

AFRICAN UNION

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**STATEMENT BY DR. NKOSAZANA DLAMINI-ZUMA
CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION
AT THE OPENING SESSION**

OF THE

**SIXTEENTH SUMMIT OF COMESA HEADS OF STATE
AND GOVERNMENT**

MUNYONYO, UGANDA

23 NOVEMBER 2012

Your Excellency Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda and in-coming Chairperson of the COMESA

Your Excellency Mrs Joyce Banda, President of the Republic of Malawi and out-going Chairperson of the COMESA

Your Excellencies Heads of States and Government

Honourable Ministers

Your Excellency, the Secretary General of COMESA, Dr. Sindiso Ngwenya

Heads of Regional and International Organizations

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I am honoured to have the opportunity to deliver these remarks at this Comesa Summit.
2. Let me from the onset express gratitude of the delegation from the African Union Commission to H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda, its Government and people for the legendary hospitality. It has been a number of years since I visited Uganda, and upon arrival I could see the tremendous developments that have and are taking place.
3. We also acknowledge and salute the outgoing Chairperson of Comesa, HE Mrs Joyce Banda, President of the Republic of Malawi for her stewardship of this important building block of African unity.

4. May I also extend my appreciation to the COMESA Secretary General for the invitation to the Summit and to the Secretariat that he leads, for their tireless efforts towards meeting the mandate of integration and prosperity.
5. This Summit occurs at the dawn of the 50th Anniversary of the OAU and AU, which offers an opportunity to reflect on the road travelled towards unity and the liberation of the continent. As we reflect on this rocky journey, we should take time and plan a smoother road for the next fifty years to attain our vision of '*an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena*'
6. A united and integrated continent of more than a billion people cannot be ignored even by the most powerful. But of course, divided we can be ignored and as President Museveni said, the little we have can be taken away from us.
7. A continent that still has 60% of the world's unused arable land has great potential for agriculture and agro-businesses. United and integrated we should find the means to use our natural resources for the development of our people and countries. We must over the next fifty years ensure and guarantee food security, as a basis for development. That is what the Chinese did, they secured food security for their people and build infrastructure, then the world came to invest.
8. At the core of our agenda for Africa for the next fifty years should be the development of our people – providing access to basic services, health care and education. Our young people, who happen to be the majority, should have access - not only to basic education - but also move beyond the MDG

goals to further and higher education, technology and skills development, so that they have a stake in the future of the continent. We must therefore congratulate Comesa for its initiatives to increase investment in science and innovation and its focus on centres of excellence for innovation. Without innovation, we cannot develop, we cannot industrialise.

9. Women make up more than half of the continent's population. They are a critical half that produced the powerful leaders across the globe and ensure the continuation of the human race. Women are also the backbone of agriculture across the continent. We must provide access to land, credit and extension services, so that women farmers move beyond subsistence farming and contribute to food security that we so need.
10. In our Solemn Declaration of 2002 the Heads of States committed themselves to work towards gender parity, in politics, business, academia, judiciary and in fact in all spheres of human endeavour. It is only when we achieved this solemn goal that we can develop to our full potential and reach our goal of a peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa.
11. On our continent and elsewhere, SMEs are increasingly a powerful engine of wealth creation and distribution, with the sector comprising over 90% of African business operations and contributing to over 50% of employment in the continent. The sector has therefore become pivotal to the continent's drive for sustainable and long-term development and growth. We ought to take advantage of the potential of the sector by improving the beneficiation potential, value-adding production, and competitiveness of the sector.

12. Africa has shown its resilience throughout the global financial crisis, taking its place amongst the fastest growing regions in the world. However, this growth is still driven by exports of primary products. The jobs in value added sectors are not created on our continent created elsewhere instead of here, because we export raw materials. By the time we get the finished products we can hardly afford them. We still have 30% of the world's reserve, so if we decide that we want to beneficiate, we can make a big difference in prosperity in the continent.
13. Our plans – at continental and regional levels – to expand infrastructure, increase investments in education, health, science and technology, improving innovation and communications are critical towards ensuring that our countries industrialise.
14. We believe that the COMESA, with its objectives of cooperating to develop the region's natural and human resources for the good of its entire people, is laying a solid foundation towards the growth, prosperity and unity of the peoples of the region and the continent. COMESA remains a trailblazer in our economic growth and social inclusion agenda after having registered some of the highest in-country economic growth rates.
15. The Abuja Treaty urges Africa to cultivate self-reliance, without cutting ourselves off from the world. External support cannot be the mainstay of our development. Only if we invest resources in our own development will we be in a position to determine the pace and extent of our development.

16. We also look forward to the acceleration of the Tripartite negotiations, because the integration of the three communities will create a huge momentum for continental integration.
17. If we don't pay attention to development, to political and economic inclusion and equity, to making sure that all citizens are included in the affairs of our countries, the lack of development will continue to be a threat to peace and security.
18. We wish those countries in the region that are going to have elections well, and hope we will maintain stability even after the elections. We will ensure that in those areas where we continue to have conflict, we work harder at peaceful resolutions to the conflict, because conflict threatens development. We must find our own solutions not only to resolving conflicts, but also in preventing conflicts from devastating our countries.
19. As we prepare for the 50th anniversary of the OAU and AU, we should seize the opportunity to communicate and inform ourselves and the world of our history, but also about where we are going. We must take charge of our narrative. We must talk about prosperity of Africa, as our forebearers. They did not say Africa should be less poor (poverty alleviation), but about prosperity.
20. We will therefore work to strengthen the African Union, as the premium voice of the continent, working with the RECs, organs and other strategic partners such as the ECA and the ADB.

21. Africa is entering a new dawn, and we must capture the moment to increase the momentum for peace, integration and prosperity.

22. Our continent, with its beauty, its riches and its wisdom has the potential to take its place amongst the greatest. We must therefore recommit ourselves towards making the 21st Century the African Century.
