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AT THE ABANT FORUM

**UNDER THE THEME “AFRICA: BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND
INSPIRATION”**

**ABANT, TURKEY
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**Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

I bring you warm greetings this beautiful morning from motherland - Africa; the land of about 1.1 billion people of diverse tongues, colours and beliefs, but share the same African values. I also bring you greetings from the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission and their heartfelt gratitude to the organisers of this Abant Platform; the Journalist and Writers Foundation of Turkey, for their invitation extended to the African Union Commission to be part of this great event. Our thanks go to the people and the government of the Republic of Turkey for the great hospitality and warm welcome.

I also wish to commend and salute the hard work by Prof. Levent Koker, Chairman of the Abant Platform, and the rest of his team particularly for the theme of this Forum which seeks to appreciate and acknowledge the richness of the Africa's experiences and highlight the inspiration in the changing African trajectory. I believe this sort of interaction will not only provide the right kind of analysis needed to understand the African story, it will also help to put into context its development challenges and provide entry points for willing minds and souls to contribute their quota in whatever ways possible to the development of the African Continent.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The choice of the topic of discourse is quite interesting. As I said earlier, Africa's experiences have been a subject of international discourse for more than five decades before and after the total decolonization of African and the formation of the African Union. In some instances, Africa has been referred to as the Dark Continent and in some dismissed as a third world continent. Some analysts have severally questioned the ability of Africans to govern themselves. Indeed, Africa has received more butts and thuds than it has been appreciated and applauded when necessary.

It is therefore heart-warming that there is a deliberate intent on the part of the organisers of this Forum to bring that side of Africa that is often uncelebrated and unreported to the consciousness of people to see, appreciate and interrogate. It is the chance for Africa to tell its own story rather than the stereotypical and misplaced stories usually disseminated by people who either have very limited understanding of the African dynamics or just simply fulfilling a hideous agenda.

I also find interesting the coincidence of this Forum and the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the existence of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and also a decade since the formation of the African Union. You would recall, the African Union was formed to promote "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global

arena". In fact, Heads of African State and Government declared the year 2013, as the Year of Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance.

This theme was carefully chosen to provide the continent with an opportunity to reflect on its development trajectory over the years and chart a new course towards the next five decades. The Anniversary therefore is facilitating and celebrating African narratives of past, present and future that will enthuse and energize the African population and use their constructive energy to accelerate a forward looking agenda of Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance in the 21st century.

The relevance of the reflections here in the Abant Platform and the several conversations happening in Africa and even in other parts of the World, therefore, cannot be overemphasised. It is much needed to have a critical understanding of drivers of progress and triggers of retrogressions.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Five decades after the formation of the Organisation of African Unity, Africa is on the rise - politically, economically, culturally, socially and in terms of its demographics. Not since the completion of the mission of the OAU to rid the continent of colonialism with the end of Apartheid in 1994 have we seen such optimism and energy in all areas of human

endeavour. At the same time, the continent is aware of the challenges it faces, and of the need to use this opportunity to rejuvenate its mission, through Pan Africanism and the African renaissance.

It is also worthy to note that Africa witnessed rapid economic growth fuelled by an improved micro and macroeconomic policies which places premium on improved management of resources. Internal structural changes have provided the needed impetus for a broader domestic economy. The number of wars, diseases and famine has drastically fallen low with the continent commitment to managing its own challenges proactively. The most evident of this is the transformation of the non-interference nature of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the non-indifference policy of the African Union (AU), its successor. This again is the realisation of the need to emphasize the values of community, kinship and good neighbourliness which is embedded in the culture of the Africa and the way of life of its people.

As part of the changing landscape, almost all African Member States are committed to promoting democracy and good governance with elections now generally accepted as the means of assuming leadership. Institutionalisation of democratic practices and governance is also taking roots with the continental body providing the needed guidance in terms of prioritising preventive diplomacy and addressing governance challenges in accordance with the African Charter on

Democracy, Elections and Governance, which was entered into force in 2012.

On another hand, the African Governance Architecture (AGA) was developed by the Commission as the overall political and institutional framework for the promotion of democracy, governance and human rights in Africa. The “AGA”, as we fondly call it, provides the framework to promote structural conflict prevention in Africa.

On the economic front, many resource-rich countries are moving up the international wealth rankings. Over the past decade, Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria and Zambia have crossed the threshold from low-income to lower middle-income status. Another five countries – Angola, Botswana, Gabon, Namibia and South Africa – are in the upper middle-income group. Equatorial Guinea is classed as a high-income country.

These structural changes have helped fuel an African based production boom by helping investments to achieve greater economies of scale, increase investment, and become more competitive. This has led to growth acceleration which is having an effect on the African people conditions of living. However, much more needs to be done in ensuring that these gains don't only trickle down but really puts the living conditions of the people at the centre of development.

One other driver of growth in Africa, I must not fail to mention here, is the increasing quality and quantity of our creative arts particularly in literature, music and movies. The fact that there is a rising global interest in African music and culture is not in doubt. Our musicians and movie artists are increasingly featuring in international productions. The international players in music and movie productions are increasingly been exposed to practitioners in Africa who are not less professional and talented.

Today, there is a resurgence of African theatre houses, spectacle spaces, art galleries and museums, music, book and film industries. The culture of cinema going is gradually returning to Africa. Today, Nollywood, Nigeria's movie industry is globally adjudged as the most prolific film industry with consistent production of more than 2,000 titles in Nigeria's three major languages every year since 2008. This coupled with global recognition as the third biggest in terms of revenue earnings after America's Hollywood and India's Bollywood. Today, there is an emerging Ghanaian film revolution alongside South African productions.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

While all the aforementioned attest to the emergence of Africa as the next frontier of development, there is still much more to be done particularly in the areas of developing our people and moving significant number of our citizens out of poverty.

As enunciated in the African Charter for Cultural Renaissance there is 'a common determination to strengthen understanding among our peoples and cooperation among our States in order to meet the aspirations of our peoples to see brotherhood and solidarity reinforced and integrated within a greater cultural unity which transcends ethnic, national and regional divergences on the basis of a shared vision' of growth and development.

I hope this Forum will assist in looking at some critical drivers that have been identified in this quest. Of importance is improving the existing cooperation between Africa and Turkey, the Great Friend of Africa for many years. Massive investment in human capital development remains a key. We hope this Forum will help in interrogating ways of improving and provide impetus in our efforts at improving the QUALITY and QUANTITY of our education and particularly in the areas of linking marketplace realities to our educational curriculum.

This is an important area of focus as we move into the next five decades in Africa. Our emphasis at the continental level is to shift from consumption based education to production based education; this can only be achieved by ensuring that our educational curriculum is in tandem with our development objectives with proper and nuanced reflections of our socio-political history.

We also need to increase investments in our healthcare delivery. Improvement in the provision of clean and safe water as well as improved sanitation will help prevent the outbreak of diseases and preserve the well-being of our people. A healthy nation they say, is a wealthy nation.

Improvements in our education and the health of our people will contribute significantly to the economic development of our continent. A healthy and educated workforce will provide the needed energies to oil the wheels of progress on the continent. We hope this forum will help in providing a third eye that is often needed in terms of policy options and best practices.

Once again, I wish to thank the organizers of this Forum for the invitation extended to the African Union, the people and the government of the Republic of Turkey for the hospitality and warm welcome. And in conclusion, I thank you all for your attention and wish you an engaging interaction over the next three days.

I thank you.