

18TH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE ASSEMBLY
OF THE AFRICAN UNION
ADDIS ABABA, 29 JANUARY 2012

DRAFT SPEECH OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMISSION,
DR. JEAN PING AT THE OPENING SESSION

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Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Distinguished representatives of countries and partner institutions ,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Four years ago, here in Addis Ababa, you elected me at the helm of the Commission of the African Union, the Continental Executive in the making. It was not only an honour bestowed upon my country, Gabon, but also a mark of confidence in my humble person.

You had also elected a Deputy Chairperson and eight Commissioners to constitute, with me, the team responsible for conducting the affairs of the Commission and to work towards the attainment of the objectives which our Union had set for itself.

The task you assigned to us, to serve Africa, the whole of Africa, was not easy. But it was an exalting one. The task was to consolidate the African Union, building then still under construction. The task was to work for the effective implementation of commitments made by you, our leaders, as regards governance, democracy and observance of human rights. The task was to inject greater momentum to the efforts aimed at putting an end to conflicts and sustaining peace. The task was to speed up the economic integration process. The task was to pursue the action initiated for Africa's voice to be heard in international fora and to effectively defend its interests. In short, the task was to nurture the hope for a better future for Africa and its peoples, generated by the launching of the African Union, almost ten years ago in Durban.

It behoves you to evaluate the action carried out, with its successes and its shortcomings, its strong points and moments of trials. But one thing is certain: in the management of the affairs of the continent, the Commission, in spite of all the constraints it faced, left no stone unturned in the pursuit of its mandate. Above all, it endeavoured to promote the unity of Africa, always and everywhere, as this is an imperative for the success of collective African action. With unity, success is more than a probability, while in division, failure is a certainty.

This ordinary session of the Assembly of the Union is being convened following a year that has been exceptional in many respects. It was a year of trials and hardships, marked by many political as well as humanitarian crises. But it should also be seen as a year which opened the doors to many opportunities: that of relations which, we hope, will finally be peaceful between The Sudan and South Sudan following the latter's accession to independence; that of real prospects of peace in Somalia, since two decades; that of the strengthening of democracy on the continent in the wake of the popular uprisings in North Africa; that of the stabilisation of West Africa with the denouement of the post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire; and that of the confirmation of the political and economic renewal of the continent.

The events of 2011 have greatly strained some of our instruments and, consequently, our capacity to anticipate. Sometimes they tested the strength of our unity and our ability to have our views prevail in some issues of vital interest for the continent.

At the same time, we should also recognise that our Union has demonstrated a real capacity of adaptation. If, like many others it could not foresee the popular uprisings in North Africa, it, however, very quickly grasped their historical scope and their democratic promises. It was able to maintain its leadership in the management of the crises which continue to shake up the continent, as illustrated, among others, by the initiatives taken concerning Somalia, the relations between the Sudan and South Sudan, and the fight against the Lord's Resistance Army. It managed to give concrete form to the imperative for African solidarity, through the organisation, in September 2011, a pledging conference for the victims of famine in Somalia and in the Horn of Africa.

**Mr. Chairman,
Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

At the time when we are embarking on a new stage in our march towards greater unity, development, better democratic governance, I recognise the presence, in our midst, of President Salva Kiir Mayardit, whose country acceded to independence on 9 July 2011. We wish this young nation full success. I also note the presence, for the first time, of Presidents Michael Sata of Zambia and Jorge Carlos Fonseca of Cape Verde, who came to power following exemplary elections. I welcome also the participation at this meeting of Dr. Marzouki, President of the Republic of Tunisia, who symbolizes the struggle for freedom in his country, and that of Dr. Abdurrahim El Kieba, Prime Minister of Libya, with whom I held some promising talks a few days ago in Tripoli.

Our people continue to suffer greatly due to the persistence of conflicts in different parts of the continent. Their aspiration for peace and their struggle for a better life should continue to inspire our actions.

In Somalia, several of our soldiers, young Burundians and Ugandans, but also Kenyans and Ethiopians, fighting alongside their Somali brothers and sisters, have made the supreme sacrifice in the service of peace and reconciliation. I bow to their memory, as I do to that of our soldiers who lost their lives in the accomplishment of their duty to protect civilians in Darfur.

I have a deep thought for those of my colleagues of the Commission who passed away since our last Summit. I pay tribute to them for their commitment and devotion to the Pan-African cause.

I also salute the memory of African leaders who have recently been snatched away from us by destiny. Each one of them, in their own manner, has contributed a building block to our endeavour. Time, this impartial judge, will decide on their place in history. I have a thought for all the Africans who became martyrs in the service of African causes.

I wish everyone present here a warm welcome to Addis Ababa. I reiterate the gratitude of the Commission as well as my grateful thanks for the support, encouragement and exhortation that you have given us over the past four years. We knew we could rely on your availability. I extend a special greeting to the Chairman of our Union, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who has performed his mission with dedication. I also grateful to the Heads of state who served in the *Ad Hoc* high level Committees on Côte d'Ivoire and Libya, with a high sense of commitment and duty.

We are pleased to welcome you to this new conference complex, this architectural gem, graciously offered by the People's Republic of China. We fully value this gesture. The relationship between Africa and China date long back, long back in history. Today, the political solidarity between our continent and the great country that China has always been is coupled with an economic partnership which is further enhanced with every passing day.

May I, therefore, on behalf of the Commission and on behalf of your august Assembly, hail our guest of honour, Mr. Jia Qinglin, Chairman of the National People's Political Consultative Conference. I would like, through him, to express our gratitude and sincere thanks to President Hu Jin Tao, the Government and people of China for this new illustration of their engagement with Africa, their support to the AU. Thanks to China, thanks to the workers who contributed to this gigantic project, the African Union today has a Headquarters commensurate with its ambitions.

It is also an opportunity for me to warmly thank our host country, Ethiopia, not only for the all the measures taken for these meetings to be held in favourable conditions, but also for having offered, together with the City of Addis Ababa, the land on which this new complex conference has been built.

I would like to state that that the site of this complex has a special history. Between 1935 and 2005, this land was the central prison in Addis Ababa, known as *Alem Bekagn*, which means "Farewell to the world". In 1936, it was the main location of the "Graziani Massacre" perpetrated against the Ethiopian elite by the Governor who at that time represented the fascist regime of Mussolini in retribution to an attempted attack against his person. The prison has been the scene of the execution and burial place of sixty ministers of the Imperial Government, after the Revolution of 1974, before becoming a place of imprisonment and execution of thousands of Ethiopians during the Derg regime. When the forces of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front took control of Addis Ababa in 1991, they opened the doors of the prison. The land was transferred to the African Union in 2005 to expand its headquarters.

To mark the tenth anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda in April 2004, it was agreed that a memorial for the victims of violations of human rights would be erected in this place. The efforts to this end have been intensified in 2010, within the framework of the Year of Peace and Security in Africa. This memorial will serve as a reminder and recognition of a darker past, including the episodes of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, as well as an affirmation of our resolve to prevent the recurrence of such acts and harm.

**Mr. Chairman,
Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The promotion of peace and security, this prerequisite for development, continues to engage the attention of the Commission. Needless to stress the need to provide our Union with the necessary capacities to face the scourge of conflicts. Consequently, we have pursued the efforts towards the full operationalisation of the African Peace and Security Architecture. Undeniably, significant progress has been made. I am particularly pleased to point out the deployment of Staff officers from the East African Regional Brigade to the headquarters of our Mission in Somalia, AMISOM. This is the first ever deployment of the

elements of the African Standby Force, which will reach its full operational capability in 2015. I congratulate the countries of the region on this important and symbolic step.

At the same time, the Commission has spared no efforts to help resolve the crises and conflicts that continue to affect the continent and consolidate peace where it has been achieved. Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia, despite the difficulties and sometimes setbacks, have reached decisive steps in their quest for lasting peace. The Sudan and South Sudan succeeded in managing peacefully their separation after the self-determination referendum held in January 2010. Côte d'Ivoire has turned a new page after the post-electoral crisis, and, thanks to the determination of President Alassane Dramane Ouattara, has initiated its process of reconciliation and socio-economic recovery. In Darfur, the adoption of the Doha Document for Peace in this devastated region has generated a ray of hope, which needs to be concretized as soon as possible. The AU and its Commission have contributed actively to all these achievements, as they have pursued their efforts to support the ongoing transitions in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, whose successful conclusion will consolidate the democratic movement in Africa.

In Somalia, the AU peace support operation has, under particularly difficult conditions, accomplished a work for which Africa can be proud. Never before had the prospects of peace in Somalia appeared so real. Finally, under the auspices of the AU, the countries affected by the atrocities of the LRA have launched a regional initiative to eliminate this terrorist group and end the nightmare of the affected civilian populations, particularly women and children.

To consolidate these achievements, the Commission has intensified its efforts in the field of post-conflict reconstruction and development. In particular, we dispatched needs assessment missions in the different countries concerned, to pave the way for an African Solidarity Initiative. This is an innovative approach aimed at mobilizing, within the continent, multifaceted assistance in favor of the countries emerging from conflict. In other words, the aim is to ensure that "Africa helps Africa". This initiative will be formally launched at a solidarity conference to be held in Lilongwe, on the margins of the next ordinary session of the Assembly of our Union.

Clearly, many challenges remain. It is urgent to redouble efforts in order to find a solution to the conflict in Western Sahara, on the basis of the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination; overcome the impasse in the peace process between Ethiopia and Eritrea; normalize the relations between Djibouti and Eritrea, through the scrupulous and faithful implementation of the Agreement concluded in June 2010, under the auspices of the State of Qatar.

Similarly, the Sudan and South Sudan, which have shown exemplary leadership in the conduct of the referendum process, should, in the supreme interests of their peoples, conclude in earnest the negotiations on the outstanding aspects of the post-secession arrangements. The unilateral measures taken by both governments, if not immediately reversed, will undermine the agreed principle of two viable states living side by side in peace and mutually supportive. The High-Level Implementation Panel, in close cooperation with IGAD and international partners, will continue its facilitation.

The issue of security in the Sahel-Sahara belt and the fall out of the Libyan crisis continue to be a source of major concern, particularly in view of the proliferation of weapons of all kinds in a region already facing many challenges. The unjustified and unjustifiable attacks recently carried out by armed groups in north Mali, unfortunately, confirmed the fears which we had expressed. The AU, in collaboration with its partners, will continue to provide full support to the efforts made by the countries of the region to face this new threat, as well as to address the socio-economic reintegration of migrant workers who had to leave Libya during the conflict in that country.

Over the past months, we have witnessed a resurgence of terrorism, particularly in Nigeria. I take this opportunity to reiterate the strong condemnation by the AU of the criminal attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram and other terrorist groups, and to reiterate our support for the efforts of the Government of Nigeria.

2012 has been declared as the Year of shared values. Revolving around democracy, good governance and human rights, these values are the very basis of our Union. The popular uprisings in North Africa have highlighted, proved if anything, the depth and strength of the aspirations of our peoples to freedom, democracy and governance.

That progress has been made is in no doubt. But we should also acknowledge that there is still a long way to go in order to fully live up to the commitments made. The violence and contestations which often mark elections in Africa remind us of this fact, sometimes in a tragic manner.

In this context, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that we recently received the 15th instrument of ratification of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which will, therefore, enter into force on 15 February 2012. I urge, once again, all the States which have not yet done so to take immediately the necessary steps to become parties to this instrument.

Mr. Chairman
Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Malabo, last June, I pointed out with satisfaction that Africa was on an upward economic trend. In spite of the difficult international situation, growth on the continent has remained robust in 2011, reaching an average of 5 to 6%. Several countries have exceeded this figure, some even reaching double figure growth rates.

Many other elements can be put forward to beef up our optimism as regards the economic future of our continent, whether they relate to the reduction of deficits and inflation, increased productivity, the emergence, in relative terms, of a middle class, as well as the rise of a generation of business men and women focusing on productive investment, a requirement for job and wealth creation. Many observers consider that Africa is on the verge of an economic takeoff, like China and India, some decades ago.

That the weekly "The Economist", which a decade ago, described, on its cover page, Africa as the "Hopeless Continent", at the beginning of December 2011, chose as a headline "Africa Rising" speaks volumes about the long way that Africa has come and the changes

that have taken place. That this weekly regretted the pessimistic vision it had of Africa is even more significant.

Undoubtedly, we owe this change of fortune to the export of our raw materials. We also, and more importantly, owe it to the initiatives that we have taken to promote political and economic good governance, the reduction in the number of conflicts, the increase in domestic demands and improvement in the business climate.

However, we are only at the beginning of the venture aimed at making our continent a fully fledged economic actor commensurate with its immense resources. Africa remains an under developed continent with very high levels of poverty. Hence the need to persevere in our efforts.

In this context, we should continue to invest in infrastructure. I look forward to the adoption, during the current session of the Assembly of the Union, of the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) launched in Kampala in July 2010, which the Commission has just finalized with the support of NEPAD, as well as the AfDB and ECA.

We should speed up the economic integration of the continent. The tripartite arrangement concluded between the East Africa Community (EAC), COMESA and SADC, for the establishment of a free trade area must be supported and emulated elsewhere. I endorse the recommendation of the African Ministers of Integration to establish a second block that would include ECCAS, ECOWAS and AMU. Against this background, the theme of this present ordinary session of the Assembly – Boosting intra-African Trade – is of particular importance. African countries do not trade enough among themselves, while the growth of intra-African trade would lay the foundations for a stronger and more sustainable economic growth.

We should pursue and intensify the action initiated for Africa to attain food self-sufficiency. I note here with satisfaction the growing success of the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP).

We should build our human resources capabilities. It is in this context that the Commission launched, in December 2011, the Pan African University. The prime vocation of the University is to train highly qualified men and women, as well as produce advanced knowledge through research and innovation.

We should redouble efforts to improve the well-being of our people, including health. In this regard, we should continue to pay particular attention to reduction of maternal mortality, with the continuation of the implementation of the CARMMA Programme launched in May 2009, as well as the control of major endemic diseases.

**Mr. Chairman,
Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Africa enters the 21st century with serious assets: huge and varied natural resources, an increasingly improved security environment, democratic governance, which is being consolidated, despite the formidable challenges to be overcome, an economic growth which

is sustained by endogenous factors, a young population whose talent is just awaiting to blossom and thrive, in scientific and technological innovation, sports, art and music.

But these assets cannot become strong levers to transform radically and as desired the continent if we do not enhance our unity and our capacity for action.

We need a stronger Union, capable to promote our vision and translate it into concrete action. I cannot but emphasize the urgent and imperative need for making substantial and predictable resources available to the African Union. To be up to the level of the ambitions we have set for ourselves and fully own our initiatives, our Union cannot continue to depend overwhelmingly on extra-budgetary resources provided by international partners in order to implement its programs. A High-Level Committee, under the leadership of President Obasanjo, has been established to submit recommendations on the matter. It is my hope that the measures called for by the situation will be taken soon. I take this opportunity to thank our international partners for their generous contributions to the efforts of our Union.

We need a Union that is more proactive in the promotion of peace, with particular emphasis on conflict prevention. It is high time to place prevention at the heart of our action, as indeed required by the Peace and Security Council Protocol and other relevant AU instruments.

We need a Union which carries higher, further, the flag of democracy, good governance and observance of human rights, as a natural extension of the Founding Fathers' struggle for independence and dignity.

We need a Union which can speed up the pace of economic integration at regional and continental levels, as a necessary step to achieve the political unity to which our continent greatly aspires. This requires, in particular, that we work towards the establishment of larger blocks, as well as the promotion and materialization of the free movement of goods and people across the whole continent.

We need a Union which fully acknowledges the role of women and the youth. The origination, in Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, of the 20th African Cup of Nations, at the time when we are meeting here, is an opportunity for me to commend all those who have contributed to the success of this festival of the African youth.

We need a Union with which all Africans can associate themselves, because it meets their aspirations, because it addresses their concerns. We need an African Union that strengthens our collective capacity to take up the challenges at hand and strengthens our faith in the future.

Mr. Chairman
Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cannot conclude without raising the issue of our capacity to effectively promote the positions of our Union and Africa's interests on the international scene. Clearly, progress has been made in this respect. I would like to mention the coordination of the African participation in the discussions on climate change. I take this opportunity to thank Prime

Minister Meles Zenawi, Chief Negotiator of the African Union, for his leadership, as well as South Africa, for the successful organization of the UN Conference on Climate Change, after that of the Football World Cup 2010, the first of its type on African soil. I wish also to refer to the participation of the AU in the meetings of the G8 and G20.

In general, the AU has succeeded, over the years, to establish a network of partnerships with key actors in the international community. Suffices to mention the Africa-China Cooperation Forum, of which the Commission has become a full member, TICAD, which we now co-organize with Japan, and the strategic partnership with the European Union and South America, as well as the close relations established with the United States of America, South Korea, India and Turkey.

However, this progress should not make us lose sight of the huge challenges that remain to be taken up in order to actually make Africa's voice heard and ensure that its views and interests are taken into account. From this point of view, we should learn lessons from the difficulties experienced throughout last year by our partnership with the United Nations in the area of peace and security. It is in this context that I submitted to the AU Peace and Security Council a report on our strategic partnership vision with the United Nations, based on an innovative interpretation of Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. I congratulate President Jacob Zuma on chairing, on 12 January 2012, the meeting of the Security Council devoted to this issue, to which we must continue to pay sustained attention.

A little more than two years ago, in the Declaration which concluded your special session on the consideration and resolution of conflicts in Africa, you stressed your determination to ensure that these partnerships with the rest of the international community be fully based on the leadership of Africa, because, you rightly affirmed that without such leadership, there will be no ownership and no viability; because we are better placed to understand the challenges we face, identify the appropriate solutions and the means to succeed and because in the final analysis these are our problems and we are those who suffer the consequences directly. This affirmation is more than ever before relevant.

Fundamentally, as one African scholar put it, last year's events highlight the need to strengthen our conflict prevention capabilities and to expedite political transformation, in order to keep external intervention at bay and, consequently, avoid situations in which outsiders are arbitrating conflicts within our Member States. In this respect, I am pleased to note that, following the request made by the Peace and Security Council, the AU Panel of the Wise has initiated a reflection on ways and means to strengthen democratic governance on the continent, on the basis of lessons learned from the popular uprisings in North Africa.

With this conviction, let us act together to free the billion of African women and men that we are from fear and freedom from want.

Thank you.