

**REMARKS BY CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION PRESIDENT CYRIL  
RAMAPHOSA ON THE OCCASION OF AFRICA DAY**

**25 MAY 2020**

Fellow Africans,

On this day 57 years ago, the Organisation of African Unity was born. From the beginning it was dedicated to the idea that only through unity could Africa safeguard its independence and unlock its potential.

Today we pay tribute to our forebears the founders of the OAU whose dream of greater African integration and unity has endured.

We also honour the legions of revolutionary leaders of Africa who took up the mantle of pan-Africanism and who fought for the economic and political integration of Africa.

They have left a formidable legacy for our continent and all its peoples. They continue to inspire us and the generations that will come after us.

It was the mission of the founders of the OAU to liberate the continent from the clutches of colonial oppression, to restore Africa's fortunes and to restore the dignity of every African man, woman and child.

We are reminded of the difficulties they had to overcome and the resistance they encountered from foreign powers that had much to gain from exploiting divisions on the continent.

Yet they taught us the power of perseverance and sacrifice, of dedication to an ideal, and that an Africa united can overcome even the greatest of challenges.

We mark this Africa Day in the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic, which has swept across the world and left no part of our continent untouched. Thus far almost 96 000 people have been infected with almost 3 000 having lost their lives.

This COVID 19 pandemic will have a lasting impact on our ability to meet the aspiration of the African Union's Agenda 2063 of a peaceful, united and prosperous continent.

The virus has exposed the deep inequalities that continue to exist on our continent and across the world.

It has shown how far we are from realising our developmental goals and our responsibilities to the citizens of our continent.

But at the same time, this global crisis should enable a new Africa to come to the fore.

It should be an Africa of heroic acts of solidarity, an Africa of cross-border collaboration and sharing of knowledge and resources, an Africa that is united by a common goal.

The challenge of this pandemic has shown how Africa is able to work together to solve its own problems.

Day by day, across our continent, we are seeing the unity that is our strength being put to the service of saving lives and supporting the vulnerable.

We salute the latter-day standard-bearers of pan-African unity: the health care workers and medical personnel, the scientists and epidemiologists. We salute the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention for leading our continent's response to the pandemic. We also pay tribute to the community workers and NGOs, and the leaders of government and business who have lent their full support to Africa's coronavirus response.

The African Union and its various organs has shown leadership and acted with speed to address this crisis.

We thank our brother, Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, for demonstrating strong and foresightful leadership to the world during this crisis.

We thank all the patriots on our continent and our friends in the international community for showing solidarity this difficult time.

We know that no country can overcome this challenge alone.

We call on developed countries, multilateral institutions and the donor community to provide vulnerable countries across the world especially in our continent with the necessary support in the form diagnostic and therapeutic medical supplies as well as necessary financial support to sustain the livelihoods of vulnerable people

We repeat our call for a comprehensive, robust economic stimulus package for Africa that includes debt relief and other support measures for the continent's immediate humanitarian needs and necessary economic recovery. As we deal with the impact of this pandemic repeat our call for the unconditional lifting of sanctions that have been imposed on Zimbabwe and Sudan

As Africans we have taken firm charge of managing this pandemic.

We have a comprehensive strategy formulated by the African Union, and have appointed Special Envoys to mobilise the financial and other resources necessary for its implementation.

COVID-19 knows no borders, nationality or skin colour.

To address the escalating humanitarian crisis we need to deepen our solidarity.

We must ensure the pandemic does not reverse our developmental gains.

We must forge ahead with meeting the aspirations of Agenda 2063.

We must move ahead with the most ambitious step towards pan-African integration to date, the creation of the African Continental Free Trade Area, and ensure that it is operationalised soon.

We must not let up on our efforts to drive the African agenda of security, peace and stability, of democracy and human rights, of women's emancipation and the protection of the environment.

We must not under any circumstances allow this global health emergency to derail our efforts to Silence the Guns on the continent.

The tragic conflicts that are breeding instability in a number of countries on our continent are exacting a heavy toll on human life and must end.

We must continue to affirm the supremacy of dialogue over military intervention.

As Africans we will continue to stand on the side of justice and support the people of the Western Sahara in their enduring struggle for freedom and self-determination.

We also call for the end of the oppression of the Palestinian people and the occupation of their homeland.

Fellow Africans

Africa has known much turmoil and hardship throughout history.

We have endured the worst excesses of humankind, from slavery to colonialism, to apartheid, and to prolonged military conflict.

But just as our ancestors were able to overcome the horrors of their time, so too will our faith, courage and resilience as Africans see us through this time of difficulty.

And so, in the words of Africa's first Nobel Peace Laureate Chief Albert Luthuli, let us cast our eyes beyond the past.

Let us fix our eyes them firmly to the future that burns bright on the horizon.

If we remain united, we will overcome this pandemic.

We will recover and restore our economies.

We will uplift the conditions of our people and we will be worthy inheritors of the legacy of the great Africans who met in Addis Ababa in 1963 to form the OAU.

If we draw from the deepest depths of African unity and solidarity we shall prevail.

May God Bless Africa and protect her people.

I thank you.