

Opening Remarks

By

**H.E. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal
Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Chairperson
of the Executive Council of the African Union**

At

**The 23rd ordinary session of the Executive
Council of the African Union**

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Addis Ababa

Excellencies Ministers,

Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,

Excellency Mr. Erastus Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission,

Excellencies Commissioners,

Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me singular pleasure to welcome you all to Addis Ababa for the 23rd ordinary session of the Executive Council of the African Union. This session is indeed historic as we are gathering on the eve of the Golden Jubilee celebration of the OAU/AU. Therefore, let me take this opportunity to express my warmest congratulations to all of you on the celebration of this significant milestone in our struggle for freedom and independence as well as our quest for unity and development.

During the next two days, we will be holding our deliberations under the overarching theme of “Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance” so as to take stock of our past, assess our present conditions and define our future direction. This is indeed a time to celebrate our achievements over the last fifty years. It is with a great sense of pride that we cherish the liberation of our continent from the shackles of colonialism and Apartheid as well as the restoration of our

freedom and dignity as Africans. On this historic occasion, it is only fitting that we honour our heroes and heroines for their selfless struggle and sacrifices, which has made it possible for us to get where we are today. Of course, our continental organization had been at the forefront in this arduous struggle and it deserves to be praised for its invaluable contribution in this regard.

We also draw enormous satisfaction with the progress that has been made in our quest for African Unity. It was fifty years ago that our Founding Fathers, in their wisdom and foresight, laid the foundation for the unity and solidarity of Africa based on the shared history and common destiny of our people. Over the last five decades, we have intensified our cooperation on issues of common interest and concern to our continent. In this regard, the OAU/AU has been an important vehicle in promoting cooperation amongst ourselves and in facilitating our collective engagement with the rest of the world to push forward the interest of Africa.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Equally, important, is the need for reflection on our challenges and shortcomings as we mark this historic event. Obviously, the last fifty

years have not been easy and there were indeed so many ups and downs along the way. Accordingly, we need to do a serious soul searching to identify our weaknesses and put forward appropriate remedies so as to be able to chart our future course.

In this regard, we should ask ourselves some of the tough questions that need answers. When the OAU was established fifty years ago, there was a great sense of hope and exhilaration for Africa's renewal. But what really went wrong? Why have we not been able to achieve the dreams of our Founding Fathers? Why do we find ourselves in this current state of affairs? I believe we need to have frank exchanges of views on these and other salient issues as we reflect on our journey over the last fifty years.

Aside from the adverse external environment, internal factors related to lack of leadership and governance have certainly contributed to the situation that we find ourselves in today. This in turn led to serious economic difficulties and senseless conflicts that bedeviled many of our countries in the 1980s and 1990s. This is the time that some western pundits were characterizing Africa as "*the hopeless continent*".

Nevertheless, not everything is doom and gloom as some of these pundits would like us to believe. As a matter of fact, there is a glimmer of hope for Africa's rejuvenation as a result of the progress that we have

been able to achieve over the last decade. Since the transformation of the OAU into the African Union, we are no doubt in a better position to address the challenges facing our continent. While the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has allowed us to chart an independent path of development, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) has enabled us to learn from each other's experiences on issues of governance.

In this regard, it is encouraging to note that the number of conflicts ravaging our continent has slowly subsided with the exception of few pockets of conflicts in some parts of Africa. This has created a favorable environment for several African countries to register high rates of economic growth. Moreover, many African countries have ushered in a democratic dispensation that contributed to marked improvement in terms of governance.

We need to build on these achievements as we strive to advance our transformation agenda over the next decades. I believe our priorities should be to ensure lasting peace and stability, deepen governance reforms as well as accelerate economic growth and industrialization with a view to laying a solid foundation for Africa's Renaissance.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Because of time constraint, during this session, I am afraid we will not be in a position to hold a candid exchange of views so that we can draw the necessary lesson for future references. Consequently, I would like to propose for your consideration to have a Ministerial Retreat as soon as possible to give ourselves a chance to contribute our share to the formulation of Vision 2063 taking full account of the lessons from our past. I will be happy to host you in the beautiful city of Bahir Dar so that you will also have the opportunity to see other parts of Ethiopia.

Having said this, as you can see from our agenda, there are a number of important issues that we are expected to deal with during this session. In this regard, we will consider the draft Proclamation on the 50th Anniversary of the OAU/AU, which is prepared for posterity in order to send a strong message to future generations on where we have come from, where we are now and where we want to go from here. I hope the various comments and contributions from Your Excellencies will enrich the draft Proclamation, which will be adopted during the 21st ordinary session of the Assembly.

On the other hand, you would recall that, during our extraordinary session on 8 April 2013, we had received progress report on the preparation of the draft budget for the year 2014. Upon our instruction, the PRC and its relevant Sub-Committees have thoroughly deliberated on the draft budget prepared in line with the Strategic Plan that we adopted during our extraordinary session. The PRC has now submitted the draft budget for our consideration together with appropriate recommendations.

Furthermore, we will receive the report of the Commission on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and deliberate on the draft African Common Position, which is crafted through a series of consultations at the regional and continent levels. Let me take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the African Union Commission, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank and all other relevant institutions for deploying the necessary efforts to develop the African Common Position.

As we prepare for the High Level Debate on the issue during the 68th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, it is imperative that we speak with one voice. In this regard, it would be recalled that, during the 20th session of the Assembly, my Prime Minister had proposed the establishment of a Committee of Heads of State and

Government on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Accordingly, we will consider the modalities for the setting up of the Committee and its Terms of Reference and recommend it for adoption by the 21st session of the Assembly.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finally, I am ready to facilitate the discussion on the above mentioned issues and I count on the cooperation of each and every one of you to bring our deliberations to a successful conclusion. I would like to conclude by wishing you a pleasant stay in Addis Ababa.

I thank you