

AFRICAN UNION

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**Welcome Remarks by
HE Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma
Chairperson of the African Union Commission**

**Opening session of the 22nd Ordinary Session
of the Executive Council**

Addis Ababa, January 24, 2013

Your Excellency, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Benin and
Chairperson of the Executive Council;

Your Excellencies, Ministers from Member states and visiting Ministers

Executive Secretary of the ECA

Heads of all the AU and UN Organs

Members of the Permanent Representatives Committee

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen;

Since this is my first address to the Executive Council, let me start by thanking you all most sincerely, both in your personal capacities and your governments, for the honour you bestowed on this Commission by electing us at the last summit of the African Union in July, 2012. We pledge to do our best to carry out the mandate you have entrusted upon us. With your support, I have no doubt that we will succeed.

We also wish to take this opportunity to thank our friend and my predecessor, his Excellency Dr. Jean Ping, for his work and dedication, to the African Union Commission. I also wish you all a successful 2013.

We also apologise to the Muslim brothers and sisters for this being a working day, and wish them Eid Mubarak.

Excellencies

Once again, you meet in Ordinary Session as Executive Council, to take stock of the important developments that have taken place on our continent in the last six months, to find solutions to the challenges we face, to plan ahead and to prepare for the Summit of our Heads of State.

This year is special, for we will be commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of our continental organisation (the OAU) - hence the theme, '*Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance*'. This means that we have the additional task of taking forward preparations for the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary in May. As a Commission, we look forward to receiving guidance from you and our Heads of State on this matter. Let me also say that after the Summit,

the Commission and the PRC will sit and finalise the activities in consultation with you, for the commemoration day and beyond.

It is our view that we should use the anniversary activities to stimulate a continent-wide debate on the importance of the concepts and praxis of *Pan Africanism and of the African Renaissance* - past, present and future – so as to inform and mobilise the African citizenry and the Diaspora behind the AU vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent.

Our 50th Commemoration activities must enable us to tell our own story: the story of Africa's rich pre-colonial history of great civilisations, its struggles against slavery and colonialism and its process of nation-formation and state-building over the last fifty years. We must demystify, appropriate and popularise our own history, our own narrative, in honour of the generations that went before us and to inspire current and future generations.

Finally, during 2013 we must also look to the future and debate, strategise and develop an accelerated African Agenda 2063 for action on integration and the development of the continent for the next fifty years.

Excellencies

Fifty years ago at the founding Summit of the OAU, President Kwame Nkrumah stated:

"as the shaping of our national destinies requires of each of us our political independence and bent all our strength to this attainment, so we must recognise that our economic independence resides in our African union and requires the same concentration ..."

The founders of the OAU have fulfilled the mission they defined for themselves, to liberate the continent from colonialism. As we celebrate and reflect on the fifty years of our Union, we must as President Nkrumah urged fifty years ago, apply the single-mindedness and strength to achieve the mission of the social and economic liberation of our continent.

It is in this context, Your Excellencies, that the newly elected Commission, reflected on its responsibility during the term of office, to decisively move forward the continental agenda, propelled by this celebrations of the 50th Anniversary.

The Commission proposes that in preparations for the Third AUC Strategic Plan (2014-2017), we identify key priorities on which to concentrate attention, so that we accelerate our agenda for an integrated, people-centred and prosperous continent,

at peace with itself. This will be in addition to the other programmes, but we thought that through prioritization, we will be able to set more realistic outcomes, which can be achieved during this period and beyond. We hope to have this ready by March.

We believe that we should focus the Commission, the RECs, Member states and other continental institutions on concrete outcomes in the following key areas, namely (1) Human capacity development focussing on health, education, science, research, technology and innovation; (2) Agriculture and agro processing; (3) Inclusive economic development through industrialisation, infrastructure development, agriculture and trade and investment; (4) Peace, stability and good governance; (5) Mainstreaming women and youth into all our activities; (6) Resource mobilisation; (7) Building a people-centred Union through active communication; and (8) finally strengthening the institutional capacity of the Union and all its organs. We will continue to consult on these issues.

It is our firm belief that we have continental policy frameworks, strategies and often action plans in most, if not all these areas. What we need to do is to identify key outcomes in each area, which we must implement seriously and resolutely, so that we can begin to see impact and decisive movement forward.

Excellencies

This continent has a young, vibrant and large population. We received a group of young women from the continent at our office last night, who were attending the Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) conference, and who will volunteer during the Summit. They spoke briefly about their dreams and aspirations, and the challenges facing young women and girls on the continent.

They, Your Excellencies, are the human face of the demographic dividend that our continent needs to reap. We must therefore as we celebrate our 50th anniversary ensure that we give the young women and men of our continent hope, and a stake in, the future. Young people must have a voice in the affairs of the continent. The Union and its organs must therefore harness their energies so that they contribute to the development of our continent.

Excellencies

Our fledgling Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is providing us with a critical instrument to manage conflicts on the continent. As a result, progress has been registered in many of the conflicts, including Somalia, Sudan/South Sudan and Madagascar.

At the same time, we have seen the re-emergence of conflict in the eastern DRC, Guinea Bissau and the Central African Republic, whilst in Mali and the Sahel we are facing new and multi-faceted challenges, with broader regional and continental implications. The persistence and re-emergence of old conflicts and the development of new threats to security continues to require our urgent and focused attention, and in particular understanding and addressing the root causes of conflicts.

To this end, amongst other things we must do, is to accelerate the operationalisation of the Africa Standby Force, so that the continent has the capacity for rapid response, when the situation requires. We acknowledge in this regard the contribution by the international community, in particular France, to the urgent need to restore the territorial integrity of Mali.

Excellencies,

We must maintain a healthy balance between achieving peace and advancing development. We cannot sustain peace if there is no development and we cannot sustain development if there is no peace.

The balance of peace and development can most effectively be achieved through people-centred government and public institutions, an active African citizenry, and through the mobilization of all sectors of civil society and the Diaspora.

Excellencies

The Commission will be reporting on all matters relating to its operations, including institutional and administrative issues, implementation of decisions of African Union policy organs and the challenges we face.

Let me, briefly, highlight a few of these.

We believe that for the Commission to successfully deliver on our mandate, we must be efficient, innovative, organised and focussed. Over the next four years, we aim to achieve this by enhancing and sustaining good governance and accountability across the Commission. We intend to enhance performance management systems linked to outcomes, operational efficiency and build an organisational culture of accountability and discipline.

We will pursue a financially sustainable and prudent Commission, improving processes and systems, internal and external auditing and strengthening financial management and accountability.

Excellencies

We reaffirm the importance of RECs as building blocks of the Union. During a meeting with the RECs, we affirmed the need to strengthen cooperation, by synchronising our programmes, strategizing and planning together, eliminate duplication in order take the agenda of integration and development to higher levels.

We have also strengthened the forum of the heads of the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, to meet regularly and to pursue the same African agenda, using our different and complementary mandates. We are supported by a Joint Secretariat of the three institutions at a technical level. We held useful meetings on amongst others the strategic vision for Africa in the next fifty years, the joint efforts we should undertake together, to strengthen our collaboration, coordination and planning, and hopefully the outcomes.

As Africans we should take charge of our development, especially our economic development. The financial crisis has turned many so-called truths about development and economic growth on its head, providing space for more nuanced, innovative and people-centred models of development, which are endogenous, as was said in the Lagos Plan of Action. Africa has a unique opportunity to chart its own path, learning from others, from its programmes of the last fifty years, but based on its own current realities.

Excellencies

It is self-evident that the AU over the decade of its existence, and the OAU before then, has taken a myriad of decisions to take forward the continental agenda. The challenge that the Union and the Commission face is the capacity to implement all these decisions. Should we not at this stage consider providing sufficient time, capabilities and tools to implement and assess the impact of the decisions we have taken? Should we not in the coming Summits take fewer decisions and concentrate on looking at the implementation of decisions?

We also urge for the signing and/or ratification of African Union treaties, since treaties are the means and tools through which the Commission, the RECs and Member states deliver on the mandates given to us by the African people.

Another issue of concern is the resources of the Union, both in terms of the quantum and the sources of funding. Not only for the Commission, but other organs and our development programmes. The current structure of the budget, where member states fund the operational budget while external partners fund the bulk of the programme budget is unsustainable and unpredictable. However, external funding cannot be the mainstay of our funding.

Our leaders have said in the past that we must be self-reliant, without cutting ourselves off from the contributions of the international community.

Efforts to explore alternative sources of funding have been going on for over a decade. We have established a High Level panel, chaired by former President Olusegun Obasanjo and we should hear from this study, so that we can debate their proposals.

The inadequacy of resources is not helped by the trend of creating more and more African Union institutions. While the importance and usefulness of these new institutions cannot be doubted, it does not speak well of the African Union if we continue establishing new institutions when we cannot sustain existing ones.

We will continue to work with our cooperating partners, on the agenda set by the continent. Furthermore, work is on the way on the global review of our partnerships. To this end, we must consider putting a moratorium on the establishment of new partnerships. Especially continent-country partnerships, until we reviewed the existing ones.

To this end, in the light of all these issues raised, I wish to respectfully recommend that you convene an Extra-Ordinary Session of the Executive Council during early April, at which you can discuss these issues in depth and make appropriate recommendations to the Assembly of Heads of State.

Excellencies, Distinguished guests

The challenges we face as a continent are, indeed, many and they are difficult: but not so many, nor so difficult as to be intractable and defeat our collective will and wisdom to resolve. Throughout history Africa has faced very serious challenges from slavery, to colonialism, to apartheid. Armed with unity and solidarity, we have overcome.

The celebrations of the 50th Anniversary provides us with an opportunity for a new paradigm; an opportunity to strengthen our belief in our capacity to become prosperous and peaceful.

Inspired by this illustrious history, I am confident that Africa's march towards greatness, towards our cherished goal of prosperity and peace will continue. The more united and organised we are, the quicker will be the pace and the shorter the journey.

Your meeting today and the next few days is but a rest stop on this journey. It is an opportunity to reflect, take stock, to plan ahead, to recharge, and to recommit ourselves to the tasks ahead.

As the AU Commission, we pledge that we will do our utmost to facilitate your work at this meeting and accompany you on this glorious journey to Africa's destiny.

With your support the African Union, will succeed!

I thank you. Merci