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Heads of meteorological services across Africa and beyond gather in Sandton for pertinent capacity building programme as the continent grapples with hazardous climate and weather

Heads of nearly 60 South African Weather Service-type organisations or National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) from across Africa and other parts of the world will on Monday descend on Sandton in Johannesburg to put heads together on how best to inspire their respective organisations to be better equipped to address the demands posed by climate change, severe weather, variable weather patterns and subsequent environmental disasters on the continent and beyond.

In collaboration with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the Henley Business School Africa, the South African Weather Service, as one of the leading meteorological services on the continent, will host the week-long WMO Executive Training Programme on Leadership and Management at the Southern Sun, Sandton from Monday, 23 October 2023 to Friday, 27 October 2023.

NMHSs from African countries such as Nigeria, Egypt, Cameroon, Rwanda, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, as well as countries from outside the continent such as Barbados, Samoa, Maldives, Guyana and Ecuador, among many others, will be represented.

Last month, the WMO released the “State of Climate in Africa in 2022” report, which revealed, among other things, that in 2022, Africa experienced a myriad of severe weather events, which led to untold devastation among communities, in addition to serious economic implications. These included drought in the horn of Africa and severe cases of flooding in the southern parts of the continent. The report also revealed that Africa has recorded a warming trend that was more rapid than the global average over the last 60 years.

The training programme also seeks to support the rollout of the United Nations’ *Early Warnings for All* initiative, which seeks to ensure that everyone on the planet is protected from hazardous weather, water, or climate events through life-saving early warning systems.

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Speaking ahead of the programme, WMO Secretary-General, Prof. Petteri Taalas said that Africa was among the hardest-hit parts of the world when it came to the impacts of severe weather and climate.

“Africa is one of the world’s most susceptible continents to the negative impacts of climate change. Severe floods, droughts, tropical cyclones, storms, and heat waves are undermining the socio-economic advancements achieved by the continent,” Prof. Taalas said.

“Between 1970 and 2021, Africa accounted for 35% of weather, climate, and water-related fatalities. Yet, only 40% of the African population has access to early warning systems – the lowest rate of any region of the world. The new *Early Warnings for All* Action Plan for Africa seeks to change that.”

South African Weather Service Chief Executive Officer and the country’s Permanent Representative with the WMO, Mr Ishaam Abader, said the capacity-building intervention is a timely intervention.

“As many parts of the continent continue to contend with severe weather impacts that are often highly destructive and often deadly, governments, the commercial and industrial sectors and importantly, communities are looking to NMHSs for forecasts that will inform their decision-making. For this reason, we need to constantly capacitate ourselves to stay ahead of the curve,” Mr Abader said.

“Doing so will put us on course to live up to the ideal of ensuring that everyone is protected from hazardous weather or climate events in the four-year timeline set for the *Early Warnings for All* initiative. The South African Weather Service is ecstatic about the WMO’s decision to once again entrust South Africa with the responsibility to host this important programme that will strengthen our African meteorological leadership.”

Dean and Director of Henley Business School Africa, Jon Foster-Pedley, said his organisation was proud to be part of the training programme, contributing to a sustainable future through effective leadership and informed decision-making.

"The collaboration between the World Meteorological Organization, the South African Weather Service, and Henley Business School Africa underscores the urgency and necessity of strengthening leadership capacities in the face of climate change," he said.

The South African Weather Service, as an active and respected member of the WMO, is hosting the training programme for the second time, after the successful session that took place in 2019.

Located at the southern tip of Africa, South Africa, like some of its neighbouring countries, has had its fair share of severe weather events. These included the 2022 and 2023 severe storms, excessive rain and floods in the Cape coastal areas and in KwaZulu-Natal, which lead to loss of life and widespread infrastructure destruction.

Journalists are invited to cover the opening ceremony of the training programme. The details are as follows:

- Date: Monday, 23 October 2023
- Time: 09:00
- Venue: Southern Sun Sandton

End

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