

**Address of the Chairperson of the African Union and President
of the Republic of Benin, H.E. Boni Yayi, to the First Global
African Diaspora Summit, Sandton, South Africa
25 May 2012**

Your Excellency, Mr. Jacob Zuma, Our Host and President of the Republic of South Africa,

Your Excellences, Members of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union,

Your Excellency, The Chair of the Caribbean Community

Your Excellences, Leaders of the Caribbean Community, South and Latin America

Dr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,

Esteemed Representatives of International Organizations and Institutions,

Your Excellences, Leaders of our Regional Economic Communities

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Brothers and Sisters from the African Diaspora,

Other African Citizens,

Eminent Persons,

Invited Guests

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with great honor and delight that I welcome you all to this historic gathering today. This is a unique and unprecedented moment in our history as people of African descent. The occasion of this Global African Diaspora Summit marks the

coming together of all leaders of all States with a significant African population to take decisions concerning the welfare and prosperity of all African people wherever they may be in any part of the world. My country Benin is honored to be at the helm of African Affairs in this unique moment.

Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The road that brought us here involved our rededication to the principles that had nourished the Pan African Congresses of the colonial era but it was nurtured and inspired by the provisions of the Constitutive Act of our Union. The guiding vision of the Constitutive Act emphasized the imperatives of development to give meaning to the political independence of African States and peoples. The founding parents of the Union were further convinced that in order for Africa to fully realize this potential the continent must harness all its resources, human and material. This emphasis on mass mobilization for development directed attention towards Africans in Diaspora as an important and vital constituency in the search for renaissance and renewal. The rebuilding of the Global African family then claimed attention as an important component of the integration and development agenda of the continent.

Consequently , the First Extra-Ordinary Summit of the Assembly of Heads of State of the African Union met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in January 2003 soon after the inauguration of the Union and decided to adopt a Protocol on Amendment to The Constitutive Act of the Union which included a new Article 3 (q) that “invites and encourages the full participation of the African Diaspora as an important part of our continent, in the building of the African Union”.

This legislative premise was followed by the adoption of a definition of the Diaspora and the institution of a process for their effective incorporation within the African Union through a Global Consultative Process. Regional Consultations were conducted in various parts of the world to elicit the views of the African population worldwide on modalities and strategies for reunification and an agenda for action and development. The outcomes of these regional Consultative Conferences were then consolidated in a framework document that

was examined and enriched by continental Africans. These outcomes were again reviewed by joint technical meetings of Diaspora and continental Africans and then submitted to policy makers in the organs of the AU and the Ministers for effective consolidation.

Through this process, the Diaspora issue became a standing agenda item of all AU Summits. Those Summits received the reports of African Diaspora Ministerial Conference held in September 2007 in Sandton South Africa and more recently that of September 2011 in New York USA. The framework document of New York were again reviewed by a third Diaspora Ministerial meeting held only two days ago in Pretoria, South Africa that has now recommended and put it before us for consideration and/or approval.

Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

What we have before us today therefore, is a cumulative result of a process and efforts that have taken a considerable time period. The Union had intended to hold this Summit in 2008 but had to postpone it. The period between then and now has been put to good use to assess, reexamine and improve the framework documents. This process that nurtured it has involved the cross section of our population in fulfillment of the principles of the Constitutive Act of the Union. Our intellectuals, civil society, technical experts, government experts have debated their contents and our Ministers have reviewed it . It is now our responsibility as the Assembly of leaders to pronounce on these efforts and adopt it , if we see fit ,as the Magna Carta or fundamental law that will drive the implementation of this Diaspora Initiative.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before ending my statement , I would like to thank all AU member states for their commitment to the Diaspora Program, In this regard , I would like in particular to extend our appreciation for the active stewardship of the African Union Commission and the Government of South African that were assigned by the Union to lead this enterprise. They have performed so creditably.

Various leaders of the Commission since the inception of the Commission under Mr. Amara Essy have played an important role in this process but Professor Alpha Omar Konare and Dr. Jean Ping for their commitment. The process began effectively under Professor Konare but it was under Dr. Jean Ping that it saw fruition. Dr. Ping deserves credit for reviving its pace and momentum and shepherding it to this fruition after it was stalled by the postponement of the Summit in 2008. The Citizens and Diaspora Directorate of the Commission deserves mention also for the diligence with which it has carried out its duties under the overall guidance of the Chairperson.

Apart from this, I should also single out the Republic of South Africa for praise in its support for the process that culminated in this historic Summit today. Over the last few years, South Africa has been outstanding in its commitment to seeing to the successful hosting of this Summit and has thus committed financial and human resources to the process to compliment the efforts of the African Union. On behalf of the African Union and the gathering here today I say a big thank you to the government and people of the Republic of South Africa and our Host, President Zuma.

Finally, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to add that if we see it fit to adopt the document before us, it will only mark the beginning rather than the end of this process. We must marry theory to practice and the real work is to ensure the effective implementation of Summit outcomes and that real task would begin immediately after this Summit when we seek to translate desires into fulfillment and program of action into facts on the ground. It is only when the collective aspirations of our people as contained in the Declaration and the Program of Action and the Implementation Schedule we adopt are faithfully and expeditiously implemented with adequate resources that we can cheerfully claim victory for our efforts at reuniting our people and harness it to the goals of integration and development. I 'am happy to observe that the outcome documents contain legacy projects that can enable us to monitor and measure progress in this regard and I would urge that we have Global Diaspora

Summits once in every five years to enable us to measure the degree of progress that we have recorded in actual practice and to reignite and renew the momentum of our dedication to the African Family.

I thank you all.