
Excellencies;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

Let me begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to the organizers of this very important event which is both pertinent and timely. The groundbreaking concept of Blue Economy can play a critical role in fostering structural transformation in Africa during the next decade and beyond, for the benefit of the peoples of Africa. It is timely because the Assembly has adopted the 1st 10 year Implementation Plan of our African blue print Agenda 2063 and also the United Nations General Assembly will adopt the Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015.
As we launch the Decade of African Seas and Oceans (2015-2025) and celebrate the African Day of Seas and Oceans, it is imperative to recognise that this is a cross cutting matter and underscore that the 2050 Africa’s Integrated Maritime Strategy, affectionately known as 2050 AIM Strategy, requires inter-agency collaboration at Member States level, and the coordination and collaboration of all the relevant stakeholders, to address the challenges and to take advantage of the many opportunities in the African maritime domain. There is need to enhance trans-border and sub-regional cooperation.

Excellencies, Distinguished guests,

Under its first Aspiration “A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development”, Agenda 2063 recognizes the huge potential of the Blue Economy as a catalyst of socio-economic transformation through knowledge on marine and aquatic biotechnology, the growth of an Africa-wide shipping industry, the development of sea, river and lake transport and fishing;
and exploitation and beneficiation of deep sea mineral and other resources.

In May 2013 when we celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the OAU/AU under the theme: “Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance” we reflected on African Renaissance in the Maritime Domain. This led to the incorporation of Maritime issues into the Agenda 2063. To that end, African Maritime Domain now occupies a golden space in the Agenda 2063. This is a signal that Africa is much more keen to take the lead to determine her destiny by taking control over the geostrategic and geopolitical challenges faced by the African Maritime Domain, especially in terms of safety, security, maritime resources and various other abundant resources provided by Africa’s inland waters, Seas and Oceans.

The following words by His Excellency Mr James Michel, President of the Republic of Seychelles, in the 50th Anniversary Commemorative Book are very relevant. He said “we Africans need to take ownership of our Blue Economy by seriously paying attention on our inland waters, Seas and Oceans as the opportunities inherent to
our inland waters, Seas and Oceans belong to us; and only us have the sole right to design creative frameworks able to develop such an immense source of resources that has, unfortunately, for quite some time, been left out, neglected, under-developed, but which remains a source of incommensurable wealth and synonym of life”.

Several metaphors and symbols come to mind when dealing with maritime issues. As an African, seeing my continent surrounded by water, I realize that Africa is a big island. As the second biggest continent and the largest Island on earth with more than 26,000 nautical miles of coastline, it is now time that we endeavour to better understand our Maritime Domain in order to strategically innovate winning frameworks that would help us take advantage and maximize the wealth opportunities provided to us by our inland waters, Seas and Oceans.

We must look to our maritime domain as a vast and virtually unexplored area with enormous potentials to play a key role in helping the continent realize its true development potential.
In many important ways, the future of Africa is very much connected with the waters that surround us. In order to fully realize this promise of development, Africa must meet the many threats and challenges that emanate from the seas and oceans. Too many of our citizens perish at sea – the victims of human traffickers and smugglers. Too much of our fish and other fauna and flora are stolen by foreign vessels thereby endangering our food security and economic development. A lot of our oil and several other minerals are stolen by unscrupulous individuals and organizations. This deprives us of our precious resources and the benefits that we must derive from them to finance the development of the beloved continent, using African resources. Too many ships dump wastes in our waters, leading to death and disease of some Africans, and at the same time irreversibly damaging the environment. Too many pirates and armed robbers roam our waters and disrupt our maritime connections with the rest of the world. This hampers trade and increases the cost of doing business in Africa.

We must now change the curve, reclaim the benefits of our natural heritage and assets to enable meaningful
improvements in the lives of our populations and ensure a brighter future to our young and future generations. The African Blue Economy must now become the new frontlines of our fight and struggles for Africa’s economic rise and prosperity including the empowerment of women. We need to leverage the bountiful resources endowed us by the creator in the African seas, oceans and inland waters, for social and economic transformation.

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Globalization has generated transnational challenges that no longer recognize borders or nation-states. In this regard, foreseen and unforeseen geostrategic challenges will grow bigger in the years ahead. No single nation has the capacity to meet all these challenges alone. It is in this spirit that synergies, maritime partnerships between and among our Regional Economic Communities (RECs), cooperation among AU Member States, local communities and the civil society and other stakeholders become imperative.
With this in mind we all understand how important it is to start implementing both the 2050 AIM Strategy and the Regional Maritime Strategies. We also need to ensure that all efforts are well coordinated in order to foster cooperation and avoid duplication of efforts and, resources amongst development partners. There, also should not be any duplication of initiatives between the regional and continental level.

The efforts we are all undertaking should help advance shared cross-cutting maritime interests on our continent, contribute to qualitative and quantitative employment for the African people, particularly the youths and women. They should also help improve Africa’s security environment and global competitiveness.

The reality of these benefits attached to Africa’s inland waters, Seas and Oceans also justifies the determination of the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) and the African Union Commission (AUC) to put Maritime Affairs as at the centre of their activities, especially through the implementation of the 2050 African Integrated Maritime
(2050 AIM) Strategy adopted in January 2014. We need to allocate the needed resources.

It will be remiss of me not to mention the plight of landlocked countries in relation to maritime-related initiatives. It should be emphasized that landlocked countries also need to trade. In order to address the challenges faced by these countries owing to their geographical locations, there is need to improve connectivity and access within and between African countries so that all African Union Member States have access to ports.

I would like to conclude my statement at this historic occasion - **THE LAUNCH OF THE 2015-2025 DECADE OF AFRICAN SEAS AND OCEANS AND THE CELEBRATION OF THE AFRICAN DAY OF THE SEAS AND OCEANS** - by emphasizing that the effective implementation of the 2050 AIM Strategy requires joint and determined efforts by all stakeholders: the RECs, Civil Society Organizations, and, of course, the Member States. **We need all of you, women, men and youth, as actors and actresses to achieve the Africa we want.** Allow me to quote the famous statement
from the former UN Secretary General which said that “more than ever before in human history, we share a common destiny, we can master it only if we face it together”.

I, take this opportunity to wish you all a very successful 2015-2025 DECADE OF AFRICAN SEAS AND OCEANS AND THE CELEBRATION OF THE AFRICAN DAY OF THE SEAS AND OCEANS!

God Bless Africa!

I Thank You.