

AFRICAN UNION



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**STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION
COMMISSION, MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT, ON THE OCCASION
OF THE THIRTY FOURTH ORDINARY SESSION OF
THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

ADDIS ABABA, 7 AND 8 FEBRUARY 2019

Mr Chairman of the Executive Council,

Honourable Ministers,

Dear Colleagues of the Regional Economic Communities, Organs and the Commission,

This session of the Executive Council is convened just days before the centenary anniversary of the First PanAfrican Congress. On 19 February 1919, intellectuals and activists of African origin met in Paris to express forcefully their demand for dignity and respect for their peoples. That Congress marked the beginning of the march that ultimately led to the inception of the Organisation of African Unity.

Furthermore, in a few months, we shall celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Sirte Declaration, which laid the foundation for the transformation of the OAU into the African Union.

This is to say that the year 2019 is fraught with symbols. We must seize this opportunity to pay tribute to those whose vision and courage enabled us to recover our freedom and dignity. Within this framework, it is gratifying to note that, at this Summit, our leaders will unveil a statue in honour of Emperor Haile Selassie, one of the Founding Fathers of the OAU.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Any commemoration is also an opportunity to take stock of the progress made and identify the obstacles to be overcome. From this point of view, this session of Council will allow us to take a retrospective look at the past six months and to agree on the way forward.

The deepening of the integration process continued to mobilise our energies during the period under consideration. The progress made regarding the Free Trade Area is particularly encouraging. At the current pace of ratification, we can anticipate the entry into force of the Agreement in the coming weeks. I hope that the six countries that have not yet signed this instrument will do so as soon as possible and that those who have already taken this step will quickly conclude the ratification procedures.

At the same time, we must ensure that international commitments made by some Member States with third parties do not contradict the provisions of the Free Trade Area. This issue was raised by the PRC.

The attainment of the objectives of the Free Trade Area also implies that we move more rapidly towards the Single Air Transport Market and the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons and the African Passport. The adoption by the Organs of our Union of guidelines on the design, characteristics and production of the African passport will be a major step.

Progress has also been made in other aspects of the integration process, including the Programme on Infrastructure Development in Africa and the Establishment of an African Electricity Market.

In parallel, we need to speed up the establishment of the financial institutions of our Union, namely the Central Bank, the Investment Bank and the African Monetary Fund. This presupposes, with regard to the first two institutions, the speeding up of the ratification process to allow their entry into force.

Our leaders have, on many occasions, expressed their commitment to the integration process. The exigencies of the development of our continent make it an imperative need to accelerate the pace of honouring the commitments made. Moreover, the rise of unilateralism leaves us no choice but to close our ranks ever more.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of this year is devoted to the issue of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons. This choice illustrates the renewed will of our leaders to find a lasting response to the nagging issue of forced displacement of persons.

We have a dual responsibility here. On the one hand, it is important that Africa, while seeking the continued support of the international community, contribute more significantly to the mobilisation of humanitarian assistance. This is, among others, the objective pursued through the establishment of the African Humanitarian Agency.

On the other hand, we must act more effectively on conflicts and crises whose outbreak or persistence is the primary cause of forced displacement of persons. The objective of our leaders to rid the continent of the scourge of armed conflict by 2020 is certainly ambitious, but its realisation is not impossible if there is political will. The recent developments in the Horn of Africa are an eloquent illustration. In this regard, I would like to hail, once again, the vision of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and other leaders of the Region.

In this context, the recent signing of a Peace Agreement between the Government and the armed groups in the Central African Republic is a positive step for this country and its long-suffering people.

The evolution of the situation seems equally encouraging in South Sudan. It is hoped that the parties will live up to the expectations raised to end the tragedy they have inflicted on their people.

I welcome the reactivation, under the auspices of the United Nations, of the process of finding a solution to the Western Sahara conflict. The African Union will provide renewed support to these efforts through the African Mechanism established at the Nouakchott Summit.

I express the hope that genuine progress will be made in Burundi, through renewed Regional action. The support of the African Union will not found wanting.

I note with satisfaction the smooth organisation of the elections and the transitions in Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The African Union will continue to support these two countries in consolidating these important achievements.

In general, we must work continuously to improve governance. Surely, we have made significant progress in this area. But there are still challenges to be taken up, as evidenced by the delays in the entry into force of the relevant instruments of our Union and the shortcomings that characterise their implementation.

I seize this opportunity to reiterate my appreciation to President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria for his actions taken as the Champion for the fight against Corruption within the purview of the theme of 2018.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Extraordinary Summit on Institutional Reform of the Union held in November 2018 was a success. It made it possible to consolidate the existing consensus and the adoption of new decisions on some of its pending aspects.

The road already travelled towards financial autonomy confirms, if it were necessary, the relevance of the approach initiated. We must continue in this direction and redouble the efforts under way.

I hope that your Council will agree on the new Scale of Assessment both for the regular budget and the Peace Fund.

With regard specifically to the Peace Fund, it is crucial to attain the objectives set and to secure sustainable funding for this tool on the basis of the assessed contributions. It is on this condition that we shall be able to ensure African ownership and continental leadership that we are constantly claiming.

Not to fund our peace efforts in a more substantial way would tantamount to entrusting to others with the essential levers of the continental sovereignty.

We must, in the same spirit, mobilise more financial support for the activities carried out by the various organs of our Union in support of the Member States, in fields as diverse as health, education and research, agriculture and infrastructure.

Since taking up office, I have been endeavouring to enhance the visibility of these programmes, through field visits, but also during my interactions with the PRC. I intend to intensify the action taken in this regard, because I am convinced that, in the last instance, the extent of the support given by our peoples and our States to our Union is closely linked to their perception of its impact on the ground.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am confident that your session will discuss these issues and many other items on the agenda with the spirit of commitment that has always characterised it, in order to mark new milestones in the implementation of Agenda 2063. Such is the hope that our peoples place in our Union, in this 2019, of which I recalled is very symbolical.

We are at a stage in our collective trajectory calling for increased mobilisation of everyone. This requires, in particular, the unflinching honouring of the commitments made and the diligent adoption of the decisions that the implementation of our Agenda demands. In this way we shall be able to build on our progress and score new victories in our march towards a united and prosperous Africa, playing its full role in the international arena.

I thank you.