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**Address Delivered to the African Union High Level Diaspora meeting
on “Building Bridges between the World African Diaspora and Africa”**

By

**Dr. Jinmi Adisa, Director, Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO)
African Union Commission**

6 October 2011, New York, USA

Your Excellency, Prof. Ibrahim Gambari, Representative of UN Secretary General to Darfur,

Your Excellency Ambassador Tete Antonio, Permanent Representative and Head of AU Mission to New York,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished Members of the African Diaspora Task Team,

Distinguished Members of the African Diaspora Community,

Colleagues in the AU Commission,

Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of His Excellency, Mr. Jean Ping, the Chairperson of the AU Commission, it gives me distinct pleasure to address this august gathering on the occasion of the African Union Diaspora High Level meeting. I left New York only last week after having serviced the extended African Union Diaspora Ministerial Conference held on the margins of the UN General Assembly on 24 September 2011. It is a mark of the importance that the Union attaches to the Diaspora agenda and your work that I am coming here now as we prepare for an Extra-Ordinary Session of Council on the 2012 budget.

At various times in the past, I have dwelt at length on the vision and purpose of the AU's Diaspora agenda which is focused on rebuilding the global African family as an agent of integration and development. I will not belabor that point in this meeting since I believe that it is well recognized by the Diaspora Task Team. Rather I will focus on the objectives of the Task Team, its challenges and how it can be harnessed to the goals and purpose of the African Union and the objective demands of the African people within the continent and the Diaspora.

The Task Team was inaugurated at the annual Diaspora Consultation with formations and communities of North America in the New York Region on 21-22 October 2010. The approach that gave stimulus to this process was based on the need to enable a grassroots dimension that will facilitate a bottom-up orientation to complement the wider regional consultation processes that the African Union has constructed in the build up to the preparations for a global Diaspora Summit which is scheduled to be held in South Africa on Africa Day in 25 May 2012.

Continental engagement with the African Diaspora implies a framework of continuous consultation to unite separated parts of Africa and stimulate a convergence of will that will allow for a consolidated purpose and significant impact on African development and its reach, significance, influence and impact in the wider global arena. The consultations are designed as a means rather than end. They are intended to facilitate appropriate organizations processes and structures that will accommodate regional and local specificities while promoting a common sense of identity and purpose that will serve as instruments for forging and implementing a common agenda.

The formation of the Task Team was based on this wider bridge-building objective. Even so, it had been associated with other clear and specific needs. The first was to serve as a hub for information flow as well as a framework of sensitization for program development within the New York axis and the United Nations complex. Two, was to carry out a pilot project for mapping of Diaspora constituencies within the New York environ as a precursor for a wider mapping of North America. We had then envisaged that the work would be completed within 3 months but the difficulties associated with this process has forced a realization that it requires much more time.

Almost one year since its inception, the Union is now in the position to assess the efforts of the Task Team and look into the future. The Task Team has served one main purpose, among others. It has been relentless in keeping effective focus on the African Union Diaspora agenda both as a framework for discussion, agreement and disagreement about policy options and initiatives and as a pressure group for ensuring that Diaspora communities in North America, especially the Task Team and the New York Forum are associated with developments within the AU process. This has promoted greater consciousness and increased the profile of the Diaspora agenda. It has also enabled greater interconnectivity.

In terms of the mapping agenda progress has been slow but cumulative. We are in the process of establishing the framework platform for the mapping process in a manner that would set effective timelines and allow for outcomes to feed into the Diaspora agenda.

On the other hand, the development of the Task Team Process has been associated with some element of rancor and divisions. In a sense, this is a positive process that

shows concern and animation. We only have vigorous disagreements over things we care about. Unanimity is a graveyard concept and debate about policy and organizational difference as a model of moving forward are pathways to progressive development. On the negative side, the tenor of debate and the positioning surrounding them are often quite acrimonious and inconsistent with the objective of rebuilding and reconsolidating the African family. Family discussions require a serene atmosphere that will enable pursuit and unity of objectives.

On the balance however, the results are quite promising and are well harnessed to the development of the AU's Diaspora Initiative, our common purpose and road towards the Global African Diaspora Summit in 2012. We held an African Ministerial Conference on the Diaspora level in New York on 24 September to consolidate arrangements for the Summit and I will be distributing the Ministerial communiqué during the process of this meeting for your information and consideration. I promise that members of the Task Team will be associated and involved in the Summit processes.

Nonetheless, this meeting should reflect effectively on the role that you wish to play and how you wish to play this role in a manner that would support the objectives of the African Union. The leadership of the African looks forward to receiving your ideas in this regard so that we can incorporate them in the wider programme.

I am pleased that notable sons and daughters of Africa such as Professor Gambari have also chosen to be associated with this enterprise. I also wish to commend our AU Permanent Representative in New York, Ambassador Tete Antonio for the leadership and nobility of purpose that he has demonstrated in this exercise. I wish also to acknowledge the efforts of the staff of our New York Office, especially Mrs. Miriam Omala. I commend the Task Team leadership under Mr. ChikeOnyeani for their consistency and tenacity of purpose and all members of the wider Forum and others who have chosen to be associated with it for holding them to scrutiny and ensuring their adherence to purpose and objective.

On this note, I thank you all and look forward to a very successful outcome with positive implications for the preparation of the Diaspora Summit and the progressive implementation of our collective family agenda.

I thank you all.