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**Extraordinary Session of the AU Assembly on the Continental Free
Trade Area held in Kigali, Rwanda, from 17to 21 March 2018**

Meeting of the Permanent Representatives' Committee

17 March 2018

Draft Statement by

H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat

Chairperson of the African Union Commission

**Madam Chairperson of the Permanent Representatives' Committee,
Excellences, Ambassadors,
Representatives of Regional Economic Communities,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Following the inaugural session of our formal meetings which held on 7 March 2018, I am once again honoured to address the Permanent Representatives' Committee, the linchpin of the African Union, on the occasion of preparations for the Extraordinary Session of the AU Assembly convened for the purpose of executing the decision taken by our Heads of State and Government to lend a strong impetus to the implementation of one of our flagship projects, the continental free trade area.

Kigali, a welcoming city as it were, has always been beautiful and resplendent. This time, however, it has enhanced its splendour in a bid to provide us with a suitable working environment, commensurate with the issues that bring us here. This therefore is an opportunity for me to express the gratitude of the African Union Commission to H.E. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda and Chairperson of the African Union, for his commitment and determination to contribute, with his peers, to placing Africa on a path of greater self-assertion on the international stage. I would also like to thank the Government and the Rwandan people for their fraternal welcome.

Excellences, Ambassadors

As you know, the Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, the preparations for which you have been working on since Addis Ababa, refers, above all, to a strong political symbolism: Africa taking charge of itself and her voice should resonate, from a position of strength that is rooted in the effective implementation of projects of continental dimension that contribute to its development and especially to the consolidation of its integration and unity.

As a key organ, responsible for starting the decision-making process within the African Union, yours is the heavy duty of laying the groundwork, through the preliminary consideration of all working documents and, therefore, of providing the Executive Council with guidance on the way forward in the consideration of matters to be submitted to the Heads of State and Government.

With the launch of the Continental Free Trade Area, one of the African integration flagship projects, alongside the Single for Air Transport Market and the Free Movement of People and Goods, we are also challenged by the urgent need to develop an African Common Position on the Cotonou Agreement after it expires. Our continent is at a crossroads.

What path will she choose? That of maintaining the status quo, which means making cosmetic changes relating to borderline adjustments which have no real impact on the lives of our populations, or that of effecting a paradigm shift which requires us to look far into the horizon for a truly integrated Africa, which is structurally transformed economically, guaranteeing the freedom of movement and settlement to all her daughters and all her sons, as well as offering, in the final analysis, fulfilling and promising living conditions for her youth, in a bid to reverse the migratory flows?

Excellences, Ambassadors,

Things are changing, things have to change. In this dynamic, the PRC remains an essential player in this desired change.

Indeed, whether it is the preliminary work on the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area, the draft protocols finalized by the Specialized Technical Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs which you are called upon to consider, or the draft of the African Common Position, whose consideration is an item on your agenda, you have, during your respective sessions devoted to these issues, shown a convergence of views that largely transcends the hesitations, procrastination and concerns observed here and there.

With regard to the Continental Free Trade Area, we fervently welcome the efforts made by all the actors involved under the effective leadership of H.E. Mahamadou Issoufou, President of the Republic of Niger, the designated Champion of the Continental Free Trade Area. I therefore urge you to conduct your deliberations in the spirit of Pan-Africanism which has always guided your practice in the discharge of your noble duties.

As for the draft African Common Position, the extraordinary session of the Executive Council held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in October 2017, decided to set up an inclusive Task Force comprising the PRC, the Commission, the Regional Economic Communities, African ambassadors accredited to Brussels and Geneva as well as the Permanent Representations of the African Union in these two cities. The Task Force held its first session at the headquarters of the African Union last 9 March.

The deliberations, which focused on the consideration of two documents, one prepared by the Commission and the other developed jointly by the Group of African Ambassadors and the AU Permanent Representation in Brussels, concluded with rewarding exchanges. Of course, regional and/or national concerns, which are otherwise understandable, in the harmonization of our position, considering the diversity of the legal status to which some Member States are already subject, differently, were raised by certain delegations. However, all participants recognized the need for a common position.

I would like, if I may, to dwell on the following three main points:

- The African Common Position must be inspired by Agenda 2063, which is hinged on the key principles of African unity, integration and sustainable development, among others, and the reconciliation of the interests of the three ACP blocs (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific). These principles will obviously have to be supplemented by appropriate financing and governance mechanisms that preserve the continent's major interests.

- The African Common Position should be understood as a general framework that outlines the scope within which negotiations will take place. It is such a general framework that we must decide here in Kigali.
- The negotiators will subsequently be responsible for ironing out with the European side all the details, relating not only to achievements, and in particular the specific agreements that some of our Member States have concluded with the European Union besides the Cotonou Convention, but also to the continuation of the objectives set out in Agenda 2063, in strict compliance with our basic principles, namely unity, integration, structural transformation of the African economies, sustainable development and shared prosperity.

Excellences, Ambassadors

The importance of the African Common Position on the post-2020 ACP is implicit in the configuration of the agenda which, while being that of an extraordinary session, has not been limited to the traditional single point. It has been broadened to include this issue because of its relevance and the urgent need for the African side to have its negotiating tool, like the European Union, the Caribbean and the Pacific, which are already up to date in their position.

I would like to conclude where I started: the indispensable role of the PRC.

As an interface organ between the African Union Commission and the Member States, the PRC, in its interactions with the respective capitals, also conversely assumes a role of explaining and enlightening States about the multilateral issues of which the African Union, as an intergovernmental organization, is the theater.

It is this constant back and forth movement between the PRC, the Member States and the Commission that contributes to building a shared perception and understanding of geopolitical and economic issues by these three main

actors at the service of one and the same cause: the emergence of Africa and the affirmation of its geopolitical personality.

Thanks to this mutual understanding, to which we all must remain committed, we could, to use a familiar expression, make the omelette of the construction of "the Africa we want" by breaking the eggs of our immediate interests against the higher medium and long term gains.

While wishing you fruitful deliberations, I thank you for your kind attention.