

AFRICAN UNION

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25 MAY: AFRICAN LIBERATION DAY

DECLARATION BY H.E. MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT, CHAIRPERSON
OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

My African Brothers and Sisters,

Today we commemorate the establishment, on 25 May 1963, here in Addis Ababa, of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). It will be exactly 57 years to the day. This date, which is considered as Africa Day, is, like all important celebrations, a moment not only of joy, but also of pride, reflection and meditation.

57 years ago, Africa laid the foundations for its unity that had been undermined by colonisation, by establishing a common organization, the OAU, which became the African Union in 2002. 57 years after this founding act, Africa liberated itself from the colonial presence and from apartheid. It initiated its political unity, and made significant economic, social and cultural progress. However, such progress cannot conceal the sometimes flagrant shortcomings and delays.

We are constantly plagued, not without anguish, by many questions. Has Africa become the continent of freedom, peace, prosperity, and success that our Founding Fathers dreamt of? Are Africans united, interdependent and thriving? Has Africa gained a place commensurate with its immense potential and legitimate ambition in the international arena?

The scorecard of the Continent's half a century of independence and freedom leaves one in doubt.

In spite of its huge economic potential, and its rich, young and dynamic human capital, most African States have difficulties in ensuring the welfare of their populations.

Key sectors such as education, health and security are largely dependent on foreign aid. Communitarianism and tribalism have become more marked due to multiparty systems and democratic principles that have oftentimes been perverted.

Ranging from open crises, caused by terrorism and inter-tribal or inter-religious conflicts to post-electoral crises, Africa is constantly beset, here and there, by scenes of violence, fragility and uncertainty over the future.

As Chairperson of the African Union Commission, one of whose key commitments is to silence the guns on the Continent, I am deeply touched by the sight of the current events in Libya, one of the founding members of the OAU, and the principal initiator and proponent of the African Union. The tragedy being played out in this country is of profound concern to us all. No-one is blameless in the failure, neither is any segment of the international community, which has a great responsibility in the persistence or even escalation of the conflict.

**My African Brothers and Sisters,
Friends of Africa worldwide,**

Against this mixed backdrop, there are some glimmers of hope, insofar as there is great determination to overcome the odds, and immense resources to break the cycle of dependency and poverty. Positive developments and new impetus, as well as fierce determination, and spectacular results, have continued to emerge and pave the way forward.

Regional organisations are being established, while continental flagship projects such as the AfCFTA are on the right track. The Continent's economic integration, another founding aspiration of our peoples, is now within reach. The emergence of the Continent is certainly feasible. However, the ardent wish of the peoples of Africa, particularly the youth, is that leadership and governance invest greater efforts to ensure that Africa gives and avails itself of its best.

A more Africanist vision of this leadership, focusing on common and binding strategic objectives, will be required if we are to pursue the legitimate aspirations of our youth and our Founding Fathers.

The reform of the African Union is intended to provide the Commission with appropriate legal and policy resources to become an effective instrument for the achievement of priority actions, the essence of which is reflected in Agenda 2063. Our common ambition, that of our leaders and hundreds of millions of Africans, is to advance with greater force and resolve towards this horizon.

Brothers and Sisters of the Continent,

The Coronavirus pandemic currently ravaging the entire world as has rarely been seen, has destroyed certainties, undermined assurances, and shattered most of our beliefs. Never before has humanity appeared so fragile and impotent. Perhaps the time has come for humanity to reflect on its vanities and limitations, in order to re-think universal civilisation.

Right from the onset the pandemic, much to the surprise of those who have always belittled the Continent, Africa mobilised itself. A continental response strategy was developed and implemented promptly.

I would like to pay a well-deserved tribute to the specialised organs of the Union in charge of this implementation, as well as to the current Chairperson of our Union, His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa, for the pertinent initiatives taken. My tribute also goes to all our Member States, which in a remarkable manner, promptly took appropriate measures, consistent with the continental strategy.

We should however redouble efforts, determination and perseverance in strictly implementing the pillars of the strategy. We should go beyond the present situation, by preparing for post-pandemic conditions in the world.

There is an urgent need for Africa to develop new forms of resilience. In a world in which multilateralism is sorely tested, Africa must stop expecting solutions from others. Africa should no longer be satisfied with this role of never-ending reservoir for some, and dumping ground for others.

There is an urgent need for Africa to chart its own course. Its food dependency and insecurity are unacceptable and intolerable, as is the state of its road, port, health and educational infrastructure. Africa's land, forests, rich fauna, mines, energy potential, and maritime and inland waterways, hold the necessary resources to provide an adequate response to the needs of its peoples. We should, in full lucidity, boldly opt for an innovative approach that is inward-looking rather than outward-looking. Let us live on what we have, using what we have, in other words let us live within our means!

As we embark on this path, our leaders will be closer to our citizens, and our Nations will become stronger. In my opinion, this inward-looking and self-reliance approach, will be a catalyst for the renaissance of our Nations. It is only when they are tested, that nations and states truly emerge. We are now at that point in history. The COVID-19 pandemic brutally reminds us of a major issue, which is the imperative need to put a stop to dependency on the exterior. This can be achieved through the twofold objective of living on our own resources, and resolutely focusing on our industrialisation process. Other entities with less resource than we have, were able to achieve this in record time.

I strongly urge women, youth, intellectuals, academics, politicians, entrepreneurs, and civil society activists, to engage in fruitful and active discussions on the issue, which is key to our material survival, our independence, our freedom and our dignity.

The only way to contain COVID-19 and its disastrous effects, is to ensure our food sufficiency, create millions of jobs, and save hundreds of millions of African citizens, who are currently seriously exposed to pandemics and various other hazards. This entails a real outpouring of solidarity for a truly strong and lasting African resilience.

There is no nobler manner of celebrating Africa Day than by initiating this intellectual, moral and political venture, which is essential for the genuine renaissance of our dear Continent.

God bless Africa.