34th AU Summit strives to ensure that, as a continental body, no country is left behind in the COVID-19 responses “as we enhance integration”

The COVID-19 pandemic remains a severe health emergency that has caused great suffering and hardship across the African continent and globally. The African Union however is committed to ensure all its member states benefit are part of, and benefit from the continental efforts to prevent and contain the pandemic especially with the rollout of the vaccination programme. The Assembly of Heads of State and Government during the opening of its 34th Ordinary Session held virtually on 6 February 2021, committed to strengthen the collective response to the crisis, marshalling resources for the benefit of all, and striving to ensure that no country is left behind.
Outgoing African Union Chairperson and President of the Republic of South Africa, H.E. Cyril Ramaphosa invited the participants to observe a minute of silence for the victims of the COVID-19 pandemic since the start of the sanitary crisis in March 2020. He commended the efforts by the Union to address the grave economic and social crisis posed by the pandemic, stating that, “despite the upheaval caused by this disease, our response as a continent has been about partnership, resilience, innovation and the sharing of strategies and resources. The people of this continent have shown themselves to be resourceful and agile. Significantly, this pandemic has demonstrated the importance and the value of our continental body, the African Union. As we prepare for the massive task of vaccinating our populations against COVID-19, we are looking to the AU and its partners to provide the assistance and support we need.” Read H.E. President Ramaphosa full statement on the AU website: www.au.int

Although relatively less affected than other parts of the world, Africa has not been spared by the deadly virus. The incoming Chairperson, H.E. Felix Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo applauded the ingenuity and resilience shown by African countries in the fight against the pandemic. “Let us organize together, with our international partners, for a great offensive against these various scourges. It is imperative that our organization can strengthen the African Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) in order to respond effectively to emergencies and complex health challenges, as a specialized technical institution of the African Union”, he stated.

The new Chairperson of the Union announced that his is delighted to make predecessor President Cyril Ramaphosa, the Champion for the Covid-19 vaccine strategy and acquisition by AU Member States.

H.E. President Tshisekedi observed that collaboratively with the Regional Economic Communities, the Union will strengthen peace and security; pursue the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area; promote a renaissance of African culture, arts and heritage; combat climate change; accelerate integrative projects, including the construction of the Inga Dam; consolidate the African Union's initiatives in the fight against Covid-19 and in the prevention of other diseases. He further added that drawing the lessons of the pandemic, in addition to strengthening
health systems, the time has come to invest more in education and scientific research. He observed that it is of highly strategic interest that each Member State earmark a large part of its income for the development of its human capital, which is the main wealth, the only one that can be effectively mobilized to solve its specific problems and face global challenges.

The new AU Chairperson then highlighted his plan of action during his mandate as Chair of the Union. “It is from this perspective that, to honor the memory of all Pan-Africanists, I intend to anchor the theme of my Chairmanship of the African Union in the following vision: "an African Union at the service of the peoples". This specific vision, which is part of the "First Ten-Year Implementation Plan 2014 - 2023" of Agenda 2063, will be structured around nine strategic pillars that are better detailed in my action plan. My Vision is to see an African Union at the service of the African peoples, I strive with the support of every one of you, to take our Organization out from the conference rooms, the hard drives of our computers and the well-crafted files of our secretariats, into the classrooms, the refugee camps, the markets of our cities and
in the fields of our respective villages”. Read the complete speech of H.E. President Tshisekedi’s here.

Echoing similar sentiments by the AU Commission Chairperson, H.E Moussa Faki who observed that through collaboration and coordination, coupled with shared responsibility based on the principle of subsidiarity, has enabled the continent to withstand the impact of COVID-19. “This is the moment for me to salute the competent organs of the Union which, through Africa CDC, is making a remarkable contribution to our fight against this scourge.” Read H.E. Chairperson Faki full statement here.

The Assembly also restated Union development priorities including trade, integration and peace and security. The commitment to drive trade and integration has been demonstrated by the progress in making the African Continental Free Trade Area a reality for all African citizenry. The Assembly noted the correlation between peace and security issues and economic exchanges, development of infrastructure, the individual and collective development of citizens, the involvement of young people and women in the socio-economic development. Terrorism, community conflicts, violent extremism, violent electoral crises, transnational crimes and trafficking were also cited as challenges that have hampered the development of the continent. “We must put an end to these tragedies that stick to the continent and degrade its image, in order to restore hope to Africans and build the Africa we want”, the Assembly heard from the AU Commission Chairperson.

The African Union Summit is convening at the end of the four year term of the current AU Commission senior leadership. The Assembly will therefore hold elections to select the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Commission. Six Commissioners will also be elected by the Executive Council. The elections will be held virtually for the first time. The new Commission leadership will be take office in a leaner institutional structure, demonstrating the implementation of the ongoing institutional reforms.


The African Union Summit will also signify the launch of activities to mark the 2021 theme of the Year on "Arts, Culture and Heritage: a lever for building the Africa we want". The theme will seek to consolidate and support the growth and recognition of Africa’s cultural and artistic riches as a common unifying foundation that can galvanize the common will of the African people, those of the continent as well as those of the Diaspora.

The President of Mali is the African Union Champion for the theme of the Year. President of the transition government of the Republic of Mali, Bah Ndaw noted the inadequate budgetary allocations to the sectors of Culture, Arts and Heritage and consequently urges Member States to allocate at least 1% of their national budgets to
these sectors by 2030 in order to enable the arts and culture sectors be solid vectors of peace, integration, growth and development in Africa. Read H.E. President Bah full statement on the AU website: www.au.int

The Assembly also elected a new Bureau.

Worth noting that, the hashtags for the African Union theme of the year 2021 are: Hashtag:

#AfricanHeritage
#ArtsCultureHeritage

For further information please contact:

Mrs. Esther Azaa Tankou | Head of Information Division | African Union Commission | Tel: +251 (0) 911361185 | E-mail: vamboue@africa-union.org |

Doreen Apollos, Directorate of Information and Communication | African Union Commission | E-mail: ApollosD@africa-union.org | www.au.int | Addis Ababa | Ethiopia

Directorate of Information and Communication | African Union Commission,  E-mail: DIC@african-union.org I Website: www.au.africa I Addis Ababa | Ethiopia Follow Us: Facebook | Twitter | LinkedIn | Instagram | YouTube