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Opening Remarks

By

H.E. Mr. Hailemariam Dessalegn

**Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of
Ethiopia and Chairperson of the African Union**

At

**The Special Summit of African Heads of State and
Government to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of
the OAU/AU**

25 May 2013

Addis Ababa

Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies Former Heads of State and Government,
Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Excellency Dr. Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,
Excellencies Former United Nations Secretaries-General,
Excellencies Former Secretaries-General of the OAU and Former Chairpersons of the African Union Commission,
Distinguished Ministers,
Heads of African Regional Economic Communities,
Representatives of Women and Youth,
Fellow Africans in the motherland and in the Diaspora,
Invited Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the people and government of Ethiopia and that of my own, I would like to warmly welcome you all to Addis Ababa for the Special Summit of African Heads of State and Government, which is convened to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the OAU/AU. I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to all our friends for honoring us with their presence on this momentous occasion. We view their presence here today as an expression of solidarity with Africa.

It is indeed a great honor and a unique privilege for Ethiopia to be the venue for the celebration of this historically meaningful event. We will do everything to make your brief stay in Addis Ababa as enjoyable as possible.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While our Founders met for the formation of the OAU at the dawn of the independence period fifty years ago, it is fitting that we are meeting here today at a time when Africa is rising. It is particularly gratifying to note that some of the African leaders who were at the forefront of the liberation struggle and who witnessed the formation of the OAU in 1963 are with us today to celebrate its Golden Jubilee.

On this special occasion, I would like to express my warmest congratulations to all Africans in our continent all the way from Cape to Cairo and from Djibouti to Dakar as well as the entire peoples of African descent living in the Diaspora. This historic day marks not only a great leap forward in the Pan-Africanist quest for freedom, independence and unity but also the beginning of our

collective endeavor for the realization of Africa's socio-economic emancipation.

We should use this historic occasion to pay special tribute to the generations of Pan-Africanists who articulated the ideals of Pan-Africanism based on the conviction that Africans in the continent and peoples of African descent in the Diaspora share not only a common history but also a common destiny. Furthermore, we should honour the Founders of our continental organization who came together under one roof in May 1963, with a resolve to pursue the quest for African Unity in earnest and finally decided to establish the Organization of African Unity inspired by the ideals of Pan-Africanism.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We will have, today, a grand debate on the theme of our Summit "Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance" based on the concept paper prepared by the Commission. I am confident that we will have candid exchanges of views on our past, present and future as we define our continental agenda for the next fifty years. I am

also hopeful that the constructive contributions from various delegations will further enrich the draft Declaration to be adopted and signed during our 21st ordinary session. The Declaration intends to send a far-reaching message on Africa's aspirations for the future as encapsulated in Vision 2063, which is being elaborated by our Commission and all other relevant stakeholders.

Previous generations paid enormous sacrifices to liberate our continent from all forms of subjugation and restore the freedom and dignity of the African people. The major responsibility of the current and future generations of Africans is, therefore, to create a continent free from poverty and conflict and an Africa whose citizens would enjoy middle income status. I believe this is the new spirit of Pan-Africanism that should inspire current and future generations to fulfill the dreams of our Founders for a peaceful, prosperous and united Africa.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sure you will agree with me that Africa's Renaissance cannot be realized without bringing about a paradigm shift in our

political and socio-economic governance. We all recognize by now that the policy orthodoxy imposed on us from outside to simply “get the prices right” did not help us to break the vicious cycle of poverty and achieve sustainable economic growth. Therefore, we have to do more than “getting the prices right” and play a proactive role in pushing forward our transformation agenda taking due cognizance of the nature of our respective political economies and development potentials.

In this regard, in my view, there are five important measures that we need to take in the next years and decades. First, we have to invest on the development of the agricultural sector. This is what we need to do, if we want to transform our economies from the bottom up and lift millions of our people from abject poverty. This is the lesson that we can draw from other societies who have successfully transformed themselves.

Secondly, I wish to underscore the need to build human and technological capability, which is very critical in accelerating growth and development. In this era of globalization, we cannot simply compete on the basis of our factor endowments. Hence, we need to

assimilate technology developed elsewhere and move up the technology ladder. That is why we need to have a comprehensive system of technical and vocational training and tertiary education, which is tailor-made to our needs for technology assimilation and adaptation. This is what would enable us to train the necessary manpower.

Thirdly, we need to build infrastructure. It is obvious this sector has been neglected over the past decades. Lack of adequate infrastructure is the nemesis of development, a difficult bottleneck, which arrests the growth and transformation of our economies. We need, therefore, to undertake massive investment in infrastructure to accelerate our growth and unleash our economic potentials. Establishing national and regional networks of roads, railway, telecommunication, electricity and other infrastructures will certainly go a long way in fostering regional integration.

It is encouraging to note that some of our friends and partners have given priority to infrastructural development in Africa in terms of their strategic partnership with our continent. In this regard, I wish to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation to

China for investing billions in this sector to assist us in our development endeavors.

Fourthly, when we say the state should play a proactive role, it does not mean that we need to stifle the private sector. On the contrary, we should get rid of the political economy of rent seeking and create a dynamic and vibrant private sector. Last but not least, we need to nurture democratic governance and popular participation in order to create a favorable condition for the realization of our vision. We can ensure neither peace nor development in the absence of democracy and popular participation and inclusive growth.

Of course, we need the continued support of our friends and partners in our development endeavors. First and foremost, we seek their understanding on the need for us to have the policy space to design and implement our own development strategies based on the objective realities of our countries and drawing valuable lessons from other successful development experiences. But there is no doubt that we need the support and solidarity of our partners in all these endeavors, which in a way would mean no more than fulfilling

commitments already made in various international fora. It cannot be over emphasized that we also need a favorable global environment particularly a fair trading regime, which is critical for boosting our economic growth.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finally, I trust that this special occasion will afford us the opportunity to rededicate our efforts towards the socio-economic emancipation of Africa and renew our partnership with the rest of the world. It is my earnest hope that by the time Africa celebrates the centenary of the OAU/AU by the year 2063, we will have achieved the dreams of our Founders for a peaceful, prosperous and united Africa.

I thank you