

ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT PAUL KAGAME31ST SUMMIT OF THE AFRICAN UNIONNouakchott, 1 July 2018

Let me start by thanking our brother, His Excellency, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, and the Government and people of Mauritania, for hosting this Summit.

We have appreciated the good facilities and organisation. The development of Nouakchott is plain to see, and the warm hospitality from Mauritians has made us feel at home. It is no wonder this country is known as the Land of a Thousand Poets.

We note that His Excellency, President Julius Maada Bio of Sierra Leone, is participating in a Summit for the first time. We congratulate you and welcome you.

The spirit of solidarity binds us together as Africans.

As a Union, we stand with the peoples of Ethiopia and Zimbabwe in their pursuit of peaceful political change. We condemn the violent attacks and convey our condolences for the lives that have been lost.

We are heartened by the strides made by the leadership of Eritrea and Ethiopia toward the normalisation of relations. You have the African Union's unwavering support.

I also wish to acknowledge the encouraging steps in the South Sudan peace process, thanks to the mediation of the IGAD-mandated Heads of State. The African Union expects the parties to fully abide by the agreements.

These positive developments remind us that partnership is the common thread in this Summit's deliberations. Partnership amongst ourselves, first of all.

Thanks to the outstanding work of the Committee of 15 Finance Ministers, together with the Executive Council, the African Union has applied the "golden rules" and adopted the most credible and transparent budget in our history.

Through this process, the 2019 budget presented to the Assembly for consideration has even been reduced by 12 per cent, compared to 2018. At the same time, contributions to the Peace Fund have never been higher.

As a direct result of the growing confidence in our finances, the African Union is in a position to work toward a long-term partnership with the United Nations Security Council for stable funding for peacekeeping operations in Africa.

Several more Member States are expected to sign the Continental Free Trade Area at this Summit and six countries have already ratified. We congratulate those who have done so.

The agreement is well on its way to entering into force. From that point forward, Africa will necessarily engage with partners as a bloc. The renewal of Africa's relationship with the European Union intervenes in this context.

The African Union's position reflects the need to modernise and expand the terms of the partnership to the full range of issues facing our two continents. It is also a good time to deepen the African Union's relationship with our "Sixth Region" brothers and sisters in the Caribbean.

Our partners are receptive to Africa's viewpoint, but it is essential that we speak with one voice. Respect for African Union decisions makes us more formidable and protects individual countries from pressure and manipulation.

The future we have been preparing for is already upon us. The institutional and financial reform of our Union has always been about the capacity to secure Africa's interests and our dignity. The business-as-usual approach cannot continue, and indeed, as we are seeing, significant changes are beginning to take hold.

Before I conclude, I wish to record our appreciation to the Chairperson of the Commission and the Secretariat staff for their hard work. I also commend the Permanent Representatives and the Executive Council for preparing a good programme for our Summit.

I thank you very much for your kind attention.