

**Press Release N.155/2014****KEY AFRICAN MINISTERS MEETING IS HELD TO CHART THE WAY FROWARD ON INFRASTRUCTURE AND INTEGRATION**

Ezulwini, Swaziland 17 July 2014- African ministers in charge of integration are meeting in Ezulwini, Swaziland from 17 to 18th July under the theme, infrastructure and integration in Africa. They were joined at their opening session today by the Right Honourable Dr Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of

Swaziland; African Union Commission Chairperson DrNkosazanaDlaminiZuma; Prince HlangusemphiDlamini, the Swazi Minister of Economic Planning; and AU Commissioners DrsElham Ibrahim and Anthony Maruping.

The ministers are discussing the theme of infrastructure and integration in Africa. At the end of their meeting tomorrow, they will adopt a ministerial declaration, highlighting among others, strategies and actions to speed up infrastructure development to support regional integration.

Integration is one of the key goals under the vision of the African Union and remains at the core of the pan African vision. It forms one of the key pillars of the African Union Commission (AUC)'s strategic plan 2014-2017. It is also one of the key enablers of Agenda 2063¹, which seeks to bring together into one framework, Africa's continental, regional and national plans.

Infrastructure on the other hand is seen as a facilitator of integration; as the hardware without which economic and social development on the continent will remain low. Compared to other continents in terms of measures of infrastructure coverage, Africa is lagging behind and this affects the integration efforts. To ameliorate the situation, the African Union has adopted, among others, the programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA).

“At regional and continental levels, through the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa and the infrastructure master-plans of the Regional Economic



Communities (RECs), we seek to connect African capitals and commercial centres through road, rail and ICT, to power our economies and communities through energy projects, including renewable and fossil fuel energy, and to increase agricultural production through irrigation projects, building storage facilities, distribution infrastructure and markets”, said African Union Commission Chairperson DrNkosazanaDlaminiZumaat the start of the ministerial meeting in Ezulwini today.

The AU Commission is also in negotiations with interested parties, to construct a high speed railway, which will be the flagship of Agenda 2063. Dr Dlamini Zuma announced that concrete agreements have been reached with the Chinese government to set up a research and development center as well as a training center to ensure successful set up of the high speed railway system. Other partners are welcome to contribute to the project, she added.

The AUC Chairperson called on Africa to finance its own development projects and programmes, saying “One of the bitter lessons from the last fifty years is that we cannot continue to develop visions and frameworks, and then expect others to take responsibility for financing our development and institutions”.

The Chairperson called on Africa to be inclusive in its development policies. “Our development will continue to be at half pace if we do not empower women to play an important part in the socio, political and economic affairs of our societies”. She also called for a skills revolution to ensure African people, especially the youth, are capacitated to undertake the different jobs that will drive the continent forward.

Right Honourable Dr Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland praised Agenda 2063 as representing a collective effort and an opportunity for Africa to regain the power to determine its own destiny. “The voice of Africa is therefore certain as we drive to the Africa we want”, he said. He highlighted the need to invest in trade related infrastructure such as transport, communication and energy sectors. To further aid integration efforts, a continental free trade area (CFTA) is expected to be launched in 2017.

Delegates to the meeting were reminded to continue making written inputs into Agenda 2063 through the website <http://agenda2063.au.int> before 31 October 2014. In January next year, the framework and its first ten year plan will be adopted.

The declaration to be adopted by the ministers at the end of their meeting will therefore underscore their determination to speed up the integration agenda in conformity with the pertinent decisions of African Heads of State and Government and the aspirations of African people. This includes support for PIDA to build the infrastructure necessary to support integration.

The ministers will make recommendations on the way forward on each of the following topics that are key to infrastructure and integration in Africa: status of integration in Africa and follow up of recommendations from the Sixth Conference of African Ministers in Charge of Integration (COMAIV1); study on the African integration fund; African regional integration index; and on intra African trade and the establishment of the continental free trade area (CFTA). They are also expected to pronounce themselves on the way forward with popularizing and implementing the common African position (CAP) on post 2015 development agenda and on Agenda 2063. (The full declaration will be available soon on the AU website, www.au.int)

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ⁱAgenda is a strategic framework for the socio economic transformation of the continent over the next fifty years. It builds on and seeks to accelerate the implementation of past and existing continental initiatives for growth and sustainable development.