

AFRICAN UNION

الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

15th Session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa (RCM-Africa)

Theme: “United Nations support for Africa’s integration in the context of the African Union’s Agenda 2063”

Statement

by

**Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson,
African Union Commission (AUC)**

**Transcorp Hilton Abuja,
Abuja, Nigeria
28 and 30 March 2014**

Co-Chairperson of the 15th Session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa Mr. Jan Eliasson, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General,

Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Minister of Finance of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and our Host

Dr. Carlos Lopes UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of UNECA,

My fellow AU Commissioners Dr. Maruping and Dr. Kaloko

Excellencies participants of the various UN agencies

Directors and representatives of AU Commission

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to start by thanking His Excellency, Mr. Goodluck Johnathan, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for hosting all of us in this beautiful capital of Nigeria, Abuja. My sister Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Minister of Finance of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, please convey our best wishes to the President and thank him for providing us with the excellent facilities to have this meeting.

Chairperson,

By the turn of the century, as the United Nations was debating its Millennium Declaration and Development Goals, it identified Africa as the '21st Century's development challenge'. Fourteen years later, we have come a long way, and we will soon enter the final stage of negotiations around the global post-2015 development agenda.

At the turn of the millennium, Africa too debated its present and future, and how to take the continent out of what became known as the two dead decades for development in the continent. Thus, we transformed the OAU into the African Union and adopted the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). Again, we have come a long way.

Thus, since 2000, we saw accelerated progress on such indicators as maternal, child and infant mortality; on access to primary education for boys and girls; on women's empowerment and on nutrition and food security. After nearly two decades of stagnation, investment (both public and private) in critical infrastructure picked up, and with renewed focus on improving revenue collection and management. Whereas it was generally believed at the turn of the century that the ICT revolution will bypass Africa, we are a very good case study on how technology can be used to leapfrog development. African higher education enrolment has increased by over 30%, our economies in the decade and more since 2000 recorded sustained growth, and with a number of countries amongst the fastest growing in the world. The vast majority of African people live in countries that are now democratic, peaceful and with improved governance.

And yet, as we assess our past and present, we are mindful that our major challenges, such as poverty, inequality, the burden of disease, hunger, underdevelopment and conflicts in some parts of our continent persist, and remain major obstacles to African development.

We are mindful that for the economic growth to be sustainable, transformative and lead to shared prosperity, we have to implement plans to diversify our economies, grow and improve our agriculture and to integrate our continent - at a much faster pace.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is these realities, the achievements and the challenges, which prompted the African Union, as it celebrated 50 years since its founding, to engage Africans from all walks of life in consultations on the future they want.

Agenda 2063 is therefore our vision for an Africa that is integrated, peaceful, prosperous and people-centred. It builds on the vision of Pan Africanism, the continental plans of the last five decades, and brings those and more recent strategies and plans together into a coherent framework for transformation. To implement this vision, Agenda 2063 framework will include milestones that we need to achieve in the immediate, the next two,

three and four decades, to realise our dream.

Some of the priorities milestones and eventually Pan African Development Goals are already in the AUC 3rd Strategic Plan 2014-2017. These include investing in our people, their health, education, security, nutrition and general well-being; expanding agriculture and agribusinesses; investments in science, technology, research and innovation; and accelerating infrastructure development such as transport, energy, ICT, water, sanitation and other social and economic infrastructure.

It includes our drive for economic diversification and industrialisation, through value-addition and beneficiation of our minerals and other natural resources; expansion of manufacturing, the services sectors, including tourism and building our blue and green economies. I know the Ministers of Finance will be discussing industrialisation, but I hope at some point they will stop discussing and do it.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Central to all of the above, is our drive for African integration, which we have to pursue relentlessly, or perish. We will fail to build competitive manufacturing, green, blue and agribusinesses sectors; improve productivity and create decent jobs, unless we cooperate to create much larger regional markets, invest in our informal and SMME sectors and create regional value chains, including Pan African businesses and champions in different sectors. We must therefore continue to remove barriers to intra-Africa trade, as well as deploy joint efforts and investment in building our productive capacities.

The infrastructure projects in energy, transport and ICT are also about connecting Africa, our economies and our people, so that the huge potential market of Africans - the young and growing working and middle classes - which the rest of world is courting, are not simply becoming consumers of imported goods, but the domestic market to boost intra-African trade and manufacturing.

Africa has over 1500 universities, research institutions and scientific centres, and we must invest in them to contribute towards the much-needed

African skills revolution, as well as developing continental centres of excellence.

The AU projects in education, harmonization of teacher education and of university curricula, the Pan African University initiative and our platforms for African scientists and researchers to share knowledge and cooperate; these too are about integrating, pooling and sharing our knowledge and experiences for greater innovation and technological development on the continent.

As the recent tragedy of the Ebola outbreak that started in Guinea illustrates, disease knows no borders and unless we have stronger health systems everywhere and unless we cooperate to strengthen our early warning systems, we are all affected. In a similar vein, illegal poaching, transnational crime and terrorism know no borders, and unless our security sectors cooperate, no single country can deal with these threats on its own.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the UN Millennium Declaration, the world and the UN system undertook to *“assist Africans in their struggle for lasting peace, poverty eradication and sustainable development, thereby bringing Africa into the mainstream of the world economy.”*

The RCM-Africa mechanism was indeed an attempt to realise this objective, by providing a forum for coordination of different UN agencies working on the continent to engage with African institutions, the African Union and the RECs towards the realisation of these objectives. This coordination and cooperation have taken place in a range of areas: peace and security, health, labour and migration, trade and industry, to mention but a few.

We are therefore once again meeting in this 15th RCM-Africa forum, to look at this undertaking from the UN system, and to engage in what Africa thinks how the UN system should assist.

In our assessment of the past 50 years in the Agenda 2063 framework, one of the issues that stands out, is that whenever Africans develop their plans and strategies, there are always others, however well-meaning, who think they know better and then develop parallel programmes, often on issues identical to the already existing African programmes and frameworks. And, because they have the resources, and us as Africans we undermine our own capacity for domestic resource mobilisation, we implement those other plans and frameworks, to the neglect of our own.

As we therefore interrogate the reports on the impact of the RCM-Africa joint mechanism between the UN and the AU and renew its effectiveness, let this take place in the context where we have African priorities, consolidated into our Agenda 2063 and into our various frameworks and institutions.

We must therefore discuss how the UN system assists, with the understanding that this can only be sustainable and transformative if the African people and African national, regional and continental institutions take responsibility for their own development and transformation and the UN assists us in that project.

Chairperson,

I am confident that Africa, from being the 21st century development challenge in 2000, has indeed transitioned to become the 21st Century development opportunity.

We look forward to continue working with the UN system to turn this opportunity into reality, into an Africa that is integrated, prosperous, peaceful and people centred, and that takes its rightful place in the world.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish the 15th RCM Africa session fruitful deliberations.