afternoon.

Climate action is a key priority for Ireland and that is why Ireland is supporting climate entrepreneurship.

Earlier this year I had the great pleasure of launching the first Irish Aid Enterprise Fund for International Climate Action.

Through this Fund, we wanted to engage the vast talent and expertise within Ireland in support of climate action for those who need it most.

We have been so impressed by the breadth of expertise that exists across the organisations who applied and their eagerness to support climate action.

As has been said many times today, the private sector has a vital role in delivering not just climate action but also progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

I am deeply heartened by the experience of the Enterprise Fund for International Climate Action, that the private sector is willing and ready to answer that call.

Our only challenge in delivering the Fund was in selecting the winners from such a competitive field.

I am absolutely delighted to announce the four winners of the first Irish Aid Enterprise Fund for International Climate Action and they are:

- FoodCloud for their pilot study of a technology led solution to food waste in Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia and Ghana;
- Action Ireland Trust for their programme of supports for entrepreneurs working in sustainable construction in Lesotho;
- DCU School of Law & Governance for their training programme on Market Based Mechanisms for reducing emissions from shipping; and
- Concern Worldwide, for their community led entrepreneurship programme in Malawi.

I very much look forward to seeing the impact of these four programmes.

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I would like to thank most sincerely all of the organisations who applied to the Enterprise Fund for International Climate Action fund.

In closing, I wish to thank the team from my own Department for the excellent organisation, which has made this year's Forum possible, with the support of other Government Departments and State Agencies

Private sector and civil society stakeholders, and the African diplomatic community have also played a critical role in preparing for this Forum, and I wish to thank you also.

Earlier this week all of you who registered to attend today's event received an email containing a list of contacts for everyone in attendance here today who had consented to share their details.

I hope that these connections, as well as those you have had the opportunity to make in person today, will serve as the first step in creating new networks, opportunities and long-lasting partnerships.

I now wish to invite you all to a closing reception in the Library here in the RDS, where we can continue the conversations that have started today.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh.