

**Address of the Chairperson of the Executive Council and
Foreign Affairs Minister of the Republic of Benin, H.E. Mr.
Nassirou Arifari Bako, to the Ministerial Conference on the
Global African Diaspora Summit,
Pretoria, South Africa
23 May 2012**

Your Excellency, the Chair of the Executive Council of the African Union,

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

Your Excellency, the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa,

Your Excellencies, Ministers of the Caribbean Community, South and Latin America and other leaders of African State populations in Diaspora,

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Representatives of other International Organizations,

Esteemed Partners and Friends of the AU,

Distinguished Brothers and Sisters in the Diaspora,

Invited Guests,

Members of the Fourth Estate,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your Excellencies, Colleagues, Friends and Members of the Executive Council of the Union,

It is with great and sincere pleasure that I welcome you all to this Ministerial Conference on the African Diaspora. This is the third time that Ministers from all Member States of the continent and the Diaspora are convening on the Diaspora agenda. The first was held in Pretoria, South Africa in September 2007, the second in New York in September 2011 and the third is taking place today to put the final seal on the Declaration and Program of

Action that we are taking before the Assembly of the Union and its Diaspora.

Our gathering here today is unique in terms of both its import and the agenda. The Summit marks a very crucial step in the evolution of the African Union. In recalling how we got here today, it is important that we retrace the journey that brought us to where we are. The origin of the AU's Diaspora Program can be traced to the Constitutive Act of the Union that embraced a process of partnership between governments and all segments of the African society. This decision on the character of relations that would govern the Commonwealth of African States was intimately linked to the desire to accelerate the process of development of the continent and its people. The founding parents of the African Union acknowledged and celebrated the fact that the process of development required mass mobilization of African people and that a vital component of this population is in the Diaspora. Hence, the inclusion of the Diaspora in the Protocol of Amendment to the Constitutive Act of January 2003 admitting the Diaspora as an important component in the building of the African Union.

The inclusion of the Diaspora in the framework of the African Union had far reaching consequences. The structure of the Commission approved at the Maputo Summit was altered to ensure that a Department was entrusted with civil society and Diaspora issues. That Department was placed under the personal supervision of the Chairperson of the Commission to highlight its importance and to mainstream its activities. Subsequently, under this leadership an elaborate initiative was developed with a precise roadmap and cumulative program of action in close collaboration with Member

States of the AU. The Government of South Africa played a very critical and important role in this regard as the lead partner working in concert with the Commission to conceive and implement this program of action.

I will not dwell on the contents of the program because that responsibility will be carried out more effectively by the Chair of the Commission and the South African Minister for International Development and Cooperation who have worked in close tandem to evolve and implement the roadmaps and to facilitate effective action plans leading to the Outcome Document i.e. the Draft Declaration that we have before us today. This Declaration has several important components. These include the Political declaration, the Program of Action, Implementation and Follow-up Mechanism as well as legacy projects that would give immediate and enduring practical value to the intentions and laws contained in the Draft Declaration.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is our expectations that our agreement on this Declaration and the subsequent seal of approval by Heads of States of Africa and the Diaspora would establish the Fundamental law that would guide this process henceforth while putting in place effective plans and benchmarks for monitoring and evaluating its process. The Declaration also contains facilitating instruments and mechanisms that will energize the African Diaspora to support the identity, unity and development aspirations of all Africans all over the world. This then is a watershed in our progressive history as African people. It is also an important and critical step in fostering African Renaissance. We thus have reasonable reasons to be

proud of this achievement and to nourish it as a lantern pole for the development and integration efforts of the African continent.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this important regard, I wish to acknowledge and pay tribute to all those who have contributed significantly to bringing us to this situation. These include the Commission of the African Union, the Government of South Africa, Member States of the Union, the Executive organs of the Union and its extended version that includes our counterparts in other states where there are significant African populations and the African Diaspora population worldwide.

Excellencies,

In this regard I must pay special compliment to my colleagues in the fraternity of Ministers and their counterparts from other regions of the world. My friends, brothers and sisters in Council, you have played a very important and crucial role in this process. We received the outcomes of all consultations between Africa and the Diaspora worldwide and processed them into policy outputs. We have convened three times including in the present session to refine these outcomes for consideration by our leaders. There is a proverb in West Africa about a lizard that laboriously and artfully climbs a tree to pluck a wholesome fruit. On getting to the top, he looks around and there is no one to applaud him and so he applauds himself. We are not simply applauding ourselves here today. The whole world is converging on South Africa to celebrate our efforts but we still have

grounds to applaud the same and moreover, to applaud our leaders who have committed resources , time and efforts to bring us to where we are. We also applaud our Diaspora for their immersion in our desire and determination to rebuild the global African Family.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finally, while celebrating the road we have travelled, we need also to remark on the road we are yet to travel. Accordingly, I would like to conclude by recalling our decision at the last Ministerial conference held in New York in September 2011. We emphasized the fact that the Diaspora program will not begin and end with the Summit and that indeed the real work begins with the implementation of the outcomes thereafter. As we finalize our own prepared outcomes for submission, consideration and approval by our leadership therefore, I urge all members of this august council to rededicate and recommit themselves individually as representatives of sovereign states, and collectively as members of the council and the Global African family, to recommit themselves to ensuring that necessary and sufficient provisions are made to ensure the success and implementation of the Summit outcomes.

On behalf of the African people everywhere looking on patiently as a new chapter in our history unfolds here in South Africa, I thank you all.