

AFRICAN UNION

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PRESS RELEASE

The 28TH Ordinary Session of the AU Summit opens in Addis Ababa against the backdrop of renewed commitment for peace and unity in the continent



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 30 January 2017- The 28th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU), officially opened today at the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia with a strong call for unity to uphold the maintenance of peace and stability in the continent.

The Nelson Mandela plenary hall was full to capacity with delegates and special invitees coming to witness the important event. They heard from distinguished speakers who took their turn on the podium to enlighten the world on the progress made so far in the continent and some of the challenges that Africa faces, as well as proposals for the way forward.

The event this year is holding under the AU theme: ***“Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in the Youth”***.

The outgoing Chairperson of the Union, President Idriss Deby Itno of the Republic of Chad declared open the official ceremony of the 28th AU summit before handing over the baton of command to the newly elected Chairperson of the African Union, H.E Alpha Conde, President of the Republic of Guinea who in his acceptance speech said “ It is with honor and humility that I accept

to preside at the destiny of our Organisation during the year 2017 and I promise to ensure that we implement all the objectives we have set to achieve during this period with the view to enhance the development of our continent ”.

Meanwhile, outgoing Chair President Deby wished a happy new year 2017 to all the delegations and invited guests while underscoring the need to continuously preserve peace, stability and prosperity in the continent. He expressed his appreciation to H.E Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the AU Commission and her team including the Commissioners and staff of the AUC, for the support given to him during his mandate as Chair of the Union. He commended the Commission and the Government of Ethiopia for the successful organisation of the 28th AU Summit.

On the other hand, President Idriss Deby warmly welcomed the newly elected Presidents of the Gambia, Ghana, Sao-Tome and Principe and Seychelles, who worn through a democratically electoral process organized in their respective countries. He also warmly welcomed H.E Mr. Mahamoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine and the new UN Secretary General, Mr. Antonio Guterres to Africa, wishing him success in his new functions and reiterates the support of the African people to the UN given that “Africa has found in Mr. Guterres a sincere, committed and sensible person who will stop at nothing to address the issues currently faced by the continent”.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the 28th Summit of the African Union, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC) warmly welcome to the UN Secretary on his first AU Summit in this capacity. “We appreciate the appointment of our sister Amina J. Mohamed of Nigeria as Deputy Secretary General of the UN, and congratulate her on this new responsibility”, underlined the AUC Chairperson while extending a special welcome to the members of the Assembly whose mandates were renewed and to the newly elected Heads of State, since last Summit.

Dr. Dlamini Zuma recalled that the year 2017 is heralded by some important developments. She said last year, Cuba, Africa and the world bid farewell to the greatest revolutionary and internationalist of our time, Fidel Aleandro Castro Ruz. “He played a critical role in the global struggle against colonialism and imperialism, and for non-alignment and unity of the countries of the South... His sustained contributions to Africa are legendary: the support to liberation movements, to newly-independent states, in the development of African education and health systems; the training of health personnel, all in the spirit of solidarity, friendship, internationalism and mutual respect”.

The AUC Chairperson said “this year marks a number of historical milestones. Firstly, 2017 marks 55 years since the formation of the Pan African Women’s Organisation (PAWO) in 1962, a year before the OAU. The women came from newly independent states and liberation movements,

determined to play their role, side by side with the menfolk, in liberating Africa. She added that “the women’s movement, as we celebrated the OAU/AU Golden Jubilee in 2013, recognized the role of the founder mothers, when they declared:

“...African women and their Diaspora sisters played a critical role in the evolution of Pan Africanism, through their contributions to the anti-slavery, anti-colonial and liberation struggles.

Through their efforts, women ensured that African struggles for freedom, dignity, development, peace and self-determination also addressed our aspirations for women’s emancipation, gender equality and women’s empowerment.”

Dr. Dlamini Zuma emphasized that in tribute to the founding mothers, it is therefore appropriate that the Assembly recognizes PAWO as a Specialized Agency of the African Union. “The task of PAWO today is to continue the struggle for the empowerment of girls and women, through education and skills, in the political, social, cultural and economic spheres. They must continue to advocate and work for a peaceful and safe Africa for all its people...Without this mobilization of women, progress on Agenda 2063 will be slow... As we start this year of youth, we must indeed commit to value our youth and deserve Africa’s future.” Underscored the AUC Chairperson. (See complete speech of the AUC Chairperson on the AU website: www.au.int).

The United Nations Secretary General, H.E António Manuel de Oliveira Guterres, who was addressing the AU Summit for the first time as special guest also expressed strong support for the AU’s annual theme: *“Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in the Youth”*. He reiterated the will for the UN to support by the African people and contribute fully to the peace missions in the continent.

H.E. Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine and Chairman of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Executive Committee thanked the African Union for the support to his government’s desire and efforts to achieve a Palestinian state living side by side with the state of Israel as an independent state with distinct borders. He expressed gratitude to all countries of the UN Security Council who voted for this resolution.

Addressing the Summit, Mr. Salvador Valdez, Vice President of the Republic of Cuba thanked the AU and the African people for the solidarity showed during the death of the liberation leader, Fidel Castro.

Issues of peace and security dominated many of the presentations by the African and visiting Heads of State and Government. Many of the leaders condemned terrorism in very strong terms. Various speakers at the summit’s opening ceremony expressed their commitment to mainstreaming youth’s programs in all socio- economic activities.

Present in today's event was H.E Mr. Erastus Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson of the AUC, the Commissioners, Heads of AU Organs, representatives of the RECs and staff of the Commission servicing the Summit.

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