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**Statement of the Chairperson of the AU Commission,  
HE Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma  
to the  
Opening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Retreat of the Executive Council**

24-25 January 2016

Mekelle, Ethiopia

**Excellency, Chairperson of the Executive Council, the Right Honourable Simbarashe Mumbengegwi**

**Honourable President of the Regional Authority of Tigray  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia**

**Excellencies, Ministers and Members of the Executive Council, and the PRC**

**Representatives from the Ethiopian Government and our host, the Tigray province and city of Mekelle**

**Dr. Hamdok from the ECA, Prof Nnadozi from the ACBF, and representatives of the ADB and the NEPAD Agency**

**Executive Secretaries of the Regional Economic Communities**

**Deputy Chairperson Erastus Mwencha and other AU Commissioners**

**Ambassadors,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Two years ago, as we concluded the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OAU/AU, we met as in retreat in the city of Bahir Dar, to discuss the core responsibilities of this important organ, the Executive Council. It was then when I spoke about our dream of the Africa we want, in the e-mail from the future.

Two years later, as we gather here in Mekelle, Tigray region we can report that we have made some headway. As discussed at this retreat, we now have Agenda 2063 as our clarion call for action, supported by all sections of the African society.

We are clear on the priorities of Agenda 2063, investing in our people, especially youth and women; in agricultural

modernization and agro-businesses; in manufacturing and industrialization; the development of our infrastructure; and democracy and developmental governance, and silencing the guns.

Our Agenda 2063 flagship projects - such as free movement of people, the Commodities strategy, the Pan African Integrated High speed Rail network - is taking off, and should help towards our vision of an integrated, peaceful and prosperous Africa, driven by its own people and taking its rightful place in the world.

Since we Tigray region of Ethiopia, reading about some of your initiatives, I have come to the conclusion that you are already started to domestic and implement the priorities of Agenda 2063, improving the livelihoods of the people; focusing on education and health, on agriculture and by working together, tackling the drought; and diversifying your economy through the development of light manufacturing, including pharmaceuticals and textiles, and through infrastructure development, and many other things.

I had the privilege yesterday to visit some of the historic and archeological sites in the region, and felt very proud of this rich history of our ancient civilizations and the site at Negashi which bears witness to the remarkable hospitality and tolerance that characterized Ethiopia, the first to give sanctuary to the early Muslims when they fled from prosecution elsewhere.

This is the spirit of tolerance and Pan Africanism that we must continue to practice, as we celebrate in 2016 the Year of Human rights with special focus on Women.

I would also like to thank the Zimbabwean artists who came up with that song on Agenda 2063, and I challenge all of us to

encourage our artists to compose as many songs as possible. Of course as the Chair of the Union, Zimbabwe led from the front. Welcome to the retreat, and to our gracious hosts from Tigray and Mekelle, thank you for your kind and warm hospitality.

I wish the Retreat warm and frank deliberations.