

OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE AFRICAN UNION, MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, DR NALEDI PANDOR, DELIVERED DURING THE 37TH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL ON 13 OCTOBER 2020

Excellency, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr Faki Moussa Mahamat

Excellencies, Members of the Executive Council

The Deputy-Chairperson of the AU Commission and all the AU Commissioners present here today,

Excellency the Director for the Africa CDC, Dr John Nkengasong

Ladies and gentlemen,

I call into order the meeting of the 37th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union.

Let me begin by thanking you all for attending this meeting albeit under extremely unusual circumstances. Likewise, I would like to thank the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr Mousa Faki Mahamat and his team for a job well done in facilitating this Session today. The importance of the issues confronting us as the Organisation and the urgency that we have to take certain decisions during the Session has left us with no option but to convene this Ordinary Session of the Executive Council despite the pandemic and I want express my profound appreciation to all of you for heeding the call to be at this meeting today.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet today under a “new normal” caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is with great concern that today, the Continent has lost more than 30 000 of people due to the COVID-19 pandemic and more than 1,5 million have been infected as of 12 October 2020. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has over-stretched our already weak public health systems to its limits.

The pandemic has also caused unimaginable impact to the socio-economic landscape thereby undermining the gains that we have made thus far. It came as no surprise therefore that the economic forecasts predicted that the Continent will experience a recession this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, for the first time in over two decades.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the world contends with the “new normal” and as we continue to navigate through the destruction that the pandemic has caused the Continent, we must not despair, instead the COVID-19 pandemic provides us with a rare opportunity to reimagine the Continent in the post-COVID-19 era. The COVID-19 has forced us to derive new ways of addressing our challenges of peace and security, socio-economic under-development, and poverty.

Excellencies and Ladies and gentlemen,

The Continent under the COVID-19 pandemic requires us to continue to take bold and decisive steps in fighting the pandemic in a collective and coordinated approach. The gains that we have achieved thus far in the successful implementation of the Joint AU Continental Strategy should galvanize us on as the Continent to continue to pool our resources until the scourge is defeated and beyond.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Continent in March 2020, the African countries have made huge strides in containing the spread of the virus. The achievements recorded thus far can be attributed to the proactive initiatives undertaken by all of us as a collective under the decisive

leadership of the AU Bureau with the support of the Chairs of the RECs, and the Chair of the AU: H.E. President Cyril Ramaphosa. Underpinned by the Joint Continental COVID-19 Strategy, the AU Bureau established the AU COVID-19 Response Fund and the AU's Medical Supplies Pool Platform and took proactive measures to bolster the capacity of the Africa CDC and its preparedness. The excellent work of AU COVID-19 Special Envoys to negotiate economic relief measures including debt relief for African countries should be supported throughout the Continent.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

These efforts would not have been realised without the tireless efforts and utmost dedication of the AU Bureau, the Chairpersons of the RECs, the African Union Commission under the leadership of H.E. Mr Mousa Faki Mahamat as well as the Director of the Africa CDC, Dr John Nkengasong who we have been working closely together with the World Health Organisation in ensuring that the Continental Strategy is effectively implemented.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we continue to fight the pandemic, we should not lose sight of the perennial challenges that we continue to face as the Continent. The ongoing conflicts in Africa in all its aspects and the difficulties we continue to face in our collective quest to silence the guns by 2020, are a serious cause for concern and must be addressed with the urgency and vigour they deserve.

The impact of climate change, droughts and extreme levels of poverty and increasing numbers of unemployment continue to hamper development in the Continent and this requires us to spare no efforts or resources to ensure that the Continent indeed realises its socio-economic potential and its vision as outlined in Agenda 2063.

Excellencies,

The challenges that we face as the Continent need an organisation such as the African Union that is well-resourced and capable to address the challenges in the Continent that continue unabated even during the pandemic.

In this regard, one of the issues under discussions and consideration during this Session are the recommendations of the Permanent Representative Committee regarding the 2021 AU Budget as well as progress that has been achieved thus far in the AU's efforts to improve its financial management. Although the issue of the budget is a technical matter, it places huge political responsibilities not only on the AU Commission but on its membership. The Chairperson of the AU Commission will provide an update on the budget situation of the Organisation and its implications on the implementation of the priorities of the African Union. The implementation of the Peace Fund is critical in the maintenance of peace and security on the Continent and therefore I have no doubt that the report by the High Representative on the Peace Fund will provide us with options and ways ahead of sustaining the Fund going forward.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The year 2021 is upon us, and as is a custom during this session we are expected to discuss and consider the theme for next year, which is entitled, "Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building a Prosperous, Peaceful, Integrated and Resilient Africa in the Context of Multi-sectoral Challenges." The theme is in recognition of the contribution of Arts, Culture, and heritage as catalysts to our socio-economic development.

I look forward to the discussions and the decisions that we take for the advancement of the goals and objectives of our Organisation forward.

I thank you,

I now invite the Chairperson of the African Union to say a few opening remarks.