

37th ORDINARY SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
THROUGH VIDEO CONFERENCE

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SPEECH OF H.E MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT
CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

Addis Ababa, 13 October 2020

Madam Chairperson of the Executive Council,

Honourable members of the Executive Council,

Deputy Chairperson of the Commission,

Commissioners,

Heads of Organs,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I convey my warm and brotherly greetings from the Headquarters of the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa.

This session of the Executive Council, which opens this morning, is taking place in an unprecedented context characterised by the persistence of COVID-19, but also by the emergence of new issues and challenges, new risks and new opportunities for our Continent. The challenge of our capacity to design and implement together a Policy for Continental response to Covid 19 has been successfully taken up, thanks to the preparation of a robust and adapted response made by the Ministers of Health of all Member States, meeting in Addis Ababa in February 2020.

At the initiative of H.E. Cyril RAMAPHOSA, President of the Republic of South Africa and current Chairman of the Union, the Bureau of the Assembly, in concert with the current Chairmen of the RECs, devoted himself in a remarkable manner to the search for appropriate solutions to address the health emergency and its devastating effects on the economies of the Member States. Special envoys were appointed to advocate, on behalf of the Continent, with the bilateral and multilateral institutions and creditors.

The objective was to obtain fresh financing and debt relief for the Member States to enable them to earmark the necessary resources to effectively fight against the pandemic and its economic and social consequences. An African Union Fund in response to COVID-19 was set up, as well as an online Platform for grouped procurement of health related equipment and supplies, in order to achieve economies of scale and to secure our orders in a highly competitive commercial context. In this regard, I welcome the strong support of the Member States to this Platform.

Honourable Ministers,

Moreover, the coordination of the Continental anti-COVID-19 response had been and continues to be conducted with proven and appreciated professionalism by the Department of Social Affairs and Africa CDC. The Member States distinguished themselves by an exceptional reaction by taking courageous and early measures. Africa displayed resilience and responsibility where African solidarity played a major role. The African private sector also contributed in addressing the issues at stake. In

short, the general mobilisation against this invisible, murderous pandemic was exemplary.

However, it must be noted that this health crisis has dramatically exposed our weaknesses and amplified our fragilities. The state of our externally-oriented economies, denounced, since the 1960s, by many development economists, came to light. The inability of our industries to produce goods and services, whose importance has proved vital for the survival of our peoples, emerged as an unbearable structural weakness.

Specifically I'm referring to medicines, test kits, masks, single-use or multiple-use suits, respirators, ICU beds that we have, either received as donations or had to import, with all that this entails in terms of increased dependency but also in terms of foreign currency outflow. All of this proved challenging.

This health crisis is, therefore, an opportunity for a well thought-out and resolute reorientation of our manufacturing capacities by giving priority to import substitution, at a time when we are preparing to operationalise the African Continental Free Trade Area.

**Madam Chairperson of the Executive Council
Honourable Members of the Executive Council**

The lives and needs of human beings are multidimensional and rebellious to any reductionism. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic has not erased other essential and pre-existing challenges on the continent.

Here I would like to recall the theme of the year, which is "Silencing the Guns by 2020" and the pursuit the institutional and reforms of the Union. Finally, I am also referring to the vote on the Budget for 2021.

With regard to the theme of the year, since the last meeting of the Executive Council, we wish to point to the positive and encouraging developments underway in the resolution of the civil war in The Sudan. The Peace Agreement, recently signed, in Juba, South Sudan, between the protagonists of this war, is a decisive step towards silencing the guns in this great country. Our wish is that the guns should be silenced on the Continent; I hope Libya will follow this example.

This project, which is particularly close to my heart and on which the evolution of Africa partly depends, continues to move forward and should continue to do so, despite the challenges.

The obstacles and challenges are well known and the aspiration to render Africa conflict-free is a long-term undertaking that must find renewed impetus in all the efforts and sacrifices made. The follow-up of this theme naturally calls for the intensification

of actions aimed at peace, security, development and integration revolving around the vision of the Agenda 2063.

As for the Institutional Reforms, they are under way. Following the adoption of the new Departmental structure of the Commission, by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, last February, it behoves the Executive Council to consider the Draft Transition Plan for the transition from the current structure to the new one, as well as the Financing Strategy for the new structure and the Transition Plan.

I would like to draw your attention to our fervent wish to see the Executive Council kindly consider for adoption Phase 1 (one) of the Transition Plan and the Financing Strategy which aims, in a gradual approach, to provide the future Commission, as soon as it takes up office, in March 2021, with a high-level managerial staff, recruited on the basis of the new selection rules, adopted by the Executive Council last February.

As for the Draft Budget for the Financial Year 2021, it was drawn up within the structural constraints linked to COVID-19. Added to this are the negative effects of this pandemic which resulted, on the one hand, in a very low rate of receipt by the Commission of the statutory contributions of the Member States and on the other hand, a general decrease of 2% compared to the 2020 budget.

Thus, the budget for 2021 will have to reconcile the need for rigour and austerity, dictated by the sharp drop in the revenues of the Member States with the need to provide the Commission and the other organs and institutions of the Union with the necessary means to carry out their missions. This situation requires that a clear strategic choice be made by the Union, one that specifies the path to be followed by the Commission.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and thank you for your kind attention.