

AFRICAN UNION

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Opening Address by the Presiding Officer to the 1st Session of the 2nd Permanent General Assembly of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union (ECOSOCC), Cairo, Egypt, 26 February 2015.

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Your Excellency, The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt,

Your Excellences, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Your Excellency, Advisor to the Chairperson,

The Director of CIDO and Head of the ECOSOCC Secretariat,

Directors of the AU Commission,

Representatives of Various Departments,

Colleagues and Honorable Members of the General Assembly,

Members of the Press Corps and Fourth Estate,

Distinguished Participants,

Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to address this maiden session of the General Assembly of our Organ, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union (ECOSOCC). Following the inauguration of this Assembly and the subsequent Summit of the African Union held in Addis Ababa in late January 2015, the time has come now for us to begin work in earnest to realize the vision of the African Union in the establishment of ECOSOCC.

I must begin by thanking all Honorable members of the 2nd General Assembly for taking the time to attend this crucial meeting. I am aware that as civil society activists who have other full time obligations your presence here is a testimony to passion and commitment to the cause of integration and development in Africa. I exhort you all to work earnestly with me to ensure that this commitment is translated into visible concrete measures that would promote the interest and well being of the vast majority of our people in this continent in line with the oath that we took when we were sworn into office in Nairobi, Kenya, on 23 December 2014.

You will all recall that in my inaugural address to the ECOSOCC Assembly at its installation in Nairobi, I set three major priorities for this august Assembly. First is to hold an orientation program for all new Members as a foundation for situating the work of our Organ in the larger framework of the African Union so that we can begin with a proper compass that attunes us to the purpose and functions of ECOSOCC, its demands and responsibility, its relationship with the Commission and the other Organs, the policy frameworks of the Union and relate desire and challenges. The draft agenda and work program for this meeting focuses on this first priority. I also indicated then that we would like to have this meeting in Cairo, Egypt.

Your Excellences, Honorable Members, Distinguished Participants,

Immediately after the installation of the Assembly in December 2014, the ECOSOCC Secretariat in the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate of the Commission (CIDO) in close association with my office initiated consultation with the authorities and Government of Egypt to make this happen. The consultation was strongly supported by our two focal points in Egypt, the Egyptian Red Crescent and the Egyptian Business Women Association. The Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt welcomed the initiative enthusiastically and committed itself to the success of the enterprise with moral, political and material support. Our presence here today is possible only because of this strong support and commitment.

I wish on behalf of this Assembly to thank the Government and people of Egypt through the Minister for its commitment and support for ECOSOCC in particular and the African Union in general. We have had the benefit of further discussion with Representatives of the Government of Egypt yesterday and I can assure you that Egyptian authorities are sincere in their commitment to promote a people-centered community in our Union that is anchored in ECOSOCC. This commitment is buttressed by the community support that we have witnessed here since our arrival in Cairo, the camaraderie and African family spirit of the Egyptian people, their love and sincerity that gives us a general sense of belonging. We consider Egypt a home away from home and a veritable champion of Africa's development and integration. ECOSOCC will continue to interact closely with the Government and people of Egypt to achieve the objectives of the continental organization and make our continent a trailblazer in the world.

Colleagues, Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I also noted in Nairobi that our second focus would be to mobilize and build grassroots support for African Union program and activities and to link them to the wishes and aspirations of the African people. Accordingly, " ECOSOCC meetings or programs would be preceded by a day for the sensitization and motivation (of the African Civil society community) in support of the African

Union'. The program of activities for this meeting has incorporated that objective and the second part of our program later today is a sensitization meeting with the Egyptian Civil society community. I see this venture as establishing the framework for national ECOSOCC Chapters in all Member States of the Union. In ECOSOCC we must talk the talk and walk the walk. Everywhere we go we must account for our presence to both governments and our primary constituency in civil society and domesticate the notion of accountability and social responsibility. In the same way, elected ECOSOCC Members will be expected to buttress their mandate with responsibility and accountability to national ECOSOCC chapters. Our watchword must be a sense of duty and responsibility rather than privileges and entitlements.

The third promise I made in my acceptance speech was that our third and foremost priority would be to operationalize the Sectorial Cluster Committees as the key operational mechanisms of ECOSOCC so that it can offer concrete advisory opinions as required by the ECOSOCC Statutes. Thereafter, we shall introduce business models to support our performance objectives and develop a strategic plan with clear goals, defined objectives and set targets. The process of this operationalization will begin in this meeting with the completion of internal elections within ECOSOCC to choose cluster chairpersons, elect the Credentials Committee and constitute the Standing Committee as the executive organ to coordinate the work of ECOSOCC in accordance with Articles 10 and 11 of the ECOSOCC Statutes. We will also consider and adopt draft rules of procedure that will govern the operations of the ECOSOCC General Assembly as the highest decision and policy making body of ECOSOCC as stated in Article 9 (1) of the ECOSOCC Statutes. The recognition of the role of the General Assembly as contained in Article 9 of the Statutes will also enable a reflection on ECOSOCC roles and boundaries as well as its duties and responsibility and its precise relationship with the Commission which hosts its Secretariat as well as other Organs of the Union in coordinate and autonomous spheres of activity.

Significantly also, an implementation strategy that places premium on a scientific and business approach must be one that accommodates competence and technical expertise. As such, I intend to appoint a few technical advisers with competence in various areas to support interaction with the various sectorial clusters. Such advisory responsibilities will not carry remunerations but would involve selected presence at specific meetings involving designated areas of advisory responsibility. The participation of these technical advisers in such deliberations would be funded by ECOSOCC.

Honorable Members,

I went through the list of the pledges in Nairobi at our inauguration to make three distinct points that must guide the progress of this Assembly. First is that our success must be anchored in sincerity and devotion. We must mean what we say and do what we promised to do. Secondly that the establishment of a business

model of conduct must be based on clear vision defined goals, set objectives and concrete business plans. Third is that as we move along there is need to audit performance in defining next steps and the way forward.

In doing this, we must also take account of significant developments that have a bearing on our objectives. After our meeting in Nairobi, the AU Summit was held in the last week of January 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Commission reported on the ECOSOCC and I made a related presentation to the Executive Council of the Union that consequently adopted Decision EX.CL /Dec. 869 (XXVI) on the 2nd Permanent General Assembly of ECOSOCC. That Decision recognized and endorsed the outcome of our election in Nairobi and gave us certain Union responsibilities that must be embraced as part of our obligations. The obligations were three-fold. First was to continue with by-elections for subsisting vacant positions in the General Assembly to ensure the widest possible representation of Member States of the Union within ECOSOCC Second to work closely with Member States to facilitate the establishment of ECOSOCC national Chapters as a framework for accountability of elected members and to disseminate information and mobilize support for AU program and activities. Third is that ECOSOCC should play a key role in popularizing Agenda 2063, the post 2015 Development agenda and other important policy frameworks of the AU. The agenda and work program for this orientation exercise that we will consider subsequently have sought to provide a sense of understanding that will enable us to undertake the additional responsibilities.

Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen.

This is the task that we have before us in this orientation program. The successful performance of our Organ will depend on our clear understanding of these tasks, our sense of mission, the ability to develop a clear roadmap for addressing our duties and responsibilities and the support that we receive from Member States, the PRC, the Commission and Coordinate organs of the Union. The Council Decision in Addis Ababa in late July 2015 calls upon all these bodies to give us the support that we require and I believe that they will so do so. Where we see such support as still required, we shall request that support in the spirit of collaboration and common purpose.

In conclusion, I wish, once again, to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Government and people of Egypt for hosting this meeting. We shall always acknowledge your contribution in this regard to ensuring that our African Union is a people-centered community that develops and grows as a dynamic and prosperous entity driven by its people.

I thank you all.