

DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

Date: July 7, 2020

Venue: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Joint Statement of the Chairperson of the Assembly of the African Union, The
African Continental Free Trade Area Champion and The Chairperson of the
African Union Commission
On the Occasion of the
Commemoration of African Integration Day**

We are meeting today to close the inaugural commemoration of the African Integration Day, which began on 1 July 2020. It is a Day on which we reflect on and celebrate our achievements in bringing African economies and peoples closer together, in conformity with our motto of Africa speaking with one voice and acting in unison. In so doing, we also assess the progress made so far in the implementation of the Agenda 2063 of the African Union, with its vision of establishing the Africa we want, through the realisation of "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, led by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force on the international scene".

The road to African integration began long ago and has witnessed some important milestones. It dates back to 1963 with the inception of the Organisation of African Unity, when our predecessors called for the establishment of the African Common Market. Continental economic integration was, therefore, a key objective of the post-colonial period. This led to the setting up of the Regional Economic Communities and, later, to the Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa for the period 1980-2000, whose main objective was to galvanise the spirit of collective self-reliance. The Lagos Plan of Action was the springboard for the negotiation of the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (Abuja Treaty) signed in 1991 and

is the legal basis and vision for the economic integration programme of Africa. The Abuja Treaty entered into force on 12 May 1994 with a gradual approach towards the African Economic Community, whose first phase was to use the Regional Economic Communities as pillars.

At this historical moment, the Abuja Treaty has ushered in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), one of the flagship projects of the Agenda 2063 of the African Union. On 21 March 2018, the Agreement establishing the AfCFTA was concluded and signed in Kigali, Rwanda. Another important milestone was reached on 30 May 2019, when the Agreement entered into force.

The entry into force of the AfCFTA Agreement was historical, opening a new development vista for our Continent. To date, 54 countries have signed the Agreement and 28 countries have deposited their instruments of ratification with the African Union Commission. Africans from all walks of life should be very proud of this unprecedented achievement, which makes Africa the land of opportunities and promises.

By establishing this market of 1.27 billion people, we are also defragmenting Africa to put behind us the history of small uncompetitive markets that have thwarted our efforts to achieve inclusive sustainable development for the benefit of our peoples. This important and inclusive market will now position us to attract increased trade and investment and, in so doing, afford opportunities for young African entrepreneurs, women and small and large enterprises. Their business activities should lead to the creation of decent jobs for millions of Africans as a means of achieving widespread prosperity.

Our commemoration of today was designed at the launch of the operational phase of the AfCFTA in Niamey, Niger, on 7 July 2019, when the 12th Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union decided that 7 July each year be designated as the African Integration Day. This Day is to be observed annually by all Member States, without it being a public holiday.

On this day, Africans from the continent and from the Diaspora propose commemorative activities to observe and celebrate the achievements of the

AfCFTA in the previous year. Aware that the fate of the AfCFTA lies in our hands, the celebration also serves to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to continue the process of establishing the African Economic Community as outlined in the 1991 Abuja Treaty.

The 33rd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union, held on 9 and 10 February 2020 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, adopted guidelines for the commemoration of the African Integration Day and these have been widely disseminated. Today we are also celebrating the pillars of the African Economic Community. These are the Regional Economic Communities, which have paved the way for economic integration in Africa at this level. Through the AfCFTA, we are now entering uncharted territory, opening a new era of continental economic integration. But we are convinced that the lesson learnt and the institutional and programmatic arrangements of the Regional Economic Communities will greatly help the AfCFTA gain momentum as we roll out trade in this market.

As we conclude the commemorative activities today, we look with satisfaction and pride at the range of activities carried out and the broad participation of African Union Member States, the private sector, academia, youths, women, the civil society and the African diaspora through the following:

- a) Round tables and debates on historical and contemporary African issues, such as the promotion of industrialisation and structural transformation in Africa;
- (b) Deployment of some of the main instruments that will be used in the AfCFTA, such as Essential Innovation Design Accelerator (EIDA); the competition for exhibition space at the Young Enterprise Pavilion at the forthcoming 2021 Intra-African Trade Fair; the AfCFTA online Mechanism for monitoring, reporting and removing non-tariff barriers; and, the African E-Commerce Platform.

All these elements testify to the passion and preparation of the various stakeholders to implement the AfCFTA. Future commemorations will be expanded to include the following activities to be carried out at the Community, National, Regional, Continental and International levels:

- a) Exhibitions and art competitions;
- b) Commemorative street rallies and walks;
- c) Media campaigns;
- d) Supplements in national and pan-African media;
- e) Sporting events; and
- f) Culinary festivals, music and dance.

Our first commemoration is taking place in unusual circumstances given the Covid-19 pandemic that has affected us all in Africa and around the world. Difficult as it is, the pandemic has inspired us to realise the potential we have to harness and address this challenge. In this regard, we need to reconfigure alternative supply chains in the face of the disruptions that emerged as soon as blockades and quarantines came into play to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Consequently, the pandemic challenged us to speed up our industrial development agenda, through the establishment of Regional value and supply chains, with the active participation of the private sector. Furthermore, the pandemic stressed the importance of strong health systems as well as e-government, e-education, e-diplomacy and e-commerce. Finally, the pandemic has unleashed the innovative spirit of Africans and built resilience as evidenced by the various adjustment measures at the community and national levels, including our use of traditional medicines.

As we look to the post-COVID-19 era, it is clear that the future of Africa as regards recovery, development and resilience lies in accelerating its economic integration through the implementation, at the level of Africa, of the AfCFTA. The AfCFTA offers the best platform for us to build and deliver inclusive and sustainable development by using the large market space to mobilise investment. Within this framework, we urge all other African Union Member States to sign and ratify the Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area.

In conclusion, we wish to call on all Africans, in a spirit of Pan-Africanism, to look forward to a bright future in a gradually integrating Africa. By acting together and in perfect harmony, we will create a better future for present and future African generations. In this regard, let us ensure, in the coming year, distinct

achievements in the Regional Economic Communities and the AfCFTA so that we celebrate the African Integration Day of 2021 with the satisfaction that our economic integration agenda is producing substantial results and benefits for all Africans.

Long live Africa! Long live the spirit of unity and integration of the peoples of Africa!

Signed:

H. E. Mr. CYRIL M. RAMAPHOSA
President of the Republic of
South Africa
Chairperson of the African Union

H. E. Mr. ISSOUFOU MAHAMDOU
President of the Republic
of Niger AfCFTA Champion

H.E. Mr. MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT
Chairperson of the AU Commission

Directorate of Information and Communication | African Union Commission | E-mail: DIC@africa-union.org | Website: www.au.int | Addis Ababa | Ethiopia Follow Us: [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [YouTube](#)