

AFRICAN UNION

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UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA P. O. Box 3243 Telephone +25111
551 7700 Fax: +251115- 517844,
Website: www.africa-union.org

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

to the

**Opening session of the 31ST Ordinary
Session of the Permanent Representatives
Committee (PRC)**

Addis Ababa, January 21, 2016

Check against delivery

Excellency, Mr. Albert R. Chimbindi, Chairperson of the Permanent Representatives Committee and Ambassador of the Republic of Zimbabwe

Distinguished Ambassadors, Members of the PRC,

Deputy Chairperson Erastus Mwencha and fellow Commissioners

Representatives of AU Organs, Regional Economic Communities and AU specialized, representative and liaison offices

Officials from Capitals, from the Commission, other Organs and RECs

Excellencies, Members of the diplomatic corps, from regional and international organisations, and UN Agencies

Representatives from Civil society

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured, on behalf of the AU Commission, to warmly welcome you to this Opening session of the 31st Ordinary Session of the PRC. Let me take this opportunity to wish you all a prosperous, peaceful and healthy 2016.

I also want to express our sincere special welcome to new members of the PRC joining us for the first time. Our appreciation to the host of the AU Headquarters, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for the measures it has once

again taken to ensure conducive working conditions for this Summit.

This Summit of the African Union will once again tackle many important issues, and I want to thank the PRC and its subcommittees for their dedicated preparatory work over the last two months.

As has become the practice, this January Summit will review work of the previous year, and focus on the key issues that we must tackle in 2016.

The AU Commission submitted its report on the major developments in Africa and activities in 2015 for consideration by Member States, which you have done.

In our 2015 Annual report, we reflect on progress towards implementation of the 10-year plan and ensure the domestication Agenda 2063 major priorities: the African skills revolution, health and nutrition; infrastructure that connects the continent, its citizens and that spur social and economic development; agriculture and agro processing; economic diversification, job creation and industrialization; and peace, security and democratic governance - are receiving the required attention.

We also provided an update on the steps taken on the Agenda 2063 flagship projects, the Pan African Integrated High Speed Rail Network, the Continental Free Trade Area, the Commodities Strategy, on Agriculture and Agro-businesses, on the African Economic Platform, Silencing the Guns, the Single African Aviation Market, on the Free Movement of People and progress toward an African Passport.

These, as your Excellencies are aware, are key to the implementation of our first Ten Year Implementation Plan.

Having formed part of the global consensus that adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, the 17 SDGs are part of Agenda 2063, but Agenda 2063 is more specific to Africa and forms part of our broader transformation agenda.

Excellencies,

During 2015 we ensured a renewed focus on the emancipation of girls and women, as a critical success factor, and indeed a precondition for the realization of Agenda 2063.

Across the length and breadth of the continent; we focused on women's economic empowerment, access to education, skills, and health; their participation in parliament, government and other

areas of human endeavours; on the challenges facing women farmers and workers, including access to capital, to modern technology, to land and to markets.

We highlighted how harmful cultural practices such as child marriages, impede the development of girls, at a time when the continent must redouble its efforts to ensure that all its young people, girls and boys, have access to quality education and training, so that they can use their creativity and energy to fuel our transformation.

The issue of African integration, as the *raison d'être* of our Union remained high on our agenda and that of the Regional Economic Communities. In addition to the launch of the Continental Free Trade Area negotiations, the RECs have also taken important steps on integration, with initiatives ranging from free movement of people, moves towards regional common markets and regional infrastructure development.

Excellencies,

We know the importance of strong and effective institutions, towards our vision of an integrated prosperous and peaceful Africa that is driven by its own citizens and takes its rightful place in the world.

Our decisions on Alternative sources of funding the AU and its programmes, the project on the Restructuring of the AU Commission, as well as the work on the division of labour amongst RECs, the NEPAD Agency and the AU Commission remain critical, and we must ensure that we continue to make progress on these matters.

The PRC and the Commission, since the January 2015 decision on Streamlining work of the AU Summits, have also cooperated to ensure the implementation of this decision, so that Summits focus on the strategic issues critical to the African people.

During 2015, after so many years of preparatory work, we have finally operationalized the Specialised Technical Committees (STCs) as AU Organs provided for in the Constitutive Act, to take on the mantle of responsibility in their respective areas of competence.

Last, but not least, the continent has played an important role in key global processes, from the development of the post-2015 development agenda and the adoption of the SDGs, the financing for development conference that we hosted for the first time in Addis Ababa, the 70th Anniversary of the United Nations and the European Conference on Migration.

As the year drew to a close, we were also part of the COP21 climate change agreement arising from the Paris Conference and the WTO Ministerial meeting held in Nairobi.

In all these important global processes, we worked hard to ensure that Africa presented a united front around its interests, and we made progress in all these areas, despite some setbacks.

The continent also continued to build on its cooperation with the United Nations family, its various strategic partnerships with other regional organisations such as the Arab League, CARICOM and the European Union, as well as strategic partnerships with countries from across the world, and through the consistent work of the AU Partners Group.

During 2015 we again saw the continuation of the trend with more and more countries establishing permanent missions to the AU. This shows the world is taking AU seriously.

Moreover, in all the work of the Commission, we build on our common mission with continental partners, the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank; consistently involving civil society, the private sector, as well as our RECs, the NEPAD Agency and other AU Organs in the programmatic work of the Union.

Excellencies,

We have a full and critical agenda at this Summit and Session of the PRC. Not least amongst this is our declaration of 2016 as the *Year of Human rights, with a special focus on the rights of Women*.

During 2015, the majority of democratic transitions and elections on the continent, with some notable exceptions, went well and should be used as a platform to build inclusive and effective institutions that involve citizens in governance, not only during elections but as we implement Agenda 2063 in our national context.

The upcoming elections in 2016 and the tireless work to resolve remaining conflict flashpoints - in the context of our Charter on Democracy, Governance and Elections and our efforts to Silence the guns - must continue to see us strengthen the culture of democracy, peace, security and human rights, of political tolerance, inclusion and the management of the rich diversity of our beautiful continent.

I would like to express our gratitude to all the peacekeepers across the continent who are sacrificing life and limb for peace and I would like to ask for a moment of silence for all those who

perished, but particularly for the Kenyan soldiers who will be laid to rest tomorrow. May their souls rest in peace.

As we celebrate this year of Human rights, we should also continue to build a Union of the People, working with civil society, the private sector, the diaspora, the African citizens, women and youth, and the media in the implementation of Agenda 2063.

Excellencies,

I would like to also express our heartfelt thanks and real deep gratitude to the Chairperson of the Permanent Representative Committee, Ambassador Albert Chimbindi from the Republic of Zimbabwe, for so ably steering the PRC during his term of office, and for the excellent cooperation with the Commission.

Ambassador Chimbindi, when taking up the mantle at the beginning of 2015 had just arrived in Addis Ababa, but I am sure you will agree with me that he hit the ground running.

We sincerely appreciate the dedication, wisdom and the spirit of Pan Africanism he brought to his leadership of the PRC.

The AU Commission looks forward to working with the PRC, the RECs and all AU organs during 2016, to build our Union and towards a better life for all Africans.

I wish this 31st Ordinary Session of the Permanent Representative Committee of the AU successful deliberations.

I thank you.