

DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

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COVID-19, security and development take centre stage in Ministerial meeting of the African Union



The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives and livelihoods of the African citizenry, continues to be a matter of great concern on the continent. As the world contends with the “new normal” and continues to navigate through the destruction caused by the pandemic, Africa remains optimistic that the proactive initiatives undertaken since the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020, have been effective in containing the spread of the virus and will enable the continent realize a gradual recovery of the socio-economic gains negatively affected by the pandemic.

It is against this backdrop that the 37th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union (AU) kicked off on 13 October 2020 with great optimism that Africa has an opportunity to reimagine an Africa post-COVID-19 and derive new ways of addressing the challenges of peace and security, socio-economic under-development, and poverty. The COVID-19 context prompted the holding of a virtual ministerial conference to enable the designated representatives of government from AU Member States to fully participate in the discussions from their respective capitals through the use of information technology.

The Chairperson of the Executive Council of the African Union, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, Dr. Naledi Pandor, while opening the meeting, observed that African countries have made huge strides in containing the spread of the virus. She highlighted the impact of the Joint Continental COVID-19 Strategy; the AU COVID-19 Response Fund; the AU's Medical Supplies Pool Platform which was essential in bolstering the capacity of the Africa CDC; as well as the bilateral and multilateral negotiations on the economic relief measures including debt relief for African countries. According to the Chair of the Executive Council, "the continent under the COVID-19 pandemic requires us to continue to take bold and decisive steps in fighting the pandemic in a collective and coordinated approach. The gains that we have achieved thus far in the successful implementation of the Joint AU Continental Strategy should galvanize us on as the Continent to continue to pool our resources until the scourge is defeated and beyond."

Similarly, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat noted that this health crisis exposed the weaknesses and amplified the fragilities of the continent, particularly due to the externally-oriented state of African economies, exposing the inability of industries to produce goods and services, crucial to save lives such as the production of medicines, test kits, masks, single-use or multiple-use suits, respirators, ICU beds. Most of these essentials, he noted, were either received as donations or imported, signaling increased dependency with its spillover effects on the foreign currency outflow. "This health crisis is, therefore, an opportunity for a well thought-out and resolute reorientation of our manufacturing capacities by giving priority to import substitution, at a time when we are preparing to operationalise the African Continental Free Trade Area", he stated.

The two-day Ministerial meeting will deliberate at lengths, the progress and intensification of actions aimed at peace, security, development and integration as articulated in Africa's Agenda 2063. Minister Naledi observed that the ongoing conflicts in Africa remains a serious cause for concern for the continent. She added that together with the other related threats such as climate change, droughts, extreme levels of poverty and increasing numbers of unemployment, which continue to hamper development in the continent, must be addressed with the urgency and vigour they deserve including the allocation of adequate and reliable resources to finance the activities of the Union. She stated, "the challenges that we face as the Continent need an organisation such as the African Union that is well-resourced and capable to address the challenges in the Continent that continue unabated even during the pandemic. In this regard, one of the issues under discussions and consideration [...] is 2021 AU Budget as well as progress that has been achieved thus far in the AU's efforts

to improve its financial management. [...] The implementation of the Peace Fund is critical in the maintenance of peace and security on the Continent.” Read the full statement [here](#)

The chairperson of the Commission echoed similar sentiments, noting that the obstacles and challenges that hamper the realization of the aspiration to render Africa conflict-free calls for renewed impetus in all the efforts and sacrifices made towards a peaceful and prosperous Africa. He at the same time lauded the recent progress in advancing peace and security in some member states. “We wish to point to the positive and encouraging developments underway in the resolution of the civil war in The Sudan. The Peace Agreement, recently signed, in Juba, South Sudan, between the protagonists of this war, is a decisive step towards silencing the guns in this great country. Our wish is that the guns should be silenced on the Continent; I hope Libya will follow this example”, he stated. Read the full statement [here](#).

In their deliberations, the ministers will among other key issues, reflect on the ongoing institutional reforms particularly with the ongoing transition to the new Departmental structure of the Commission, adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in February 2020, as well as the Financing Strategy for the new structure. The meeting will also consider the African Union Budget for the financial year 2021 and deliberate on the African Union theme for 2021 on “Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building a Prosperous, Peaceful, Integrated and Resilient Africa in the Context of Multi-sectoral Challenges.” The theme is in recognition of the contribution of Arts, Culture, and heritage as catalysts to our socio-economic development.

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