

AFRICAN UNION

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

As 2018 draws to a close, I would like, on behalf of the African Union (AU) Commission, to wish a happy and prosperous 2019 to all the citizens and leaders of the continent, as well as to the African diaspora around the world.

The year 2018 was marked by further progress in the continental integration process. In January, in Addis Ababa, the Heads of State and Government launched the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM). The Extraordinary Summit held in March in Kigali saw the opening for signature of the Agreement on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment.

To date, 27 Member States have joined the SAATM. The Agreement on the AfCFTA has been signed by 49 Member States and has already been ratified by 14 of them, while the Free Movement Protocol, which garnered 32 signatures, has only one ratification. The Commission will intensify its efforts to ensure the early entry into force of these instruments and the accession of all Member States to the SAATM.

It cannot be stressed enough how crucial integration is for the development of the continent and the fulfillment of its people's aspiration to well-being. In this context, the Commission will continue to pay particular attention to the free movement of persons, as the persisting obstacles to our citizens' movement within their own continent are simply unacceptable. I congratulate those Member States that have taken measures to ease the procedures for the entry of African nationals into their territories, and urge those that have not yet done so to join this growing momentum. I am pleased to stress that, in February 2019, in Addis Ababa, at the 32nd Summit of our Union, the Commission will present, for adoption, guidelines on the design, production and issuance of the African passport, the materialization of which will take us one step closer to the long-held dream of complete free movement across the continent.

Investment in infrastructure is an important aspect of continental integration. It is worth noting that 2018 saw the beginning of the development of the second phase of the Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA); the acceleration of the process towards the creation of the continental electricity market; and the operationalization of the

African Renewable Energy Initiative. To mobilize the necessary political support for these initiatives and SAATM, I appointed a High Representative to follow up on them.

The AU has continued to work in many other key areas. Thus, several activities were carried out in sectors as diverse as those of education, science, technology and innovation, including through the Pan-African University, the academic mobility scheme and research grants; culture; space development, with the ongoing work to operationalize the African Space Agency and the Earth Observation Program, which aims to help Member States better manage their natural resources; health and nutrition; livestock; environment and agriculture. In February 2019, the AU, together with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), will organize the first ever international food safety conference in Addis Ababa, against the backdrop of significant progress in the implementation of the 2014 Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation in Africa.

These programs are having a tangible impact on the continent's development and the livelihoods of its people. Their reinforcement and the need for better outreach to ensure they are more widely known will continue to engage the attention of the Commission.

The quest for peace and security has been a major priority for our Union in 2018. It is all the more so as our leaders have solemnly pledged to do everything possible to silence the guns by 2020, by ending the wars and other acts of violence that continue to afflict different parts of our continent and cause untold suffering. Clearly, achieving this goal requires renewed efforts on the part of all our Member States, civil society and other actors: peace is a global undertaking that requires the involvement of all.

In the meantime, I note with satisfaction the progress made over the past months. Reconciliation between Eritrea and Ethiopia and other positive subsequent developments in the Horn of Africa have proved that peace is within reach when the required political will exists. I look forward to similar advances elsewhere on the continent, be it Burundi, as part of the region's action with the support of the AU and the larger international community; the Central African Republic, where we are endeavoring to relaunch the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation; Libya, with the intensification of efforts to convene, under the auspices of the AU and the United Nations, an all-inclusive national reconciliation conference; and Western Sahara, where the stalemate in the peace process has lasted for far too long. I urge the South Sudanese stakeholders to definitively close the sad chapter of the violence they inflicted on their own people and to resolutely move from the rhetoric of peace and reconciliation to its actual practice. I call for restraint and dialogue in Sudan, where the incidents that have occurred in recent days and the regrettable loss of life that has accompanied them are a source of concern. I renew the AU's willingness to accompany the Comoros to preserve the hard-won gains in the stabilization of the archipelago, in parallel with the search for a definitive solution to the issue of the Comorian island of Mayotte on the basis of international legality and relevant AU decisions.

I salute the efforts of African civilian and uniformed personnel deployed in peace support and counter-terrorism operations in different theaters. From Somalia to the Sahel through the Lake Chad Basin, their actions and the sacrifices made are admirable.

More generally, the goal is to anchor peace and stability in the continent on a lasting basis. It is precisely in this perspective that efforts are being made to deepen the democratization processes, ensure respect for human rights and combat corruption, which was the theme of the Summit for the year 2018, and, more generally, promote good governance. The Commission has, in 2018, observed fourteen presidential and legislative elections, including the recent elections in Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), to assess the extent of their compliance with the relevant continental instruments - some of these polls have benefited from AU technical assistance. The Commission has also continued to monitor the effective implementation of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. In February 2019, it will submit to the Summit a draft Protocol on Specific Aspects of the Right to Nationality and the Elimination of Statelessness in Africa.

African solidarity, whether manifested among states or in favor of the most vulnerable, is one of the fundamental tenets of Pan-Africanism. Several AU initiatives undertaken in 2018 have been driven by this principle, including the fight against the Ebola epidemic in the DRC, as was the case in West Africa in 2014, and against other diseases in different parts of the continent; support to Member States affected by the fall army worm disaster, which threatens the food and financial security of millions of agricultural producers; the repatriation, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration and the European Union (EU), of more than 30,000 African migrants stranded in Libya and the mobilization of the resources necessary for their reintegration into their countries of origin; and the support provided to countries emerging from conflicts and crises under the African Solidarity Initiative. In 2019, the theme of the Summit will be devoted to the plight of refugees, returnees and displaced persons, with the aim of scaling up the continental response to this phenomenon.

Whether it is to ensure development and integration, promote peace and security, or strengthen the foundations of good governance, the role of women and youth is central. It is therefore with renewed determination that efforts to promote gender equality and African youth empowerment will be pursued. The formation of parity governments in Ethiopia and Rwanda and, more generally, the progress made in gender mainstreaming are encouraging steps that need to be expanded. The appointment of an envoy and the establishment of an AU Advisory Council for the Youth are also part of this commitment to involve all segments of our people in the drive towards continental renewal.

The year 2018 was marked by repeated attacks against multilateralism and the institutions that emanate from it. Africa has consistently expressed its concern over this situation, which is undermining the ability of the international community to meet the complex and multidimensional challenges it faces. The struggle for a more just world and greater solidarity, based on the scrupulous respect for international law, will remain a key priority for the continent. I welcome the continued deepening of the partnership between

the AU and the United Nations, as demonstrated by the signing, in January 2018, of a Memorandum of Understanding on the implementation of Agendas 2063 and 2030, which complements the agreement concluded in April 2017 in the area of peace and security, as well as by the joint actions undertaken in the field by the AU Commission and the United Nations Secretariat. Likewise, I welcome the progress made in the relationship with the EU as part of the follow-up to the November 2017 Abidjan Summit, and look forward to the successful holding of the Afro-Arab Summit in 2019 in Saudi Arabia.

At the same time, the AU will remain resolute in the fight against xenophobia and racism, which are manifest in migration policies in some parts of the world and whose rise is one of the facets of unilateralism. In this regard, the AU reaffirms its full support for the Global Compact on Migration agreed to in Marrakesh, Morocco, this month.

This is the overall context in which the institutional reform process of our Union is unfolding. The aim is to ensure that the Union is fit for purpose, can better meet the expectations of African countries and peoples, and ensure that Africa speak with one voice on the world stage. Major milestones have been set in this regard, particularly in terms of financial autonomy, working methods and coordination with the Regional Economic Communities, with the first coordination meeting planned for June 2019, in Niamey. Measures have also been taken to strengthen the representation of women and young people, with the introduction of quotas for these categories for all posts at the AU level. Similarly, the the NEPAD Agency has evolved into an AU Development Agency.

This process will continue in 2019. Particular emphasis will be placed in this regard on the streamlining of the organs of the Union, the reform of the Commission, and the development of a new scale of assessment for the AU budget.

The year 2018 has certainly seen significant progress, for which the continent can take legitimate pride, but many challenges persist. Conflicts and violence remain a reality that affects the lives of large segments of the African population. The democratization processes and the promotion of good governance are still fraught with difficulties. Poverty and misery are the daily lot of hundreds of millions of people even though the continent is endowed with wealth and talent. The voice of Africa on the international stage is still insufficiently taken into account, while the continent represents more than a quarter of the membership of the United Nations.

With Agenda 2063, Africa has developed a roadmap that clearly articulates the path forward for its emergence. The year 2019 offers the opportunity to move faster to break the multiple chains that hinder the actualisation of Africa's rich potential. From this point of view, nothing is more decisive than the deepening of continental unity. As I have pointed out many times, with unity we are everything; without it we are nothing.

The 19th of February 2019 will mark the centenary of the Pan-African Congress, which took place in Paris and laid the foundation stone for the creation of the Organization of African Unity. May this centenary further raise awareness and strengthen the will for a stronger mobilization in a way commensurate with today's exigencies.

In conclusion, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to President Paul Kagame for the dynamism with which he chairs our Union and for his constant support to the Commission. I look forward to working with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who will chair our Union from next February.

Addis Ababa, 31 December 2018.