

## INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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### OUTLINING AFRICAN PRIORITIES FOR 2022: THE ASSEMBLY OF THE AFRICAN UNION BEGINS ITS 35TH ORDINARY SESSION



The Assembly of African Union Heads of State and Government today commenced its 35<sup>th</sup> Ordinary session and the first to be held in person following a hiatus in 2021 wherein the Assembly was held virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The opening session was marked with calls for continued African solidarity in addressing the impact of covid-19 on the continent and the urgent need to address the emerging scourge of coup d'états and the threat of terrorism.

While making his opening address, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr Moussa Faki Mahamat gave a broad overview of the state of the Union, touching on issues related to health, governance, peace and security amongst others and the actions taken by the AU and its member states to address issues of regional importance.

#### COVID-19

In relation to Covid-19, Mr Moussa Faki informed the Assembly that the Africa CDC and the African Medicines Agency (AMA) will play leading roles in promoting Africa's public health strategy and leading the implementation of the AU strategy of resistance and future triumph against the pandemic and other public health issues. The acquisition of vaccines and their manufacture in Africa will be the high points of the strategy. Mr. Faki noted that Covid-19 pandemic led to a contraction in growth of 2.1% in 2020 and an increase in the debt ratio by 10 points of GDP, necessitating a continental strategy that will focus on the identification of innovative sources of financing, debt cancellation and reducing the harmful effects of the pandemic on economies.

#### Terrorism and Governance

The AUC Chairperson described the scourge of terrorism on the continent as being at an unprecedented scale and which, coupled with the resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government, calls for a new approach in addressing security on the continent, especially in light of "new destabilising factors" in Africa. He warned that no part of the international society can be reassured about its fate when all the other parts are not; adding that the crisis of multilateralism is real and significant in this respect.

#### Multilateralism

On multilateralism, the AUC Chairperson further noted the increased interest in the continent but observed that it has not yet translated into substantial development in favour of Africa. He said any Marshall Plan arrangement would require a surge in the mobilisation of endogenous resources. He called for a revisiting of the Union's approach to partnerships, saying that such partnerships should focus on concrete, transformative and integrating mega projects in the

five priority areas of peace and security, infrastructure and energy, climate change, innovative development financing, and training youth and women's empowerment.

### **Institutional Reform of the AU**

While noting that the ongoing institutional reform of the Union has improved internal management and efficiency, Mr Moussa Faki pointed to legal and political limits that impact the powers and leadership of the AU Commission on matters of regional and continental importance. He noted in particular the need to clarify the relationship of subsidiarity and complementarity between the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the AU, to avoid any detrimental effect on the functioning of the Union's political and security architecture; and the issue of sovereignty of states, which can act as a protective shield against abuses occurring in a member country, and used as a wall against intervention by the continental organisation. He reiterated that the double handicap was not unrelated to the conduct of the AU Commission in the face of unconstitutional changes of government witnessed in parts of the continent.

### **The Palestinian Question**

On the Palestinian question and the granting of observer status to the State of Israel, the Chairperson reiterated the Union's commitment to supporting the Palestinian people in their legitimate quest for freedom and independence, and their inalienable right to the establishment of their own national state alongside the State of Israel in conformity with the relevant decisions of the AU and the United Nations, based on the principle of two states living together in peace, harmony and mutual respect.

Read the full the speech of the AUC Chairperson @ <https://au.int/en/node/41442>

The Assembly was also addressed by the Ethiopian Prime Minister Dr Abiy Ahmed, the Secretary General of the United Nations Mr Antonio Guterres and Mr Mohammad Shtayyeh, Prime Minister of the State of Palestine.

The Ethiopian Prime Minister Dr Abiy Ahmed, whose country hosts the AU Headquarters, took exception to the fact that seven decades after the formation of the United Nations, Africa remained a junior partner without meaningful input or role in the system of international governance, singling out the UN Security Council where Africa lacks representation, and called for reform of the UN to reflect current global realities with equitable representation. He reiterated collective advocacy in accordance with the Ezulwini Consensus for Africa to have no less than two permanent seats and five non-permanent seats in the UN Security Council. He called for the establishment of an African Union continental media house, to provide authoritative news and information, fight disinformation promote the African collective agenda and strengthen Africa's voice across the world. On peace and security, the Prime Minister said his country's challenge over the past year was internal in nature and was about maintenance of law and order. He said external actors made the resolution of the internal matters difficult. He thanked other Heads of State and Government for their "support, solidarity and understanding" as the country went through trying times and informed them that his government had launched an inclusive national dialogue platform with formal legislation. He further committed to pursuing lasting and durable peace in the country.

Read the speech of the Ethiopian Prime Minister at <https://au.int/en/speeches/20220205/welcoming-speech-ethiopian-prime-minister-abiy-ahmed-opening-35th-ordinary-session>

The Secretary General of the United Nations Mr Antonio Guterres addressed the Assembly by video conference. He said the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals

and the AU's Agenda 2063 is the cornerstone of the relationship between the two organisations. The SG took a swipe at the global financial system that has “abandoned African countries”, describing it as “morally decadent”. He further assured the Assembly that the United Nations would support Africa in its covid-19 pandemic recovery.

Watch the Secretary General of the UN speech at <https://au.int/en/videos/20220205/secretary-general-united-nations-statement-35th-au-summit>

Mr Mohammad Shtayyeh, Prime Minister of the State of Palestine, updated the meeting on the situation of Palestinians in their legitimate quest for freedom and independence. The Prime Minister's speech will be available soon.

The Assembly meeting saw the handover of the rotating leadership of the Union from H.E. President Antoine Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo who was Chairperson in 2021, to President Macky Sall of Senegal.

Watch the handover ceremony at <https://au.int/en/videos/20220205/handover-ceremony-35th-au-summit>

See press release at <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20220205/president-macky-sall-senegal-takes-over-new-chairperson-african-union-au-2022>

The opening ceremony also saw the announcement of the Bureau of the AU for 2022, remarks by newly elected Heads of State and Government and the launch of the African Union Theme of the Year 2022, Year of Nutrition: “Strengthening resilience in nutrition and food security on the African continent: Strengthening agro food systems, health and social protection systems for the acceleration of human, social and economic capital development”.

Watch video at <https://au.int/en/videos/20220205/announcement-bureau-assembly-african-union-2022>

Read all speeches on <https://au.int/en/speeches/1525>

### **Background on AU Assembly**

The Assembly is the African Union's supreme policy and decision making organ. It comprises heads of State and Government of the continent's member states. It determines the AU's policies, establishes its priorities, adopts its annual programme and monitors the implementation of its policies and decisions.

The Agenda of the 35<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Assembly is available on <https://au.int/en/summit/35>

Learn more about the mandates of the AU Assembly by downloading the AU Handbook from <https://au.int/en/handbook>

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Summit Main entry Point on the AU Website : <https://au.int/en/summit/35>