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**Statement of
H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat
Chairperson of the African Union Commission
on the occasion
of the 8th Ministerial Conference of the
China-Africa Cooperation Forum
29 November 2021
Dakar**

Excellency Mr. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, and Co-Chairman of FOCAC

Excellency Mr. Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal and Co-Chairman of FOCAC

Excellency Felix Tshisekedi, President of the DRC and Current Chairman of the African Union,

Excellencies, Heads of State, members of the Bureau of the Assembly of the African Union,

Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Madam Deputy Chairperson of the Commission,

Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that we meet today in this beautiful city of Dakar, known for its legendary hospitality in the land of "Teranga", for the Eighth edition of the FOCAC Ministerial Forum.

The cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the African Continent is a historical, strategic and constant one. It was founded on the principles of friendship, equality, solidarity and mutually beneficial development.

The theme of today's Conference "Deepening China-Africa Partnership and Promoting Sustainable Development to Build a China-Africa Community with a Shared Future in the New Era" perfectly reflects the hopes placed by our Governments and peoples in our Strategic Partnership.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At present, Africa faces two major challenges on which its recovery from the pandemic and its development depend, namely health and infrastructure.

With regard to health and the fight against COVID19, Africa and China have come together to fight the virus. The Extraordinary China-Africa Summit of 17 June 2020 on Solidarity against COVID-19, was held successfully and gave rise to many concrete actions. The willingness of China to transfer its expertise in vaccine manufacturing and production to Africa is greatly appreciated by the African Union. The urgent need today for the Continent is, of course, to effectively cope with the spread of the virus with all its variants including the latest Omicron and the production of and accessibility to vaccines. In this regard, I would like to salute this great outpouring of solidarity between China and the African Continent which is given concrete form today with the announcement by President Xi Jinping of one billion vaccines for Africa.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to express the solidarity of the African Union with the Southern African States, unfairly stigmatised by the emergence of the new variant, for which they are in no way responsible.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It seems to me important to also note the socio-economic consequences of COVID 19 on the well-being of our peoples and to stress the need for substantial investments and the treatment of the debt which weighs heavily on the economies of our Member States. We fully appreciate the efforts made, in particular by China, within the framework of

the G20, as well as those of the World Bank, the IMF and other partners.

Bilateral debt relief between China and our States remains a priority for the African Union. The significant efforts of China to relieve African economies of the burden of their bilateral debts are laudable and deserve to be commended. However, it is undeniable, as the World Bank notes, that a funding gap of around US \$ 290 billion for the Continent is a source of concern. This is the very thrust of my appeal to China to redouble its efforts to increase the measures likely to lighten this burden for national economies, already strongly affected for some by threats to peace and security. Many Member States, like those in the Sahel, devote a significant portion of national budgets to security-related expenses.

I would like to thank President Xi Jinping for the measures he has just announced in favour of Africa on this matter.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The COVID 19 pandemic has highlighted the need for us to accelerate the development of infrastructure to support priority basic social services such as health and education. Access to energy and ICT infrastructure is essential for the sustainable development of the Continent.

You will recall that last February, African Heads of State adopted the infrastructure priorities of Africa over the next decade in the form of the Second Priority Plan of Action. A master plan for the Continent, in terms of infrastructure, PIDA is one of the fundamental pillars of the implementation of Agenda 2063 and in perfect coherence with the “Belt and Road” initiative. The coherence of the Belt and Road initiative

and the PIDA lays the foundations for a great China-Africa development venture.

The integrative and cross-border projects, Roads, Railways, Ports, Airports, Energy, Telecommunications should receive more attention from this partnership between Africa and China. The Belt and Road initiative is raising high hopes and expectations in several areas, including infrastructure development, which faces three major challenges: prioritisation, capacity and funding. The signing of an MOU between the African Union Commission and China on this subject is expected in the coming days.

We are particularly aware of the fact that, within this framework, the insufficiency, indeed, the flagrant deficits of infrastructure services will directly affect the lives of our peoples. Therefore, when we speak of infrastructure development in Africa, our prospect looks at the central role of infrastructure in economic and social transformation of Africa.

The development of infrastructure will enable the full operationalisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area to stimulate the long-awaited accelerated industrialisation, thanks to diversified production capacities within a African CommonMarket.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Following the meeting of Experts , held in Beijing a few days ago, our Ministers are preparing to consider and adopt four strategic documents that will guide our dynamic partnership for the next three years. These are the Dakar Plan of Action (2022-2024), the 2035 Vision for China-Africa Cooperation,

the China-Africa Declaration on Climate Change and the Declaration of the Eighth Ministerial Conference of FOCAC.

These documents, once adopted, will serve as a framework for joint action towards the desired objective of ensuring universal prosperity through the development of Africa.

Our common journey continues to be supported by a strong common political commitment and, as Lao Tzu said: "Do the hard things while they are easy and do the great things while they exist as such".

I thank you for your high and kind attention.