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AU Commission Chairperson at SADC Summit: expresses gratitude for support, commends development progress, challenges region to do more

Mbabane, Swaziland – 30 August 2016: The Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, has expressed sincere gratitude to Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) for supporting her as Chairperson and for their cooperation with the AU Commission during her mandate.

Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma addressed the leaders of the region, for the last time in her current capacity, as they gathered in Mbabane, The Kingdom of Swaziland for the 36th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government, from 30-31 August 2016.

In her remarks, the AU Commission Chairperson commended the Regional Economic Community for its work on a regional industrial strategy and action plan; on gender equality and the rights of girls and women; their investments in infrastructure, which overall positively impacts on continental integration and development. “Progress in SADC and in other RECs, means progress towards continental integration,” she highlighted.

“The SADC region, with some exceptions,” the Chairperson noted, “has the advantage of being connected through infrastructure: transport, energy and ICT, with room for improvement on energy, water and sanitation.”

However, she challenged the region to do more in a number of other areas including: maritime transport and the blue oceans economic, renewable energy, the political representation of women, and expanding railway transport networks, citing the Pan African Integrated Highspeed rail network aimed at linking the continent from Cape to Cairo and from Djibouti to Dakar.

The AUC Chairperson also highlighted the critical role that SADC must play as part of the Tripartite in the move towards the Continental Free Trade Area, as a key deliverable of Agenda 2063.

After commending SADC on its ongoing efforts to integrate and harmonize higher education in the region, the AU Commission Chairperson said more is expected from them. She noted areas of science, technology, mathematics and engineering (STEM) sectors, as well as vocational training and skills.

In his acceptance speech as incoming SADC Chairperson, King Mswati III of the Kingdom of Swaziland, announced the establishment of a SADC University of Transformation, which will deliver in education and training. The University of Transformation will use the technical vocational educational training model of delivery. It will be a critical contributor to the African skills revolution.

His Majesty paid tribute to the role of the continental institutions such as the AU Commission, the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank in supporting and complementing the work of SADC and other RECs.

King Mswati announced a scholarship offer to the first intake of 300 students, 20 from each of the 15 Member States. The first intake of students are expected to begin school before the 37th SADC Summit in 2017.

Other speakers at the opening ceremony included Lt. Gen. Seretse Khama Ian Khama, President of Botswana and the outgoing SADC Chairperson; Dr. Stergomona Lawrence Tax, Executive Secretary of SADC; and Dr. Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

SADC is expected to issue a Communique after the second day, 31 August 2016 following deliberations in a closed session, dealing with matters on the Summit agenda such as review of the elections since the last SADC Summit in Seychelles, Tanzania and Zambia; building resilience to drought and other extreme weather conditions in the context of food security; combatting illegal wildlife poaching; domestic resource mobilisation and nominations for the AU Commission.

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