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Education, Peace, Politics, Climate, Economy and International /Global Diplomacy in Focus at 37th AU Summit

The 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) kicked off on Saturday 17 February 2024.

Holding under the theme: “Educate an African fit for the 21st Century: Building Resilient Education Systems for Increased Access to Inclusive, Lifelong, Quality, and Relevant Learning in Africa”, the event at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, was well attended by African Heads of state and Government, and high-level representatives from the African continent and beyond.

The event witnessed the election of H.E Mohamed Ould Ghazouani, President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania as the Chairperson of the Union for 2024, taking over the baton of command from outgoing Chair, H.E Azali Assoumani, President of the Union of Comoros.

Key speakers during the official opening ceremony included H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AU Commission, H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, H.E Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil, H.E Ahmed Aboul Gheit ,the Secretary General of the League of Arab States, the Prime Minister of Palestine H.E Mohammad Shyyeh, and the outgoing Chairperson of the Union, the President of the Union of Comoros H.E Azali Assoumani.

The Assembly started with a moment of silence in honor of the memory of the late Namibian President H.E Hage Geingob. Taking the floor, the outgoing Chair of the Union, President Assoumani, presented a comprehensive report of the achievements and activities undertaken on behalf of the AU during his leadership. He noted successes in peace and security, socio-economic development, youth and women’s empowerment, Africa speaking with one voice and taking common positions on global issues, enhancement of infrastructure, agriculture, climate change, education, health, and ICTs among others. He called for peace in the Middle East, reiterating the need for a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine.

In his welcome remarks, Ethiopian Prime Minister H.E. Dr Abiy Ahmed, underscored the importance of creating strong regional and continental platforms, emphasizing that these platforms are essential for addressing national development challenges from geopolitical, logistical, and security standpoints. He commended the African Union for its accession to the G20, as “marking a significant milestone” on the global stage.

Addressing the Assembly, AUC Chairperson, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat highlighted some critical concerns facing the continent, including peace, political and institutional instability, climate change, economic governance deficits, integration challenges, poverty, and the marginalization of women and youth in development and leadership processes. He stressed the urgent need for

Member States to proactively engage with these issues, underscoring their importance in achieving the aspirations of Agenda 2063 for a transformed and prosperous Africa.

“We are now strongly challenged by the urgency of clear positions on this set of issues, at the heart of the emergence of our organization and our continent. The strengthening of our unity and the intensification of our struggles require a new start, a true renaissance of nationalism and Pan Africanism”, said the AUC Chairperson.

In highlighting the continent's progress, H.E. Faki commended the successful advancement of institutional reforms and the strides made in regional integration, notably through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). He expressed satisfaction with the progress made in some areas including the Peace Fund, the African Common Positions on climate change, the reform of global governance, the financing of African peace keeping missions, and the notable accession of the AU to the G20 Forum.

The Secretary General of the League of Arab States and the Prime Minister of Palestine, highlighted peace and security concerns, calling for an immediate ceasefire in the ongoing war between Israel and Palestine. They also called for win-win strategic partnerships, economic development, and inclusive quality education, which is the African Union theme of the year 2024, among others.

“The Global South is becoming an unavoidable part of the solution to the main crises that afflict this planet.... Only an inclusive social project will allow us to establish prosperous, free, democratic, and sovereign societies,” Brazil’s President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva stressed during the opening of the AU Assembly. President Lula offered to support the efforts of the African continent in closing the digital gap, and reiterated his country’s readiness to help advance technology, ensuring that governance mechanisms for Artificial Intelligence (AI) reflect the perspectives of the Global South.

“The country (Brazil) has committed to facilitating improved dialogue between the G20 and the High-Level Panel set up by the UN Secretary-General. The aim of this initiative is to stimulate discussions about the Global Digital Compact, focusing on creating effective, equitable, and wide-reaching governance frameworks to support Africa's digital transformation”, he noted. President Lula further highlighted climate as a critical priority ahead of COP 30, stating, "Our priority also includes the health of our planet. The urgent need to protect the world's two largest tropical rainforests, located in the Amazon and Congo basins, positions us as key players in the climate agenda. There is no global south without Africa. He went on to say that "rekindling Brazil's relationship with Africa involves reclaiming our historical connections and playing a significant role in shaping a new, more equitable, and supportive global order. Most importantly, it paves the way for us to unite in addressing the forthcoming challenges."

As the AU’s highest decision making body, the Assembly is deliberating and deciding on various issues of continental priority including the progress of the institutional and financial reforms of the Union, which include the operationalization of the African Union Peace Fund; the Panel of Eminent Africans to oversee the pre-selection of candidatures for Members of the Commission ahead of the upcoming AU Commission elections in 2025; the progress report on the implementation of the AfCFTA as the theme of the year 2023; progress on the operationalization of the Africa CDC, and the establishment and operationalization of the African Medicines Agency (AMA), among others.

The two-day meeting will also look at several reports by AU organs and specialized agencies as well as reports of the various sub-committees of the African Union looking into matters of multilateral cooperation; human rights and governance; refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons; economic and trade matters among others. Reports of the various Specialized Technical Committees of the AU that focus on thematic areas such as gender equality and women's empowerment; education, science and technology, agriculture, rural development water and environment; transport, regional infrastructure and energy; and justice and legal affairs will also be tabled.

The 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government ends on 18 February 2024, with the adoption of the decisions, declarations, and resolutions of the Summit.

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