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Statement of the Chairperson of the African Union
Commission, HE Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma,

at the

Opening of the
7th Europe Economic Congress
Katowice, Poland 20 April 2015

Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of
Poland, Mr. Bronisław Komorowski

Honourable Jerzy Buzek

Excellencies, EU Commissioners

Excellency, Former President Kohler

Esteemed Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour to address this 7th European Economic Congress, and to thank our Polish hosts for their warm and friendly hospitality.

We are particularly pleased to address this Congress on behalf of the African Union, at a time when Poland and other countries of central Europe are looking towards Africa.

This is of course not a new relationship. Countries across the region played an important role in supporting Africa's struggles for self-determination.

Thousands of African professionals trained in your countries, and continue to make invaluable contributions to the development of the continent.

We look towards renewed partnerships with you in a changed world, hence our participation in this Congress.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the turn of the century, Africa was undergoing a transition - politically with the end of long-standing conflicts, including the end of apartheid in Namibia and South Africa, and the spread of multi-party democracy.

Economically, we successfully campaigned against the crippling debt, and introduced reforms to improve the performance of our economies.

Thus over the last decade, Africa is the second fastest growing region in the world after Asia, with some of the fastest economies in the world.

Improvements in economic management, the development of infrastructure, and greater regional integration, have seen the emergence of a stronger African private sector.

As the youngest continent, Africa is a continent of the future, with a young population until at least the middle of this century and a growing middle class.

It still has vast and untapped natural resources, including minerals, oceanic resources, arable land, forests and water.

Thus, at the beginning of this year, the African Union adopted a fifty-year vision, Agenda 2063, as a framework to mobilise all 54 Member states, the private sector, civil society towards the common goal of creating an Africa that is integrated, prosperous, people-centered and peaceful, and that can take its rightful place in the world.

Agenda 2063 prioritises investment in people, especially health, education, and access to basic services.

More specifically, we are working towards an African skills revolution, especially in sciences, engineering, technology and mathematics.

To address our infrastructure backlogs, we look at new technologies and public private sector cooperation, to leapfrog development (transport, ICT and energy) and with regional infrastructure that link and economies.

This is especially true in the case of energy, where we are developing a mix including tradition oil, gas and coal resources, as well as renewables: geothermal, solar, wind, biomas and hydro.

African agriculture is still largely performing way below its potential, it is therefore another focus area: improving irrigation, storage and transport facilities; access to land rights, technology and capital especially for women, who are the majority in the sector; and growing agro-processing and agribusinesses.

More generally, African countries are hard at work to diversify their economies, and move beyond raw materials, building manufacturing and services, the green and blue economies and towards value-addition of their mineral resources.

Lastly, we pay special attention in all the above on the empowerment of women and young people, whom are the key drivers and innovators of our development.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is on the basis of the above priorities that we seek partnerships with rest of the world: encouraging investments in agro-processing and agricultural technologies; in value-addition; in manufacturing; in infrastructure and in logistics.

These should be win-win partnerships, that makes money for investors as well as build African productive capacity, results in technology transfer and the development of skills.

We believe that there are synergies that we share with Poland and the region, learning from your experiences of the transition.

We therefore want to work with you on facilitating business to business contacts, starting in the specific areas that I mentioned above.

In addition, we raise with governments and the private sector our request for the urgent revival of scholarship programmes to African students, to aid the much-needed African skills revolution, especially in sciences, engineering, technology and vocational areas.

In conclusion, we are determined that the current positive trajectory of the continent will continue, as a result of the actions we take in the economic and political spheres, and the investments we make today.

We invite you as partners on this journey with us.

I thank you.