5 December 2020 - 12:00am

Your Majesties,
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Your Excellency, Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AU Commission,
Your Excellencies, Members of the Executive Council,
Mr Wamkele Mene, the Secretary-General of the AfCFTA Secretariat,
Heads of AU Organs,
Heads of Regional Economic Communities,
Deputy Chairperson and Commissioners of the African Union Commission,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are now at the end of the 13th Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union on the African Continental Free Trade Area.

The operationalisation of the AfCFTA is a historic milestone in the long walk towards African economic integration.

At its core is a developmental approach that seeks to liberalise trade, build value chains and overcome the infrastructure deficit on the continent.

Our continent is one of the fastest growing markets in the world with a projection of more than a billion consumers.

The AfCFTA brings with it the promise of new beginnings and increased opportunities for our continent and its people.

We reaffirm our optimism that the AfCFTA will leverage on these opportunities by attracting more foreign direct investment and expedite the implementation of post-COVID-19 economic recovery plans.

If the AfCFTA is to succeed we have to overcome the political and socio-economic challenges that face the continent.

We have to address issues of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment.

We have to address issues of security and instability, which are causing untold suffering for the African people and holding us back from realising our full potential.

We have to renew our collective commitment to realising the aspirations of Agenda 2063, and not waver in our resolve to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by the end of this decade.

Progress will not be achieved without economic development, and the economic integration of Africa through the AfCFTA must now be our most important collective task.

I call upon Your Excellencies to continue to support the African Union Commission and the AfCFTA Secretariat as we move towards the second phase of negotiations.

I wish to commend all Ministers of Trade and negotiators for their dedication and hard work in always trying to find common ground and arriving at implementable solutions.

Nelson Mandela reminded us that: “After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.”
Our work is far from over. There is still much more to be done.

Let us not falter and let us not tire, for the prize is within our reach.

Let us only rest when we have achieved what we set out to.

Your Excellencies,

Our plans for the operationalisation of the AfCFTA were momentarily disrupted by the devastating coronavirus pandemic.

As we continue to battle this public health crisis, we are determined to remain firmly on the path of progress.

In confronting this pandemic, we came together as never before.

We have shown just what we Africans are capable of achieving when we stand united.

Let us in the same spirit of unity and solidarity take forward the operationalisation of the AfCFTA and drive the post-pandemic economic recovery effort.

I thank you all for your attendance and for all those who made this virtual session of the Assembly possible.

I now have the honour and pleasure of declaring the 13th Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government on the African Continental Free Trade Area officially closed.

I thank you.