

AFRICAN UNION

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DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

2018 NEW YEAR MESSAGE OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION, MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT

2017 has been a particularly eventful year, with the assumption of duty of a new Commission. I have had the privilege of serving with a diverse group of individuals over the past nine months, and the results have been encouraging.

Youth has been at the center of our agenda, as the African Union works to open up opportunities for them in every field. 2017 was the year of Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investment in Youth. This made it possible to renew our commitments, as African States and institutions, to achieve our targets for young people, including through reducing the proportion of youth unemployment by at least 2 % annually. In adopting the African Union Demographic Dividend Roadmap, Member States have pledged to open up financial services for young people, promote entrepreneurship, increase investments in health, education, and create spaces for youth civic engagement and political participation. They further pledged to mobilize investments in sectors with the potential for high employment multiplier effects and to engage the corporate sector to encourage on-the-job training and philanthropic programmes.

Member States also renewed their commitments to empowering the youth through the ratification, domestication and full implementation of all African Union Shared Values instruments, including the African Youth Charter and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

I am pleased that several African Union Member States have launched the Continental Demographic Dividend Roadmap and committed to report annually on progress made. The vast majority of Member States completed the development of their Demographic Dividend profiles. This now gives us a clearer picture of the high-impact areas that require strategic investments in order to harness the demographic dividend. I call upon the Member States that have not yet done so to complete these profiles.

Reports of African migrants being auctioned as slaves in Libya by international criminal networks were received with shock across the continent and beyond. In response, the Commission took a number of steps, including working with the Libyan authorities, as well as the United Nations, the European Union, the International Organization for Migration and the High Commissioner for Refugees, as part of an African Union-led task force, to facilitate and accelerate the voluntary repatriation of migrants. I requested the African

Commission on Human and People's Rights to carry out an investigation into the situation and to report as soon as possible. Alongside this, the Commission will also take additional steps to address the underlying drivers of irregular migration.

In November, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, which was established to further the advancement of our people. While the task of making these aspirations into reality is a long one, we are confident that it will be achieved.

This year, the Commission reevaluated the effectiveness of its previous policies and strategies with respect to gender equality and women's empowerment on the continent. On this basis, a new gender equality and empowerment strategy has been developed, which ensures better alignment with agenda 2063, places stronger emphasis on tangible results and accountability, and promotes innovative practices.

Regional integration remained a priority for the African Union. Significant progress has been made regarding the negotiations over the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA). Following the 4th meeting of the African Ministers of Trade, held in Niamey in December 2017, it is envisaged that the CFTA agreement and other related documents would be adopted in March 2018. The CFTA, which is a flagship project of Agenda 2063, will create a market of over 1.2 billion people. Its establishment will significantly increase intra-African trade, create economies of scale and regional value chains, and augment job opportunities. In parallel, a legal framework for the management of migration and mobility – the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to the Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment has been elaborated. It is due for adoption by the African Union Summit of January 2018.

The Commission will also accelerate the implementation of a number of continental policies, including in the area of infrastructure, with the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), and agriculture, with the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). In this respect, greater emphasis will be placed on food security and safety.

Another Agenda 2063 flagship project is the Single African Air Transport Market. This initiative is a follow-up to the Yamoussoukro Declaration of 1999, and will be launched in January 2018, on the margins of the African Union Summit. Twenty-three Member States have pledged their solemn commitment to the Single Air Market, the implementation of which will increase the number of routes, reduce the cost of air travel and contribute to the expansion of intra-African trade and tourism. I call on all Member States that have not yet done so to join this important initiative.

On the institutional building front, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government took an important decision to transform our Union into an effective and efficient institution capable of accelerating progress towards economic integration, peace, security and overall prosperity for African citizens. In line with this decision, I have established a Reform Implementation Unit to co-ordinate the implementation process. I am particularly

pleased with the progress we are making on the “Financing the Union” agenda. In 2018, Member States will be funding almost 40% of the African Union programme budget, compared to less than 5% in 2015 when the initiative was launched. A number of measures will be taken to strengthen overall finance and budget management accountability. In January 2018, I will be submitting a progress report, setting out a number of reform implementation proposals and recommendations, for discussion by the Summit.

Several successful elections were held in Member States. I note, in particular, the peaceful conduct of presidential and representative elections in Liberia. This bears testimony to the commitment of the Liberian people and leaders to sustain peace in their country. I congratulate the peoples and Governments of the countries that held elections for their commitment to ensuring smooth electoral processes, moving us closer to realizing the spirit and letter of the African Charter on Elections, Governance and Democracy. I urge all concerned to respect the will of the people, abide by their national and international obligations, and to use non-violent and legal means in resolving electoral disputes.

As we work towards building stronger institutions and promoting prosperity, the fight against corruption assumes even greater importance and urgency. It is a well-recognized fact that corruption hinders efforts aimed at promoting democratic governance, socio-economic transformation and peace and security. It creates inequality in our societies and erodes the rule of law. While empirical evidence shows that Africa has made some encouraging steps in the last five years, huge challenges remain. In recognition of these, the African Union Assembly declared 2018 as the African Anti-Corruption Year (Project 2018), with the theme “Winning the Fight Against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa’s Transformation.”

The African Union remains committed to working with the Member States to deliver on the ambitious Agenda 2063 flagship project of Silencing the Guns by 2020. We all need to rededicate ourselves to ending violence and sustaining peace in our continent, including by bringing to a successful conclusion the ongoing peace processes in Mali and the Central African Republic, ensuring that the elections planned in the Democratic Republic of Congo in December 2018 take place on time and in a conducive environment, consolidating progress made in Somalia, and ending the threat posed by terrorism in the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, and in Horn of Africa.

It is my earnest hope that the south Sudanese stakeholders will deliver on the commitments made in the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Access signed as part of the IGAD-led Revitalization Forum that took place in Addis Ababa in December 2017. The people of South Sudan, who have endured so much pain and suffering, desperately need and deserve peace.

We have had several key engagements with our strategic partners. We started the year with a high-level African Union Commission-United Nations Secretariat meeting. We renewed our commitments to work together on Africa’s peace, security and governance

challenges. In November, the African Union-European Union Summit took place. The outcomes of these meetings stand to significantly enhance the quality, effectiveness and impact of these partnerships.

As we enter 2018, we should remember all those who lost their lives not because they lost the will to live, but because of the deadly cloud of conflict, intolerance and disregard for human life and endeavor. We ought to do more and better in 2018 to ensure a future for ourselves, our children, our continent and our world, where the right to life, peace, opportunity and protection should be the basic barometer of our shared humanity.

We should not also forget the women and men serving in African Union or United Nations peace operations in Africa. In 2017, many of them were killed in the line of duty. Their sacrifices should not be in vain.

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