

AFRICAN UNION

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Welcome Remarks of the Chairperson of the African
Union Commission, HE Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma

to the

**30th Ordinary Session of the
Executive Council of the African Union**

Your Excellency, Moussa Faki Mahamat, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Chad and Chairperson of the Executive Council;

Honorable Ministers Members of the Executive Council, and Heads of Delegations;

Excellency Dr. Abdullah Hamdok, Acting Executive Secretary of the UNECA;

Excellency Erastus Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson of the AU Commission and fellow Commissioners;

Excellency Dr. Ibrahim Mayaki, CEO of the NEPAD Policy and Coordination Agency;

Prof. Emmanuel Nnadozie, Executive Secretary of the African Capacity Building Foundation;

Excellencies, Head of AU Organs

Representatives of the African Development Bank;

Leadership and representatives from AU Organs, Executive Secretaries of the RECs, and AU representative and liaison offices;

Excellencies Members of the PRC;

High-level Officials from the capitals, AU Commission and other organs staff

Representatives of Civil society

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very warm welcome to the African Union Headquarters and to this 30th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council.

A special welcome to the new Foreign Ministers who are present at the Executive Council for the first time. We look forward to your contributions and insights, and you will be introduced at appropriate time by the Chairperson of the Executive Council.

I join the Chairperson of the Executive Council in wishing you a healthy, peaceful and prosperous 2017.

A word of gratitude to the Ethiopian Government and People for the welcome and hospitalities provided, to once again make this Summit held at Headquarters a success.

Your Excellencies

As we start this session, we are reminded once again, as we were at the 5th Ministerial Retreat in December 2016, that we are building Africa's future in a fast-changing world with contradictory trends.

Globally, countries are experiencing political changes and instability. Citizens' confidence in political systems are at an all-time low. Social media reinforces this trend, where users trust what they hear from '*other ordinary citizens*', more than from the media or other official sources.

It includes the challenges to the unity of the European Union, with Brexit, the mobilisation and advances of their ultra-right buoyed by the elections in the US, and as Europe approaches a number of critical elections this year.

It manifests itself in global progress on gender issues on the one hand, but on the other hand a neo-conservative pushback against women's rights and leadership.

The world feels more insecure, as violent extremism of all kinds, acts of terrorism, and international crime impact on all our security, with no country that is exempt. This is coupled with large movements of people across the world, as conflicts, economic insecurity and climate change take their toll.

Whilst on the surface there is no global arms race, expenditure on arms are sky-rocketing, with the proliferation of arms in the hands of states, and increasingly, non-state actors. This poses threats to global, national and regional stability and security alike, in addition to siphoning off money that should be used for development and peace.

Multi-lateralism remains under threat, despite the recent global consensus on the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the climate change process. On the one hand, the unipolar position of the G7/8 is being challenged by especially the BRICS countries. On the other, hand, we seems to be moving towards multi-polar world, as the USA under the new administration threatens the consensus on climate change, attack hard-won women's rights and move towards protectionism.

It is also manifested in the proliferation of negotiations on supra-regional trade blocks, whilst the Doha Development round of negotiations has not left the starting blocks. Africa's only protection in these treacherous global waters, is to honour the decision to commence its own Continental Free Trade Area in 2017.

With the 2008/2009 financial crisis slow-down in global growth and yet another commodity price collapse, the reality of globalization's game of winners and losers are becoming more self-evident. The wealth of the richest 1% in the world now equals that of the remaining 99% in the world combined. And yet, many use every loophole to avoid paying their fair share of taxes, including through illicit capital flows. At the same time, the middle and working classes are more insecure, with sustained attacks on their incomes and social benefits.

The agenda of reaction in the world is not without challenge. The responses include protests by youth, students, trade unions and other groups, against the excesses of globalisation. More recently, we see an emerging broad front, led by the women's movement, against the attacks on progressive rights, joined by other sectors - migrants, minority groups and others. Indeed, they are showing that in the face of the wave of global reaction and growing inequalities, there are alternative voices.

These times, though full of challenges, also present vast possibilities for Africa to claim her place in the world. More specifically, the technological breakthroughs, in ICT, biotechnology, renewable energy, transport, and other areas, that can be used to leapfrog our way towards development and shared prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Global youth unemployment, which has been consistently at two and sometimes three times that of adult unemployment, continues unabated. Better educated than any other generation before them, prospects for the overwhelming majority of them remain few and far between, and often less secure in comparison to preceding generations.

Thus, as Dr. Carlos Lopes reminded us at the Retreat, as the world population ages, the social compact of inter-generational solidarity is under fundamental threat.

Excellencies,

This is the global context in which Africa has to navigate the continental agenda. What then do we need to do to successfully steer our way towards 2063?

First and foremost, it requires that we revive and strengthen the spirit of Pan Africanism, unity and solidarity.

It means we have to guard our unity jealously, and to not allow ourselves to be divided or diverted from our agenda.

Above all, it necessitates - as the Deputy Chairperson Erastus Mwencha said the other day - passion, commitment and dedication to our integration and development agenda, and in particular:

To meet the first target in Agenda 2063 of commencing the Continental Free Trade Area by end of 2017.

To unlock the potential, the energy, the creativity and the talents of Africa's young men and women. This can be achieved through the African skills revolution; by creating jobs and economic opportunities; by economic diversification and transformation, agricultural modernisation and industrialisation and by investing in them so they can be the drivers of Agenda 2063.

To do what needs to be done on the Free movement of persons, so that we unlock opportunities for intra-African trade, studies, business and tourism. And we encourage those countries who have implemented the continental free movement of persons decisions.

To encourage all Africans, in coastal, island and landlocked countries to participate in the new frontier of the blue oceans economy.

To participate in the African Economic Platform on 20-22 March in Mauritius this year, to engage business and the academic sector on the economic and skills priorities of

Agenda 2063. We see more and more unemployed graduates, we must know where we go wrong.

To continue the path of gender equality, and using all Africa's talents by empowering women and girls.

And to continue to reform our Union to better serve the African people, including implementation of our decisions, especially on Financing the Union.

Excellencies, it is indeed our determination to stay the course, and take charge of our destiny, our unity and our commitment to Pan Africanism, which will allow us build the Africa we want, as we navigate through the various global tempests.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have earlier referred to the global movements for progressive ideals.

On the continent too, we see a growing number of popular protests - around issues of wages and services, democratization and inclusion, and by students for free education. This, along with the over fifty (50) elections held on the continent over the last four years, and the developments in the cities, towns and rural areas of Africa, shows a continent that too is fast-changing.

Over this period we have had numerous Presidential, parliamentary and local government elections. The growing number of local elections shows that our countries are taking decentralization and bringing government closer to the people, seriously.

In general, with a few exceptions, voter turnout has been significant, consistently over 60%, with high participation by women and youth.

In most cases, whether incumbents were re-elected, whether there were changes in heads of states or changes in governing parties or coalitions, the transfers of power were generally peaceful.

And, where there was a problem, the continent and RECs stepped in to make it happen, and to avert a crisis.

These developments show that we are working towards consolidating democracy on the continent. But as we noted, during the Year of Human Rights, as situations where there were problems showed, and as the reports of our Human Rights institutions noted, we have to do much more to strengthen our democracies, governance and human rights.

Indeed, as the Panel of the Wise report of 2010 on post-elections violence stated:

Often, elections provide the opportunity for people to express other grievances, be they political, about resource sharing, social justice, marginalization, ethnic rivalry, intimidation, or other malaise, perceived or real.”

We are thus making progress, but there are still many challenges, and we must do more, as we operationalize our African Governance Architecture and strengthen adherence to normative frameworks on human rights, elections, democracy and governance. The revitalization of the African Peer Review Mechanism must also help in this regard.

Your Excellencies,

Allow me, as I conclude, to just reflect on the significance of this moment and underscore the importance of this session of the Executive Council.

2017 is the year that the African Union commemorate its 15th anniversary. It is the year when the Pan African Women's Organisation marks the 55th Anniversary of its founding.

A venerable body of work has been achieved by these institutions, thanks to your commitment to their ideals and principles.

It is my hope that we will stay the course and continue to build on this work. We must also make the improvements and changes required for our institutions to be fit for purpose to accelerate the implementation of Agenda 2063.

Whatever we do at this Summit, we must ensure that we preserve the precious and principled unity of this continent and our Union.

This unity is our legacy that we bequeath to future generations, as this is the African Year of Youth.

I wish this meeting fruitful deliberations and thank you once more for your attention.

I thank you.