

AFRICAN UNION

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

to the

**28<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the  
Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the  
African Union**

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA. 30 January 2017

**Your Excellency, President Idriss Deby, outgoing Chairperson of the African Union and President of the Republic of Chad;**

**Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government of the Member States of the African Union;**

**Your Excellency, Mr. Antonio Gutterez United Nations Secretary General;**

**Your Excellency, Mr. Mamoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine;**

**Your Excellency, Mr. Salvador Valdez, Vice President of the Republic of Cuba;**

**Excellencies, Former Heads of State and Government and former Secretaries General and Chairpersons of the OAU and AU;**

**Deputy Chairperson Erastus Mwencha and fellow Commissioners;**

**Dr. Adesina, President of the African Development Bank;**

**Dr. Hamdok, Acting Executive Secretary of the UNECA;**

**Excellencies, Members of the Executive Council and other Ministers;**

**Leaders of of AU Organs;**

**CEO of the NEPAD Agency, Dr. Ibrahim Mayaki;**

**Honourable First Ladies;**

**Excellencies, Heads of Regional Economic Communities and African Union Specialised Agencies, Representative and Liaison offices;**

**Excellencies, members of the Permanent Representatives Committee;**

**Representatives of Civil society;**

**Members of the Diplomatic Corps;**

**Officials from Capitals;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

A warm welcome as we meet in the 28<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union.

A warm welcome to the UN Secretary on his first AU Summit in this capacity. We appreciate the appointment of our sister Amina J. Mohamed of Nigeria as Deputy Secretary General, and congratulate her on this new responsibility.

On behalf of the Commission and the Summit, our gratitude to Prime Minister Hailemariam Desaglen, the Government and Peoples of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, for their usual and legendary hospitality.

A special welcome to Excellencies, members of the Assembly whose mandates were renewed and to the newly elected Heads of State, since our last Summit.

Ba Edgar Lungu, Mwabonbeni pa kumisala kabili as President of the Republic of Zambia. The people of Zambia and Africa look forward to work with you to strengthen peace, and to raise the dignity and wealth of all Africans.

*[Excellency Edgar Lungu, congratulations on the renewal of your mandate]*

Ghana man panin Nana Ado Dankwa Akuffu Ado

Mi ma wo mbo

*[President Nana Ado Dankwa Akuffo Ado, congratulations]*

for the confidence the people of Ghana have placed in you. Following in the footsteps of our Founder, Kwame Nkrumah, we expect you to play a critical role in our collective quest for unity, prosperity, peace and continental integration.

We also welcome the President of The Gambia, HE Mr. Adama Barrow; the President of Sao Tome and Principe, Mr. Evaristo Carvalo and the President of Seychelles, Mr. Danny Faure. The President of Seychelles is no stranger, since he regularly attended our Summits in his capacity as Vice President of his country, welcome Mr President in this new capacity.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

2017 is heralded by some important developments.

Last year, Cuba, Africa and the world bid farewell to the greatest revolutionary and internationalist of our time, Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz. He played a critical role in the global struggle against colonialism and imperialism, and for non-alignment and unity of the countries of the South.

His sustained contributions to Africa are legendary: the support to liberation movements, to newly-independent states, in the development of African education and health systems; the training of health personnel, all in the spirit of solidarity, friendship, internationalism and mutual respect.

As Castro said about the Cuban solidarity in his address to the South African Parliament in 1998: *the Cuban soldiers who fought in Angola (and I might add for the freedom of Namibia and South Africa) did not take anything home, except their dead.*

Our greatest tribute to Fidel Castro, is to continue our friendship and solidarity with the Cuban people, for the full lifting of the economic embargo and the return of Guantanamo Bay to the Cuban people.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

This year marks a number of historical milestones.

Firstly, 2017 marks 55 years since the formation of the Pan African Women's Organisation (PAWO) in 1962, a year before the OAU. The women came from newly independent states and liberation movements, determined to play their role, side by side with the menfolk, in liberating Africa.

The women's movement, as we celebrated the OAU/AU Golden Jubilee in 2013, recognized the role of the founder mothers, when they declared:

*"...African women and their Diaspora sisters played a critical role in the evolution of Pan Africanism, through their contributions to the anti-slavery, anti-colonial and liberation struggles.*

*Through their efforts, women ensured that African struggles for freedom, dignity, development, peace and self-*

*determination also addressed our aspirations for women's emancipation, gender equality and women's empowerment.*

In tribute to the founding mothers, it is therefore appropriate that the Assembly recognizes PAWO as a Specialised Agency of the African Union.

The task of PAWO today is to continue the struggle for the empowerment of girls and women, through education and skills, in the political, social, cultural and economic spheres. They must continue to advocate and work for a peaceful and safe Africa for all its people.

Without this mobilisation of women, progress on Agenda 2063 will be slow.

### **Excellencies**

2017 also marks a centenary since the birth of a pre-eminent freedom fighter, Pan African, scientist, diplomat, teacher and democrat, Oliver Reginald Tambo, who was born in 1917.

After the Sharpeville massacre in 1961, Tambo was given responsibility to seek support amongst African countries, to take forward the struggle from exile. He diligently pursued this mission for over three decades, until South Africa was free.

As the longest serving leader of the ANC, he led the armed struggle, the campaign to isolate apartheid, and worked with the OAU and its Liberation Committee. He was passionate about women's emancipation, about education as both a science teacher and lawyer, about young people, and about peace and democracy.

It is perhaps appropriate that the centenary of his birth coincides with the African Year of Youth, as he said:

*The children of any nation are its future. A country, a movement, a people that does not value its youth and children, does not deserve its future.*

As we start this year of youth, we must indeed commit to value our youth and deserve Africa's future.

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

The future we are building today must leave Africa integrated, prosperous and peaceful, for current and future generations.

It is befitting that our theme for 2017, *Harnessing the Demographic Dividend, through Investment in African Youth*, is about building this future today.

The continent has 200 million young men and women ages 15 to 24 years. By 2025, a quarter of the world's youth under 25 will be African. As the rest of the world ages, Africa will remain a young continent. This is the comparative advantage we have, which must be translated into a demographic dividend.

To harness this resource, we must provide all African boys, girls and young people with opportunities to be in school, complete secondary education, have access to vocational training and universities, and to expand their knowledge of science, mathematics, engineering and technology. Within this, we must pay special attention to creating opportunities for girls and young women, so that we use the full potential of all our resources.

At the African Economic Platform to be held in Mauritius from 20-22 March this year, we will engage the business and academic sectors to close the gap between industry and education systems. Strengthening this link will help eradicate the skills mismatch, to stop graduate unemployment and address the shortages of engineers, agricultural scientists, biologists, geologists, and a host of other skills.

We must support the call by civil society, for an African Decade of Reading, so that the new generations may learn from and renew Pan Africanism.

### ***Ladies and Gentlemen***

Since sixty percent of the unemployed are young, with their unemployment rate double that of adults, we must resolve to decisively tackle youth unemployment.

Our programmes of beneficiation and economic diversification, of agricultural modernization and the development of agro-processing,

must of necessity target the creation of jobs and economic opportunities for young entrepreneurs.

In this regard, we welcome the African Development Bank *Strategy for Jobs for Youth in Africa 2016-2025*, which aims to create 25 million jobs and impact 50 million youth. The Bank estimates that *'reducing Africa's youth unemployment rate to that of adults, would translate to a 10% to 20% increase in the continent's GDP.'*

We must ensure that African children, young men and women see the blue oceans economy, as part of their natural heritage and for possible career paths. The same goes for our celestial space and careers in the space sciences.

### ***Excellencies,***

To unlock their full potential, we should do more to involve young people. This is economically prudent, and a democratic imperative, since they constitute the majority of our population.

By involving young people, they have a sense of ownership and stake in the future. By facilitating the full participation of girls and young women, we secure the future.

The future of Africa belongs to youth, but the quality of that future will be determined by what they do with it today. Youth, therefore, have responsibilities to learn, to read, to serve, to participate, to innovate, to build, and to create.

They have a responsibility to be organized, at local, national and continental levels, so they can help drive Agenda 2063.

On our part, we will this year appoint a Special AU Envoy for Youth, to mobilise and advocate for the youth, during this year of harnessing the demographic dividend.

### **Your Excellencies,**

Despite the challenges we face, we have countless examples of governments leading society, acting decisively in building a better life for current and future generations.

We congratulate Egypt for being the first African country to start an ultra-modern connection of 900 kms of high-speed rail between Alexandria and Aswan. Egypt is showing us that the dream of a Pan African integrated high-speed rail network that connects all African capitals and commercial centres, can be realised.

It includes countries such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, The Gambia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, who have launched the campaigns to end child marriages, to give girls the opportunity to stay in school, to be healthy, and to reach their full potential. We hope other countries who still have this practice, will join the campaign.

It includes the sterling organization by the women who travelled from across the continent to gather on the slopes of the majestic Mount Kilimanjaro, and who adopted their Charter on Land Rights, which will be distributed to Your Excellencies today.

It also includes the Women in Maritime in Africa (WIMAfrica), who are asserting women's right to be part of the blue oceans economy, as ship-owners and builders, port and logistic management. They contributed to the Lome Charter on Maritime Security, Safety and Development, and are working with us on the Annexures.

It includes Ethiopia, DRC, Cote d'Ivoire, Mozambique, Tanzania and Rwanda, who are recording the fastest compound growth in the continent, and are amongst the fastest-growing economies in the world. These countries, along with those who set the target of reaching middle-income status in the coming decade, are contributing towards eradicating poverty in one generation.

It also includes the thirteen countries that made the solemn commitment to lead in launching the Single African Aviation Market in 2017, as per the Yamoussoukro Declaration. They recognize that Africa will be the fastest growing aviation market in the coming twenty years. Already in 2013, it transported over 70 million passengers annually and supported 6.9 million jobs<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: International Air Transport Association



The countries that made the start to open their skies to fellow African countries, like Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Africa, are helping to lead the way in Africa claiming its airspace. We must encourage all countries to join them to open their airspaces to all African countries.

It include the steps taken by Botswana, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal and others on industrialization, beneficiation and value addition, as well as the initiatives to build regional value chains, as we are poised to start the Continental Free Trade Area.

It also include the good examples of progress on free movement of persons, following the launch of the African Passport in Kigali last year. And it include, Benin, Comoros, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Togo and Uganda, who are already offering visa-free access or visa on arrival for all Africans. We hope that they too will be joined by others.

It includes the work we do with the Diaspora, as an integral part of the African renaissance and the global struggle against racism and intolerances.

It includes the ongoing work to put our Union on the route to self-reliance, and to build a Union of the people that is effective and responsive to the aspirations of the African people.

It includes the progress we make on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Last, are the examples of work by Regional Economic Communities infrastructure development, on economic integration, free movement of people, as well as on democracy, human rights, peace and security.

Across the continent, there is progress in silencing the guns. The President of Tanzania asked me why are we waiting for 2020, and not immediately. More must therefore be done to achieve this goal faster. The fight against terrorism remains a challenge, and we must all unite to defeat this scourge that threatens our collective security.

It is with much concern that we learn that sporadic fighting continues in South Sudan. The people of South Sudan need peace. We again

call on all the parties involved to honour the agreement, in order to ensure peace, reconciliation, healing and justice.

It is clear that globally we are entering turbulent times. For example, the very country to whom our people were taken as slaves during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, have now decided to ban refugees from some of our countries<sup>2</sup>. What do we do about this? Indeed, this is one of the greatest challenges and tests to our unity and solidarity.

### **Excellencies,**

The year of youth must provide a basis for advancing the social contract, Agenda 2063 between our generations and the younger and future generations, for the benefit of all Africans.

Let me use this opportunity, to most sincerely thank the outgoing Chairperson of the Union, His Excellency Idriss Ito Deby for his guidance to the Commission and the precision and decisiveness with which he ran the affairs of the Union during his year in office. Mr. President, this is nothing less than what we expect from a pilot.

### **Waheshimiwa, Mabibi na Mabwana** **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

Tuzidi kuwa thabiti na wenye umoja.  
[Let us remain resolute and united.](#)

Tuzidi kuwa na maono na kuijenga Afrika tunayoiitazamia kuishi, ili tuwarithishe vizazi vijavyo Afrika iliyo bora na yenye umoja.  
[Let us imagine and create the Africa we want to live in, so that we can bequeath a united and better Africa to future generations.](#)

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Allow me before I take my seat, to take this opportunity to respectfully call on President Johnson Sirleaf to join me on this podium.

Your Excellency, on behalf of all of us, a heartfelt gratitude to ECOWAS, who under your leadership made us proud, as you stood

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<sup>2</sup> Libya, Somalia and Sudan

by the people of The Gambia and defended the values and principles of our Union. Our thank you to all those who participated, the President of Mauritania and others, and who remained steadfast.

We are particularly proud, that it was under your stewardship, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, as our first elected female President. You are a pioneer and inspiration to all women and men.

This is a token of our appreciation and gratitude. ECOWAS has set the example to all of us, to remain steadfast in defense of the principles and values of the African Union.

I thank you.