

OPENING REMARKS BY H.E MR ERASTUS MWENCHA

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

**At the Experts Meeting on “The Development of a Ninth
Volume of the General History of Africa”**

20 May 2013

VENUE: UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA (UNECA)

Your Excellency, Mrs Isabel Cristina de Azevedo Heyvaert, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Brazil

Your Excellency, Mr. Mulugeta Said, State Minister of Culture and Tourism for the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Mr. Getachew Engida, Deputy Director General of UNESCO

Professor Elikia M'Bokolo, Chair of the Scientific Committee for Pedagogical use of GHA Project

I would like, on behalf of the AU Commission, to warmly welcome you all to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia at this auspicious moment in Africa's history, where we will be discussing the development of a ninth volume of the General History of our beloved continent Africa, as well as celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Organization of African Unity/African Union.

From the onset, I would like to welcome you, Honourable Minister of Culture and Tourism for the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Mr Amin Abdulkadir, and the Honourable Minister, Secretariat for Promotion of Racial Equality of the Federal Republic of Brazil, Ms Luiza Helena Bairros for finding time to attend this important meeting. I acknowledge the presence of Mr Getachew Engida, Deputy Director General of UNESCO, and appreciate the efforts and hard work of his team who have worked tirelessly in preparing for this meeting.

As I hinted earlier, the year 2013 marks an important year in the annals of the African Union, a watershed year, which marks 50 years of the OAU, as well as 10 years since the launch of the African Union. During the jubilee celebrations of the OAU, which will be marked both this month and

throughout this year, we will be paying specific tribute to those that planted the seed for Pan-Africanism and paved the way for a united, prosperous and peaceful Africa. It is not by coincidence therefore, that we are gathered here to reflect and discuss ways to preserve and build on the legacy of those who came before us. This year the AU will be celebrating in the spirit of Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance, for it is with this spirit that our forefathers came together to fight for the liberation and freedom of all Africans. As the late Kwame Nkrumah said in his independence Speech on March 6, 1957, their independence was meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of Africa.

Excellences,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

The commemoration of the establishment of the OAU-AU marks a significant chapter in the long and rich history of the continent, and provides us an excellent opportunity for reflection on the achievements and key milestones that have been recorded over the past 50 years.

As one author known as Russet Shadows stated **“You cannot be prepared for the future without understanding the past, and in order to understand the past, you must understand the literature of the past...”**.We celebrate this history because it defines who we are, and our ability to learn and understand our history will inform the decisions we make in shaping Africa’s future. From great civilizations, to heroic struggles against colonial domination, Africa has fought against the odds to establish itself as an independent continent

Today Africa is home to 6 of the 10 fastest growing economies in the world. It is also the source of large resources and materials needed for the creation

of every day goods and services, making it the prime destination for foreign investments for emerging and more developed economies such as Europe, China and the United States. Much of our natural resources are barely harnessed by Africans, a condition that enabled exploitation of these resources in large quantities, putting Africa under heavy pressures and tensions, leading to wars and slow development. All this is the result of ignorance and a lack of accountability and commitment to the on-going struggle for the total economic freedom of the continent.

Excellences,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It is said that history repeats itself, but we are only doomed to relive our past if we fail to learn from it. Unfortunately, not many of our youth are knowledgeable about this struggle we speak about. Hence we must not only document our history but we must teach it. Knowing our history through education helps to shape our identities and improve understanding of the values and heritage shared by Africans and people of African descent. This leads me to another importance point, and that is the importance of documenting Africa's history in efforts to tackle some of the challenges currently facing African in terms of fully understanding the wealth and potential, and the need for Africans to harness and transform our raw resources for the good of our people. African Youth must develop a sense of pride and responsibility, which will inform and empower them make better decisions for the betterment and progression of their continent.

In the same spirit of solidarity in which our fore-leaders came together in the early 1960s, we need to exude that same spirit of Pan-Africanism to harmonize our curriculums through the pedagogic use of these history

document, as well harmonization of national policies and programmes and development agenda for the economic freedom and long term development of Africa, based on ...

The monumental undertaking of compiling and publishing the 8 volumes by UNESCO has broken down barriers, challenged stereotypes and deeply enriched our knowledge of African influence in arts, world history, cultures and even natural sciences.

Excellences

Distinguished Participants

Allow me to acknowledge and appreciate UNESCO for their unwavering commitment to uncovering the hidden gems of our great continent, and also appreciate the Government of Brazil for their financial support to the development of the 9th volume of the General History of Africa publication. Be rest assured of AU's continued support and commitment to the work of the Experts who are working on this ninth volume.

I thank you and I wish you successful deliberations.