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CIDO Ag. Director's Opening Remarks

Diaspora Focal Points Workshop
Cairo, Egypt, 13-15 December 2016

Your Excellency by Ambassador Amgad Abdel Ghafar, Assistant Minister for African Organizations & Communities, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Egyptian government official present).

Your Excellencies Representatives of Governments of AU member States, from various Diaspora Ministries, Offices and Embassies,

Distinguished Guests and Colleagues from the AUC

All protocols observed

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to be here in Cairo, Egypt for this important and high level meeting. Allow me first, on behalf of **Her Excellency Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma**, Chairperson of the African Union Commission and everyone at CIDO to start by thanking the government of Egypt for a warm and kind reception since our arrival for this workshop. We have been accorded with pleasant hospitality since arrival and I am sure this will continue throughout our stay in this beautiful city of Cairo. Extending from that, I also thank every one of you for making yourself available for this meeting.

In a related development, I would like to extend condolences on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission over the terror attack that happened on Sunday, December 10th where lots of innocent lives were lost. As the people of this lovely country are in mourning for the three days set by the government, I ask all of us to show solidarity by standing and observing one minute of silence.

As most of you already know, this Diaspora Focal Point meeting of which we are here for, is taking place 4 years since the Global Diaspora Declaration of 2012. Allow me to remind you a few of the things from that Declaration.

We agreed to create platforms for closer interaction, solidarity and effective collaboration between governments and civil society of Africa and its Diaspora including continuation of Regional Consultative Conferences and creation and consolidation of Regional Networks as

partners and interlocutors for the implementation of the outcome of the Global Diaspora Summit. We also committed to engage developed countries with a view to creating favorable regulatory mechanisms governing migration; and to address concerns of Africans living in Diaspora Communities. Without having to recite the entire Declaration from South Africa, you can see how the Declaration and this meeting today operate hand in hand. In fact, the Declaration of South Africa laid out clear instructions to host rotational AU Diaspora meetings in Africa and in the Diaspora to review the implementation of that Diaspora Declaration. So, let us ask… "What have we done so far?"

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

Diaspora engagement is a strategic priority for the African Union. The Constitutive Act of the African Union clearly states that it shall "invite and encourage the full participation of the African Diaspora as an important part of our continent, in the building of the African Union". However, while there is continental, regional and national momentum for diaspora engagement, there remain several structural challenges relating to the capacity of all AU member states to develop sound policy frameworks that can generate developing impact from diaspora engagement. AU member states are currently in different stages of evolution in terms of diaspora engagement. While some member states have advanced policy and program frameworks, the majority remain in early stages of policy development and planning. In addition, the existence of an information gap in many member states relative to diaspora engagement initiatives in other member states and at the RECs and AU level, results in an ongoing lack of harmonization of national level diaspora engagement priorities with regional and continental frameworks.

It is from this background that the African Union through CIDO organized this workshop. This workshop, with your active participation will assist with coming up with ways of building the capacity of AU member states and other stakeholders in the field of diaspora engagement by connecting them with technical resources from the AU Commission, RECS, diaspora, and other member states. The workshop will also establish a basis for the harmonization of national diaspora engagement initiatives with relevant regional and continental frameworks to build cohesion and maximize impact.

Your excellences, ladies and gentlemen

This continental workshop should provide a platform for senior policy makers and heads of Diaspora units and departments set up by AU member states to convene, interact and establish viable networks and build up strategic partnerships in the field of diaspora engagement. This will in turn facilitate the development of a reliable mechanism through which diaspora-oriented policymakers can share and exchange examples of good practices in diaspora engagement activities. By doing this, we hope that member states that are in early stages of designing their diaspora engagement policies will learn a thing or two from the wealth of experience of those at the forefront in this field.

Secondly, the workshop starting today should present all of you an opportunity to share successful diaspora engagement models derived from your experiences in Africa and beyond. The workshop will enable a collective examination of the key ingredients that contribute to successful diaspora engagement, regarding the identification of opportunities that connect key influencers within the diaspora with dynamic and well-performing segments of local institutions, both private and public for homeland development.

Thirdly, the workshop is an opportunity for every participant present to understand the ecosystem of migration and development policies and programs at the level of the RECs and the AU. We are sure that this will help member state focal points in identifying opportunities and gaps that enable a better harmonization and alignment of national-level engagement policies and programs with those at the regional and continental level.

Your excellences, ladies and gentlemen

You have been invited to take part in this workshop because we count on the knowledge and experience you have in your various fields of work. As you may have noticed from the workshop's programme, the scope of the meeting has been structured in a way that upon successful completion, we should be able to tackle all the Aspirations of the AU's flagship programme; Agenda2063. Aspirations 1 through 7 lay down the African Union's vision to have a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, an integrated continent that is politically united, an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law, a peaceful and secure Africa, an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics, an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people and finally, a strong, and united Africa positioned as an influential global player and partner. All these can only be achieved with effective engagement of policy makers and every key player from member states. This should show you how important it is to have you here during this meeting. Africa as a continent requires your collective expertise to fully put Agenda 2063 into play.

Your excellences, ladies and gentlemen

Allow me at this point to emphasize that for Africa to achieve its long-term goals, for Africa to turn its developmental visions into tangible fruits, and indeed for the African Union to see the bold Agenda 2063 fully implemented, it is time for us to start talking less and working more. It is with this in mind that we have organized this workshop with the goal of coming up with tangible results. **We do not want to come out of this workshop with just empty words but solutions and realistic work plans that will help individual member states and Africa as a whole**. Some of the outcomes expected out of this workshop are:

a) Facilitation of the exchange of information and experience

b) Establishing mechanisms to harmonize national diaspora policymaking with regional and continental frameworks to reduce duplication, optimize limited resources, and maximize impact.

c) Developing a diaspora engagement map of AU member states to present a unified snapshot of the various diaspora engagement policies, programs, projects and partnerships in place in all AU member states as well as at the regional and continental levels.

d) Identifying the capacity-development needs of the newly-formed diaspora-oriented units, directorates and departments set up by the governments of AU member states.

e) Developing workable proposals regarding the generation of new knowledge to improve evidence-based diaspora engagement policy in critical sectors such as diaspora investment and entrepreneurship, and sectors badly affected by the flight of skilled personnel from the continent, particularly health and education.

f) Sharing case studies of proven outreach strategies

In my final remarks let me thank Her Excellency Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission under whose leadership we have been able to organize this workshop.

A special word of thanks should again go to the government of Egypt for opening their doors allowing us to hold this event here. Many thanks should go to the team at CIDO for the work they have put into this project now and the work they will continue with even after this workshop. To other branches and departments of the African Union Commission present here today, thank you for the support always. I look forward to a successful workshop with fruitful deliberation and recommendations.

Thank you all.