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**Welcome Remarks by
H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma
Chairperson of the African Union
Commission**

**Opening session of the 23rd Ordinary Session of the
Executive Council**

Addis Ababa, May 22, 2013

Your Excellency, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Chairperson of the Executive Council, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus ;

Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers from Member States

Executive Secretary of the UNECA

Deputy Chairperson Erastus Mwencha and Fellow Commissioners,

Heads of all the AU organs

Executive Secretaries of the Regional Economic Communities

Members of the Permanent Representatives Committee

Commission Directors and Staff

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

We meet on the eve of the celebrations of the 50th Anniversary of the OAU/AU. Like in May 1963, the eyes of the continent and the world are focused on our activities and deliberations.

During the 12th Extra-Ordinary Session of the Executive Council in April 2013 we agreed that our Yearlong Anniversary celebrations should be memorable, people-centered, global, involve young people and leave a lasting legacy.

We agreed that through the celebrations we will reclaim the African narrative, as we reflect on the past, assess our present state and plan our future.

Your Excellencies,

African Member States and our people in their various formations have taken up this clarion call. Just during May, we see Anniversary activities and debates on Pan Africanism and

Renaissance and on Agenda 2063, across the length and breadth of Africa and the Diaspora.

The debates span a range of issues, from the integration agenda to peace and security, the African identity, our search for prosperity and self-reliance; to the questions of governance, social inclusion, gender equality and Africa's place in the world.

These debates by Africans from all walks reaffirm Pan Africanism as a lodestar, a guide to action and the foundations for Africa's Renaissance.

As we therefore reflect on the 50th Anniversary Proclamation, we must be mindful of these inputs from our people.

We must be mindful of our people's expectations that we should emerge from this Summit – as our Founders did in 1963 – with a mission that will unite Africa and set her on the path to peace and prosperity.

Your Excellencies,

In elaborating the mission of the current generations, we must look back, as well as assess our present state. Like in 1963 when the founding states took their first steps into political independence, in 2013 we see Africa taking off towards peace and prosperity.

In 1963 several African countries were on par or had higher GDP rates than their counterparts in Asia. For instance, in 1960 Ghana had the same GDP per capita as South Korea. Until 1975,

the fastest growing developing country was Gabon. Botswana's growth rate exceeded that of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Thailand. Only thirty years ago, China was poorer than Malawi.

Again in 2013, African countries constitute the majority of the ten top fastest growing economies in the world, and between 2001 and 2010 African GDP growth matched that of Asia at 4.4% per annum.

Africa's growth has now averaged 5% per year for more than a decade, higher than at any other period since the early 1970s.

So are we going to be able to take advantage of the momentum build and move faster and reach and maybe exceed our counterparts elsewhere? It requires a change in mindset and a determination to transform our continent.

Despite the progress of the last decade on the economic front, this has not yet translated into rapid social transformation. It has not yet translated into rapid industrialisation, increases in quality jobs, incomes and sustainable development, nor in the rapid reduction of inequality and poverty. Across all dimensions, Africa still has the lowest human development indicators of any region in the world.

Your Excellencies,

The consensus however remains, that Africa is heading in the right direction. Editor Ozwald Boateng in the latest edition of *New Africa* puts it this way:

The four horsemen of the apocalypse are in retreat. And a promise is being fulfilled that this cradle of humanity is

stepping from the yoke of servitude, neglect and abuse to take its place alongside others of (humankind's) first-born.

The reasons for this optimism include Africa's natural resources - its unused arable land and water, its potential for energy generation, its long coastlines rich in marine resources, to name but a few.

Africa's demographic trends also present unique opportunities: its youthful population, its women, the growth in its cities, its growing entrepreneurial, business, working and middle classes. Africa's greatest resource and potential is clearly its people – now and into the future.

The comprehensive African good governance and peace and security architectures make it possible for us to promote and strengthen democratic elections, governance and popular participation. This also greatly enhances our ability to address conflict and crisis situations on the ground, and to find African solutions to our problems.

There is however no room for complacency, and we must resolutely strengthen governance and institutions to align to the needs of our people, and to tackle the root causes of conflicts and instability, so as to ensure lasting peace and human security.

Your Excellencies

The eminent Pan Africanist, President Nkrumah articulated the mission of their generation, but also the challenges, in his speech to the Founding meeting in May 1963:

Independence is only the prelude to a new and more involved struggle for the right to conduct our own economic and social affairs; to construct our society according to our aspirations, unhampered by crushing and humiliating neo-colonialist controls and interference.

From the start we have been threatened with frustration where rapid change is imperative and with instability where sustained effort and ordered rule are indispensable. No sporadic act nor pious resolution can resolve our present problems.

Nothing will be of avail, except the united act of a united Africa.

These words are still true today as they were fifty years ago.

Your Excellencies

As we chart the mission of our generations for the next fifty years, we must learn from the past and guard against the difficulties that President Nkrumah warned against.

Our 50th Anniversary Proclamation and eventually Agenda 2063 that we will adopt in 2014, must therefore provide a mission framework that will result in rapid change, in sustained effort and in united action by a united Africa.

The draft Proclamation that we will put before you today, will benefit from your deliberations. It will also benefit from the inputs of civil society (including the youth assembly, the business forum, the women and our intelligentsia) and ultimately our Heads of State and Government.

The draft Proclamation, therefore, frames our key objectives for the next five decades around the themes of the African Identity and Renaissance; the Integration agenda; the agenda for Social and Economic Development and Prosperity; Peace and Security; Democratic Governance; Self-reliance and Africa's place in the World.

In each of these areas, the Proclamation must spell out our continental mission and strategic objectives for the next fifty years. We think that the key action areas will help us to comprehensively deal with the challenges before us. Without pre-empting your inputs and debates, I would like to highlight a few of these areas:

We have taken the general approach that we must be bold and give a clear message to our people that as Africa we can and will change our situation, that we can and will take charge of our destiny.

But this is not enough, we must also commit as leaders, as Member States, the African Union and its organs, as the RECs, as civil society, as the Diaspora and the African citizenry to work resolutely to forge development and transformational paths that suit Africa.

This must include confidence in our people and their ability to make change happen, confidence in African solutions that draw inspiration from our concrete realities, and confidence in our ability to overcome – in our lifetime – poverty, disease, war and hunger.

Central to this, Your Excellencies, is the change of mindset. For too long we have been told, and believed, that we are poor. And yet the entire world for the last five hundred years have looked towards Africa, during slavery and colonialism plundering our human and natural resources, and continue to do so through neo-colonialism.

Our pledge to rapidly develop our human resources, to industrialise, to develop our agriculture and to foster self-reliance by mobilising our domestic resources to advance our continental agenda is a pledge towards current and future generations.

It is a pledge that we can and will achieve prosperity and peace, that Africa's Renaissance will be driven by its own people.

Your Excellencies,

We have a number of issues and reports before us at this Executive Council, and the PRC and Commission have worked tirelessly to ensure we prepare for this Summit and for the 50th Anniversary celebrations. In particular, since the Extra-Ordinary Council we have effected amendments to the 3rd Strategic Plan of the AUC (2014-2017) and finalized the 2014 Budget for approval.

There are other areas that require our focused attention after the Summit, such as strengthening our institutional architecture; implementation of decisions taken in the retreat between the AUC and the RECs; follow-up on the High-level Panel on the Audit of the AU; the issue of the proliferation of AU institutions and structures, the review of the mandate of the Pan African

Parliament, strengthening our capacity to implement decisions of policy organs and the review of strategic partnerships. So indeed we have a full agenda ahead of us after the Summit.

Excellencies,

During the Extra-Ordinary Executive Council we handed over each country's anniversary torch. A number of Member States have taken the torch to kick-start their own Anniversary activities.

The year-long Anniversary activities throughout the continent and in all Member States should galvanise, mobilise and energize our people behind Pan Africanism, and involve them in the discussions around Agenda 2063.

We thank the Chairperson of the Executive Council who have been guiding us through these preparations and Your Excellencies, Members of the Executive Council for your on-going support.

I Thank you.