

AFRICAN UNION

الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA P. O. BOX 3243 TELEPHONE: 011-551 7700
FAX: 011-551 7844, WEBSITE: www.africa-union.org

**Statement of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, on
the occasion of the visit of Honourable Barack Obama, President of
the United States of America to the African Union**

28 July 2015. AUCC, Addis Ababa

**The Honourable Barack Obama, President of the United States of America,
Your Excellency, Ato Hailemariam Desalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal
Democratic Republic of Ethiopia**

**Honourable Senators and Members of the House of Representatives of the
United States of America**

**Esteemed Ministers, Members of Parliament, Government leaders and officials
of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia**

**Excellencies, Members of the US delegation, government officials, business, the
media and civil society;**

Excellencies, representatives of the Permanent Representatives Committee

**AU Deputy Chairperson Erastus Mwencha, fellow Commissioners,
representatives of AU organs and Regional Economic Communities**

**Excellency, Dr. Abdulaih Hamdock, Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNECA,
and representatives of UN Agencies**

**Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and International agencies and
institutions**

African Union Commission Staff

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to welcome You Honourable President of the United States of America, and the US delegation to the headquarters of the African Union, and specifically to Nelson Mandela Hall. This is the first-ever visit to the headquarters of the Organisation of African Unity, now the AU.

Africa and the USA have strong and historic bonds, forged with the blood and sweat of African sons and daughters captured and forced across the Atlantic ocean, toiling on the plantations and cities that made the United States into the great country it is.

Today we are proud that Africans are part of the beautiful tapestry of humanity of the United States of America, with their rich contribution to its history, literature, music, sciences, politics, business, the arts and sports.

Honourable President, although we welcome you as the President of the United States of America, Africa also claims you as our own, because everyone of African descent remains an integral part of us.

We warmly welcome the Congressional delegation, and recall their unwavering bipartisan support, and the support of ordinary Americans, to our struggles against colonialism and apartheid.

Citizens of the United States contributed to African development, in education and other areas, producing leaders such as Pixlie Ka Seme, Wangari Mathaai, and William Tolbert, to name but a few.

The high school that I attended, Adams College in Durban, was founded 162 years ago in 1853 by American missionary Newton Adams and educated many prominent leaders across the continent, including the first Nobel Peace Laureate in Africa, Chief Albert Luthuli of South Africa and other leaders like Seretse Khama (Botswana), Joshua Nkomo (Zimbabwe), Milton Obote (Uganda), ZK Matthews (South Africa), Henry Majula (Zambia) and Charles Njonjo (Kenya).

During the 1960's, a young Kenyan Tom Mboya lobbied for opportunities for young Africans to study in the US, and created the African American Students Foundation (AASF). Mboya and others convinced President John F Kennedy to support this effort, starting with what became known as the 'Student Airlift' and gaining government support to African students to study in the US over the next two decades.

The ties that bind us together, therefore go back a long time, and are strong and enduring.

Honourable President, Excellencies,

This visit comes at a time when the African continent has adopted a framework for its development for the coming fifty years, Agenda 2063, the Africa we want.

Africa is a youthful continent and likely to remain so over the next few decades. By the end of this century, one in three of the world's population will be African. Over half of its population are women. Our people therefore remain our most precious resource.

It is for this reason that Africa is embarking on a skills revolution, to educate and train its children, young men and women. Like the programmes President Kennedy introduced in the 1960's and 70's, we would appreciate similar cooperation with the USA and African universities to help train new generations of African scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs and innovators. Young people such as Siya Xuza who at the age of 26 years has a minor planet named after him for his efforts towards the development of cheaper rocket fuel.

This visit also takes place a few months before the critical COP21 meeting in Paris on climate change and the post-2015 development agenda in New York. Even though Africa contributes the least to emissions, it is amongst the most affected by climate change. As we seek to industrialise, increase manufacturing, modernise agriculture and agro-processing, develop the blue economy, and grow our private sector, we are mindful of our responsibilities to humanity and future generations.

Africa is therefore in a unique position to chart a development and industrialisation path that is different, through renewable energy and climate-smart agriculture.

But we do require the cooperation of our partners and the USA, through technology transfer, and investments in infrastructure development, renewable energy and our blue and green economies so that we develop without destroying the planet.

In addition to energy infrastructure, Africa also wants to take advantage of technology to leapfrog development in transport and other infrastructure; connecting our commercial centres, rural areas and cities through rail, highways, marine transport, aviation and broadband.

Just last month, we launched negotiations for the Continental Free Trade Area, to enhance intra-Africa and global trade and investments, contribute to the free movement of goods, services and peoples, the development of the private sector and Africa's attractiveness for foreign direct investments.

Honourable President,

Your visit takes place during the 70th anniversary of the UN, when we recall the founding Declaration that proclaimed

the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

As Africa celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2013, we vowed not to bequeath war and conflicts to future generations of Africans. Africa therefore remains a reliable partner to build a peaceful and just world envisaged by the Declaration and African sons and daughters are at the forefront of peace-building and peacekeeping missions, not only across the continent but also in other regions of the world.

The African Union therefore continues to work with the United Nations. Whilst Africa is willing to make its financial contributions towards peacekeeping, we need the assistance of the UN and partners, to ensure predictable finance for our efforts. As we do this work, we must at the same time correct the historical injustice of Africa being the only continent left out from permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Though we are making progress, challenges remain. We are as concerned as you are with the global threats of terrorism and extremism and Africa is playing its part in the fight against Al Shabaab and Boko Haram. South Sudan and Libya area also major challenges, and we hope that the IGAD process will bear fruits by the next scheduled meeting.

We must all work to build greater tolerance for religious, cultural and political diversity, and build inclusive societies.

Corruption as a global phenomenon is of great concern to us. Contrary to popular perceptions of corruption in Africa, the report of the panel chaired by former President Thabo Mbeki on the Illicit Financial Flows from the continent (amounting to over 50 billion US dollars per year) shows, that over 60% of these outflows are as a result of the activities of large commercial companies, with criminal activity accounting for a further a 30% and political corruption less than 10%.

We must therefore tackle this issue head-on, based on accurate diagnosis of where the problem lies, and through collective action.

Africa is also taking on its responsibilities in the fight against disease, as shown in the recent fight against the Ebola Virus Disease, through the deployment of ASEOWA and the operationalization of the African Centre for Disease Control to prevent similar outbreaks.

We once again thank the USA, the African private sector and other partners for contributing towards this effort.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Africa knows that its development will be much slower, unless it invests in its girls and women. We are making progress, with twenty-three African countries now having more than 30% women in parliament (with Rwanda leading the world).

As we celebrate 2015 as the African Year of Women empowerment for the realisation of Agenda 2063, we are committed to advance women and girls in every area of human endeavour – in education, science, technology, mathematics and research; in agriculture and agro-processing, as entrepreneurs and in the judiciary. We are also taking steps to address violence, in conflict and in peacetime, as well as other harmful cultural practices against girls and women.

Women's empowerment is not only a human rights issue, but also makes economic sense, and is a guarantee for sustainable peace, community stability and cohesion. It contributes to the prosperity of families and communities, especially since women on average contribute 70% of their income to the household, whilst men on average only contribute 30% of their incomes towards households and communities.

Investing in women therefore is critical to shared prosperity and to Africa becoming a prosperous, integrated, peaceful, people-centered continent, playing a dynamic role in the world

It is all these factors that make us confident that we are on the right track with our Agenda 2063, the Africa we want.

We do know that in the words of Nelson Mandela, after climbing one great hill, there are many more hills to climb.

But we are convinced that Africa shall – like the great marathon runners of Ethiopia – conquer these hills.

Honourable President,

The United States of America is an important force in global affairs, and we have been taking the relationship between our continent and your great country to new levels, not least as a result of your leadership in convening the first US Africa Leadership Summit last year, your support for agriculture and developing young African entrepreneurs.

We are also very pleased to have with us the high level delegation from the US Congress, who played a pivotal role in the bipartisan support to Africa, including more recently the extension of AGOA.

Africa remains seized with the issues facing its Diaspora everywhere, and we therefore applaud your leadership towards the normalisation of relations between the USA and Cuba.

It seemed impossible when in 1973, President Fidel Castro in an interview predicted that a resolution shall be found when the US has its first black president, and the world has a Latin American Pope. We wish you Honourable President and the Cubans, all the best in these endeavours.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As President Mandela said, it looks impossible, until it is done. Martin Luther King Jnr predicted that the USA shall have a black President, within 25 years. It took 44 years.

But today we have you Honourable President, who against all odds climbed Mt Everest of American politics, became a young Senator, and reached the highest office, in the midst of an economic crisis. You have steered America out of this crisis, and back on the road to recovery.

In electing you, the American people showed their belief in the oneness of humanity; that it did not matter that you had an African father, and American mother, a Muslim father and Christian mother. They looked at your humanity, as a person capable of leading them, rather than at the differences.

As Foreign Minister, when you were elected, I said that your election is an inspiration to every black person: that they can reach whatever aspirations they have, if they work hard and focus.

I now invite Honourable Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, to address the African Union.