**Welcome address by**

**Ms Tanja Fajon**

**Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs;**

**Africa Day Conference, Brdo, 20 April 2023**

***(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)***

Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Friends,

How wonderful it is to start the day with such beautiful inspiring music. My sincere thanks to Wiyaala and her fellow musicians for filling this morning with energy and for showing us the full potential of cooperation, integration, understanding and respect.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to Slovenia, the green jewel of Europe, with its mountains, forests, rivers, lakes and sea, and especially with its extraordinary biodiversity.

However, like everyone else, we are under threat – the threat of droughts, extreme weather, fires. A drastic change to our way of life, to our food and water security lies ahead of us.

We are under no illusion that this is only happening here. Many countries are facing much bigger threats due to climate change than we are. Some are threatened by physical extinction due to rising sea levels, while elsewhere large parts of the world’s population have no choice but to migrate and depend on humanitarian aid to survive.

In the face of these challenges, we are all small and vulnerable. Only if we work together, in partnership, can we be successful.

Slovenia is – like most countries in the international community – a small country. For us it is essential to forge partnerships around the world. Solidarity and respect are the guiding principles of Slovenia’s foreign policy.

Our partnership with Africa, a large, diverse and opportunity-filled continent, has emerged from this context and continues to develop and deepen.

Twelve years ago, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held the first Africa Day Conference. Through the years, the event has created a unique and precious cooperation between Slovenia and Africa, between Europe and Africa.

It pleases me to see that we are enhancing our bilateral cooperation with this conference – not only because I visited Africa just last week and had a series of in-depth discussions, as well as witnessing the valuable potential that we can all draw on together.

I would like to thank all those who responded to the invitation to the conference, showing that the theme we have chosen for this year's event is extremely relevant. If there ever there was an issue we can call a global challenge, it is certainly the consequences of climate change.

I look forward to discussions about different aspects of climate security. How can we address this topic in the global multilateral forums, such as the UN Security Council and COP28?

When it comes to climate justice, we need to think and act faster, and use an effective model of global climate finance.

Local actions that take into account sustainable solutions are equally important. Local knowledge is always the best as it can offer the best solutions. Transfer of knowledge, technologies and innovation – in collaboration between government and the private sector – may be an important step forward.

The ideas, needs and concerns of young people must be included in policies. Young people are the future, their number is growing and they all have the right to live in prosperity and be respected. If we cannot guarantee this, we are literally forcing them to look elsewhere for a brighter future. The message of young people is also reflected in the UN-sponsored exhibition Little Inventors, which is on display in the conference rooms.

We need to mainstream gender into climate action much more vigorously. Women should have the opportunity to participate fully in these processes, and we need to make use of their knowledge and their responsible role in society. It is hardly possible to build a better future for all if we exclude half of the world’s population from this process.

Climate change is also an opportunity to create new or renew existing partnerships for the green transition, for the development of new technologies and to find new solutions.

The business pillar of this conference will focus on answers to some of the dilemmas regarding the intersection of climate technologies and economic development. There is Artificial Intelligence, there is high technology, and we should use them for the benefit of the environment. We look forward to the presentation of seven Slovenian-African business clubs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Africa Day Conference is accompanied by the pilot project to provide training on climate security, which will take place in cooperation with the Slovenian Peace Operations Training Centre. The training is one of Slovenia’s concrete contributions to climate security.

To conclude, I am sincerely grateful to the African diaspora in Slovenia, not only for their participation in the Africa Day Conference but for enriching our society every day.

I look forward to exchanging ideas at this conference, and to taking concrete steps toward our strengthened partnership.

And finally, you are warmly invited to attend the cultural programme that will take place in Ljubljana later today.

Thank you.