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African Union Commission Chairperson

H.E. Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat

Speech

at the

**31st Ordinary Session of the
Executive Council of the African Union**

30th June 2017

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Your Excellency, Hadja Makalé Camara, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Guinea and Chairperson of the Executive Council, Honourable Ministers Members of the Executive Council, and Heads of Delegation,
Mr. Kwesi Thomas Quartey, Deputy Chairperson of the AU Commission and Commissioners,
Distinguished Heads of the AU Organs, Executive Secretaries of the Regional Economic Communities,
Distinguished Members of the PRC,
Invited Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Since this is the first time that we, the Commission and myself, are meeting with you, I would like to reiterate our gratitude for entrusting us with the exalting task of leading our Union over the next four years.

I seize this opportunity to thank the Government of Ethiopia for offering the excellent working conditions by hosting the present session which should have been held in another Member State as per the tradition. This mark of generous hospitality of the Government and people of Ethiopia deserves our high appreciation. I wish you, Members of the Executive Council and all others, a warm welcome.

I am pleased to pay high tribute to my illustrious sister, immediate former Chairperson of the Commission, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, for the remarkable quality of her leadership, for the outcome of her action and the human virtues from which we benefited throughout her term of office.

May I express to her our esteem and gratitude. We wish her the best in the new life she will have chosen.

I am delighted to be among you today on this side of the discussion table after having being, on the other side of the same table. No matter which side I am on, I am always myself, happy to be with you, for the same cause, in the service of the unity of our Continent.

Ladies and gentlemen

We have a busy agenda. However, I welcome the excellent work that the PRC and the Commission have done, making it easy for our deliberations.

Consequently, I would like, in order to save time and energy, to focus on four specific issues: the priorities of our agenda, progress of the institutional reform of our Union, the need to speak with one voice and the challenges of the link between our decisions and the will to implement them.

The Agenda 2063, clearly sets the direction for our action and I welcome its gradual domestication through national policies and strategies.

The priorities which are stated therein have constantly asserted themselves as the real concerns of our peoples and our leaders.

They are first and foremost issues of peace and security. Immediately after taking office, I devoted my first travels to areas where Member States continue to face the scourges of wars and terrorism: Somalia, South Sudan, the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin region.

I am committed to continue my visits to where guns continue to do the talking, especially in Central Africa.

In all these regions, I have come to two conclusions. The first concerns the urgent need for Africa to take charge of its own peace and security. Traditional peace keeping methods have been shown to be wanting in the face of the new forms of violence. A new approach is necessary.

The second teaches us that no violent crisis in Africa will be resolved by arms. Dialogue, reconciliation and the search for consensual solutions is the only path to peace. All our own efforts and those with our partners have been and will remain resolutely directed to the implementation of these two conclusions outlined in brief here.

The empowerment of women and the youth is an urgent requirement for any progress in the Continent. I just returned from the Pan-African Youth Forum held in Ndjamena, Chad yesterday, to discuss our theme of the year “Harnessing the Demographic Dividend by Investing in the Youth”. The expectations of the youth are as huge as they are urgent. African youth want results. They are thirsty for concrete actions.

In all the countries I have visited, I have witnessed and listened to the plaintive fears of women and young people. These are the social strata with the most pressing demands. Our meeting cannot ignore or minimise their voices. We must make decisions that translate this urgent social need into concrete action.

Economic and political governance issues call for more resolute attention. Among the many questions to which this priority refers is the issue of the Continental Free Trade Area, as it facilitates the movement of persons and capital, is therefore of prime importance.

Investment, particularly private investment, innovative entrepreneurship, job creation and integration depend to a large extent on it. Its implementation procedures need to be accelerated.

The wave of immigrants, who continue to die in large numbers in the most atrocious conditions at sea, in the desert and in the snare of criminal human trafficking networks simply intolerable. We must act here now, while accelerating long-term and medium-term policies to fight poverty, exclusion and marginalization, which are the root causes of this unbearable tragedy on the human conscience.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For the Continent to deal effectively with these new challenges, the African Union as the main instrument of action cannot remain in its current state. The strong competitive demands require a new instrument of action.

The wisdom of our leaders regarding reforms, has been a long standing and recurring theme of our meetings. Reform was also the central theme of the last two summits, that of Kigali, in July 2016 and the one of Addis Ababa, in January 2017.

President Paul Kagame, who was entrusted with dossier of the Reform by his colleagues, has done an excellent job. The general framework, which has been broken down into an operational and technical matrix, is now available. I do not want to preempt the Report that His Excellency President Kagame will present to his peers at the Assembly. I would like to sincerely welcome the excellent interaction we have had with His Excellency and the members of the team he set up for this purpose, especially during the Retreat organised in Kigali with the members The Executive Council and the PRC on 7 May of 2017.

The dynamic action initiated by the Current Chairman of the Union, His Excellency Professor Alpha Condé, President of Guinea, has been remarkable in several fora and especially at the Conakry meeting which brought together Presidents Idriss Deby Itno and Paul Kagame, in our presence, and a dynamic impetus of leadership was imprinted to the reform process.

All this progress on the Reforms is encouraging. However, it is urgent to propose to our Heads of State and Government to focus on concrete measures to speed up the process and to make them robust so that in the year 2018, the AU reforms will harken a reawakening our organization.

Delay in the implementation of this salutary reform will have very serious consequences for our productivity, our capacity to address the huge challenges that face us and it will also seriously tarnish our credibility in Africa and the world.

I must be frank with you here. Our international credibility is very important. Wherever I have been over the last 100 days, I have sensed the same gratifying appreciation. No international organization, no large or medium power in the world intends to act in Africa without the African Union. To continue to deserve this immense recognition demands that we undertake the reforms measures that will enable us to maintain our rank.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This international credibility brings me to stress the third point of my speech, namely, the need to speak with one voice.

You are aware that we adopted a decision in 2006 at the Banjul Conference relating to the representation in our partnerships. Several events have shown that whenever we have maintained our unity and spoken with one voice, we have won victories. The latest example is the election of the Director-General of WHO. This election affords me the opportunity to congratulate our compatriot, Dr. Teodros, on his brilliant election while wishing him every success in his new role.

I would like to assure him of our deep desire to work with him for the good of the African populace, especially in the area of health of women and young girls in Africa.

Despite the progress in the implementation of the Banjul decision, we have continued to project the image, on many occasions, of presenting ourselves in disparate ranks.

Some partners continue to encourage this situation by dealing with Africa in complete disregard of our choice to speak henceforth with one voice. We must stop endorsing this practice. If we do not do it ourselves, by abstaining from any conduct detrimental to our freely chosen options, how can we reproach others about their behaviour towards us?

Ladies and Gentlemen

The need to speak with one voice and the deficiencies noted in this area leads us to a substantive matter, the relationship between our decisions and our willingness to implement them in concrete terms. This is not the first time that I speak about the serious dichotomy between our decisions and their execution. The only difference is that today I take the measure of the phenomenon by finding myself personally confronted on a daily basis with its contradictory manifestations.

I know that the problem is not simple but we cannot continue to ignore its consequences on the moral health and credibility of our organisation.

There are two things. Either we take decisions and adopt the texts to apply them, or we defer the adoption of these decisions until we are ready to implement them.

The idea applies to all our sovereign choices, to our democratic choices, our electoral systems, our political governance, our economic choices, our current institutional reform, our rejection of external interference and our commitment to the principle of African solutions to African problems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world around us is rapidly changing. Its excessive globalization imposes on us, with extreme severity, the imperative to act at speeds and sequences we do not control.

The extraordinary plurality of challenges and demands leave us with no other choice but to change our methods and styles of work and to reform ourselves quickly.

It is at this price and at this price only, that we can hope to maintain our balance in the storm.

I wish you successful deliberations.