

AFRICAN UNION

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UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA P. O. Box 3243 Telephone: 011-551 7700 Fax: 011-551 7844
website: www.africa-union.org

**ADDRESS BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION
COMMISSION**

H.E. DR. NKOSAZANA DLAMINI ZUMA

DURING THE 8TH AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT FORUM (ADF VIII)

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA,

23RD – 25TH OCTOBER 2012

**Executive Secretary of the UNECA, H.E. Mr. Carlos Lopez,
Honorable Ministers, Representatives of Member States,
Representatives of Regional Economic Communities (RECs),
Representatives of International Organizations
Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. I am pleased to be invited to participate in this 8th Session of the African Development Forum on the highly topical and important issue of, ***“Governing and harnessing Natural Resources for Africa’s Development”***.

2. Next year, Africa will be commemorating 50 years of the founding of the Organization of African Unity (the OAU), the forerunner of the African Union. This being the watershed mark in the independence of our continent from colonial rule, the 50th Anniversary will be an occasion to take stock of where we come from, where we are today, and where we want to be 10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 years from now.

3. I believe the discussions and outcomes from the ADF should provide useful inputs into the stock-taking that Africa will be making during its 50th Anniversary. And, since I am talking to the experts, I shall just pose a few questions for your consideration.

Distinguished guests,

4. The importance of natural resources to Africa's history and to its future cannot be over-emphasised. We were colonized because of our natural resources, our current status in the global economy is defined by our natural resources and our future will be determined by the manner in which we utilize our natural resources.

5. One of our continent's finest sons, Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah said of Africa in 1965:

"Her earth is rich, yet the products that come from above and below her soil continue to enrich, not Africans predominantly, but groups and individuals who operate to Africa's impoverishment... even the present very inadequate surveys of Africa's natural resources show the continent to have immense, untapped wealth... if Africa's multiple resources were used in her own development, they could place her among the modernised continents of the world. But her resources have been, and still are being used for the greater development of overseas interests."

6. The next generation of OAU leaders again at the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action in 1980 reflected upon this matter, when they noted that *'Member States are unable to exercise meaningful and permanent sovereignty over their natural resources,'* and agreed on measures to address this situation.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

7. Ideas from the ADF should therefore help our decision makers to assess the state of affairs today. It should help to chart a path to the future in which Africa uses its natural resources productively and sustainably to its benefit and that of its people. A future where the use of our natural resources leads to Africa's development. A future that claims an equal and dignified place in the global community of nations.

8. This ADF should, therefore, address the challenges that Africa faces today with respect to the utilization and management of our natural resources.

9. You must address such issues as the ownership of these resources. Yes, the resources are physically located on our continent, in our countries – but do we really own them? What should be the right balance between foreign and national ownership of resources and how do we get there? How much of our resources should we give away and how much should we keep for our own needs for the next fifty or hundred years from now?

10. Africa is, today, among the fastest growing regions in the world. How come this growth is not generating enough jobs for our people, especially the youth? How come the jobs our people have are low level and poorly paid jobs? What are the conditions under which our people work in these industries and how do they compare to conditions in similar industries in other regions? Are our people being adequately compensated for this work? How come poverty continues to be endemic? How come this

growth is not leading to economic development? What can and must be done to change the situation?

11. In most of our countries today, the natural resources are simply being extracted and not processed. As a result, there are neither backward nor forward linkages established to expand the whole economy and grow jobs. It also means that we are denied the benefits of value addition and higher returns for our resources and industrialisation of our economies.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

12. What about the impact of resource extraction on our environment? How much do we compel the resource extraction industries to respect and restore the environment during and after their activities have ceased? How do these activities impact on the health and lives of our people and host communities? How do we deal with those who commit environmental crimes but enjoy the protection of powerful mother countries? We saw what happened in the Gulf of Mexico. How can we ensure that similar corrective measures happen in Africa when similar catastrophes occur? What legal frameworks exist to redress these situations? Are they adequate? How do we ensure justice for the victims, the voiceless, our people?

13. Africa is endowed with extensive forestry resources, which provide a major source of energy supply, promotes rural agriculture and enhances land productivity through the maintenance of soil fertility and minimizing soil erosion. They also act as carbon sinks, therefore serving as

the lungs of the planet. Unfortunately, these forests are quickly diminishing due to unsustainable and often illegal logging, and due to other acts of deforestation. Some of these acts are done by people who should know better, including large foreign entities.

14. The world is now talking about the green economy in the light of diminishing fossil fuels. How is Africa preparing itself to engage in the ongoing global discussions and transformational processes? Are our legal frameworks in place and adequate to protect our land and environment, as well as food security in the face of threats from agro-fuel crops? What should be the role of genetic engineering in agriculture and the new green economy?

15. I am also concerned about the unregulated and illegal harvesting of our marine resources, leading to depletion of the stocks and the destruction of the marine ecosystems. How do we protect our long coastlines and how do we ensure that our people and countries receive full benefits from the exploitation of these resources?

16. Africa is also fortunate to have expansive and fertile land and is capable not only of supporting agriculture and food security of all our people, but also have exportable surpluses. We need to preserve this land and use it sustainably. To this end, we need to support and train our people in sustainable methods of agriculture and other uses. We must also ensure that our people are not deprived of the land by foreign interests that have the capacity to acquire large tracts that are often used for non-food crop production. Furthermore, we must ensure that our people working on foreign owned farms work under humane, fair and beneficial conditions.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

17. There are many more other important issues and questions that should be asked and answered to help our continent to harness its natural resources for the development of Africa and our people. I hope you will ask these questions in your various workshop sessions and come up with answers and concrete recommendations.

18. I must, however, note that Africa's greatest and most valuable resource is its people. We have a vibrant and youthful population. Our human resource – mineworkers, entrepreneurs, scientists and engineers, biologists, farmers and fishers - is the common thread that links all the other resources. It is, therefore important that we spend some time on discussing how we can harness their energy and resourcefulness. We need to develop the capacities and skills of our people – especially youth and women - to enable them be fully involved and participate effectively in all aspects of the management and the value chain of our natural resource utilization.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and look forward to receiving and reading the results of your discussions, because I am sure they will answer our questions.

I thank you!