

ACCEPTANCE REMARKS BY PRESIDENT KAGAME AT OPENING CEREMONY OF
30TH AFRICAN UNION SUMMIT

Addis Ababa, 28 January 2018

It is a solemn honour, to accept the call to serve as Chairperson of our Union.

Thank you for your double trust. First as the leader of the reform process and now as the leader of our Union.

I promise to do this with you and do the best job I can. Obviously, I will need your full support.

President Alpha Condé is a professor, a teacher, and I can safely say that I have learned from him. I have also seen his very big heart for Africa. Congratulations Mr President.

Please join me paying tribute to his impeccable service to our organisation.

I have been lucky to work with his predecessor President Idriss Deby, and even luckier, to work with both of them. I want to assure you that I had a lot of wisdom flowing from them.

Africa's defining challenge is to create a pathway to prosperity for our people, especially young people.

Elsewhere, this has been achieved through industrialisation. But the growth trajectory that transformed Asia is not necessarily any longer a viable option for Africa, simply because we waited too long to act.

Technology has evolved so rapidly in recent years, that Africa's window to follow that strategy is narrowing much more rapidly than previously understood.

We are running out of time, and we must act now to save Africa from permanent deprivation.

Scale is essential. We must create a single continental market, integrate our infrastructure, and infuse our economies with technology.

No country or region can manage on its own. We have to be functional, and we have to stay together.

The financial and institutional reform of the African Union derives all of its urgency from these realities.

Fortunately, Africa has assets and strengths to build on, starting with this organisation, and its tangible commitment to unity.

This is an advantage, which no other region of the world possesses, in such abundance. Unity must be our starting point, as we do the necessary work of re-defining our plans and ambitions, in continental terms.

These changes need to happen. There is no country on our continent that does not want to be part of a more assertive and visible Africa.

The programmes, policies, and priorities of the African Union contain the right tools for the job.

I wish to pay tribute to previous leaders of the African Union, and to former Heads of State, for paving the way forward.

There is tremendous value in the African Union's flagship initiatives, such as Agenda 2063.

Because of their foresight, we are in a position to adopt three historic agreements, that are of the highest importance for building Africa's wealth, from within.

Today, we will launch the Single African Air Transport Market. This is a major step forward for transportation.

We are nearly ready to adopt the Continental Free Trade Area. It really needs to be done this year.

Freedom of movement for people in Africa is equally important, and it is achievable in 2018.

By committing to break down these barriers, we will send a tremendous signal in Africa and beyond, that it is no longer business as usual.

Our people deserve a brighter future. Their sacrifice and hard work should be rewarded with better lives for families and communities.

We are thankful to the Heads of State, who champion important themes and priorities of the Union at every Summit.

I ask that we pay careful attention to their reports, and act on the recommendations offered. This is work they are doing on behalf of all of us.

I wish to commend the efforts of the African Union's professional staff, which often goes unheralded.

Your hard work and talent are greatly valued. We do not say this, often enough. We are going to be asking you to do even more, going forward.

Soon enough, we will also have the funds to support the African prosperity agenda.

The levy on eligible imports is being implemented, the Golden Rules were recently approved by the Finance Ministers, and we have a more credible budget process in place.

We have in some ways, in the past, helped perpetuate the narrative that Africa is a burden. This way of thinking has been around for years. Fixing it won't take a year, but it need not take more decades either.

None of us would be wrong to feel angry, about the time and potential we have lost, in regard to who we are and should be.

But at the stage we are at, we should choose to respond with focus and facts, in order to underscore our common humanity.

I wish to close with a message to Africa's young people.

Elders should be able to enjoy the pleasure, of telling you how hard they had it at your age, so you don't take things for granted, and are inspired to work even harder.

However, too many Africans come of age in the same conditions as their parents and grandparents, and sometimes the hardships endured are even worse.

Our job is to make sure that every generation in Africa, enjoys a better life than the previous one.

Young Africans are also professional men and women, and you have a full role to play. We cannot build Africa without you.

For women especially, we need to unreservedly accord them their full rights and roles.

I thank you.