

AFRICAN UNION

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

**On the Occasion of the Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of
the Establishment of the Organization of African Unity and
the Debate of the Assembly on *Pan Africanism and the
African Renaissance***

**Addis Ababa
25 May 2013
AUC Main Hall**

Your Excellency Hailemariam Dessalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Chairperson of the African Union,

Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government of the Member States of the African Union,

Your Excellencies former African Heads of State and Government,

Your Excellencies Members of the Executive Council of the African Union,

Your Excellencies former Secretaries-General of the Organization of African Unity and Dear Brothers,

Your Excellency Vuk Jeremic, President of the General Assembly of the United Nations,

Your Excellency Ban-Ki moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Your Excellencies Heads of African Regional Economic Communities

Your Excellencies Heads of AU Specialized Organs and International Agencies,

Members of the Permanent Representatives Committee of the African Union,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished Guests,

Fellow Africans on the motherland and in the Diaspora,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to warmly welcome Your Excellencies and all present to the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and African Union and to this very critical debate on *Pan Africanism and African Renaissance*.

We committed ourselves to honour this historic commemoration, by having celebrations that are memorable, global, people-centered and will leave a lasting legacy. Part of that legacy is to reclaim the African narrative - the narrative of our past, present and future - and to tell our own stories.

Your Excellencies, Esteemed Guests, Fellow Africans

The Founders of the OAU followed in the footsteps of sisters and brothers, stolen and sold from African shores and through struggles, broke the shackles of slavery. They followed in the footsteps of our people from across Africa - North to South, East, West and Central that resisted colonialism and subjugation. They followed the declaration of independence of the first Black Republic of Haiti, more than two hundred years ago. Pan Africanism united and inspired our people across the continent and globe, never to accept oppression.

There are few narratives that more evocatively captures Africa's past, as the extract from Ben Okri's *Infinite Riches*:

It was indeed a splendid road. It had been built by the natives, supervised by the Governor-General. He dreamt that on this beautiful road all Africa's wealth, its gold and diamonds and diverse mineral resources, its food, its energies, its labours, its intelligence would be transported to his land, to enrich the lives of his people across the green ocean.

Deep in his happy sleep the Governor-General dreamt of taking the Golden Stool of the Ashante king, the thinking masks of Bamako, the storytelling rocks of Zimbabwe, the symphonic Victoria Falls, the shapely tusks of Luo elephants, the slumbering trees of immemorial forests, the languorous river Niger, the enduring pyramids of the Nile, all the deltas rich with oil, the mountains rifted with metals apocalyptic, the mines shimmering with gold, the ancestral hills of Kilimanjaro, the lexicon of African rituals, the uncharted hinterland of Africa's unconquerable spirits.

He dreamt of taking Africa's timber-like men, their pomegranate women, their fertile sculptures, their plaintive songs, their spirit-worlds, their forest animals, their sorceries, their myths and their strong dances.

He dreamt that the natives would transport all these resources tangible and intangible, on their heads, or on litters, walking on the great road, in an orderly single file, across the Atlantic Ocean, for three thousand miles.

He dreamt of having all these riches transported to his land.

Some of them would be locked up in air-conditioned basements, for the benefit of Africa, because Africans did not know how to make the best use of them, and because his people could protect them better. He dreamt of having them in the basement of a great museum, to be studied, and to aid, in some obscure way, the progress of the human race.

He dreamt of the great road on which all the fruits and riches of African lives would be directed towards sweetening the sleep of his good land.

He did not dream of the hunger he would leave behind.

Pan Africanism and the dream of Africa's renaissance were in direct opposition to the dream represented by the Governor-General. It was these contending dreams of the Founders of Pan Africanism of freedom, liberation, solidarity, self-determination and independence that united and help to defeat slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

Your Excellencies,

Today, as we debate Pan Africanism, fifty years after the OAU was formed, we have to ask some tough questions about our dream for Africa for the next fifty years and the Pan Africanist values that continue to inspire us.

In the Jubilee book that we distributed today, we have the speeches of the OAU Founders of 1963, and statements from Your Excellencies, our Heads of Government and States in 2013 on how you see Africa's past, present and future.

Many of the themes we are concerned with today also occupied the OAU Founders in 1963.

Firstly, the Founders swore their solidarity when they vowed that *all of Africa shall be free*, recognizing that they cannot be free when their brothers and sisters were still under the yoke of colonialism and apartheid. They therefore in word and deed, through support to the liberation movements and by advocating in international forums, fought for the total liberation of all Africans.

Today, there is an impression that solidarity is a thing of the past. And yet in Somalia, when not so long ago the world gave up as a hopeless cause, it was African sons and daughters who fought and laid down their lives to create peace and keep the peace, placing it onto the road to recover. This is but one example in our recent history.

There is no greater example of solidarity than in the sacrifices of African peacekeepers across the continent, and at some point in the near future we must build a memorial in honour of those who lost their lives from all over the continent. When we therefore talk about African solutions to African problems, it is because we know that we can only permanently silence the guns, if we act in solidarity and in unity.

Secondly, we have with some notable exceptions, largely achieved self-determination. However, the self-reliance and economic independence that our Founders spoke of remain elusive, and social inequalities are on the rise. The Pan African commitment to independence and self-reliance remains important today – as we seek to integrate, to expand and modernize our infrastructure, to industrialise, to develop our human capital and our agriculture.

Thirdly, we must accelerate our integration. “It appears obvious”, one of the Founders said, “that the irresistible pressure of technology must lead to the constitution of economically powerful geographical blocks...we have the choice of participation in the modern world as a solidly constructed group... or standing aside from the main economic stream.”

We must therefore act with greater speed and a sense of urgency to create Free Trade Areas and towards an African Common Market, create the five regions as building blocks of the Union, and facilitate the free movement of peoples and goods.

Fourthly, our greatest resource is our people, especially our young population, whose energy, creativity and courage must drive Africa's renaissance. Investment in their education and training and more generally in science, technology, research and innovation therefor remain critical to drive Africa's modernization and development in all spheres. In this regard, the role of African business, entrepreneurs and professionals must be strengthened, so that they too contribute to the Pan African vision. Our women must be empowered as a critical ingredient to the continental development.

Finally, to quote yet another of our Founders "...never before has unity of action been more desirable and urgent; never before have nations faced such a challenging and splendid opportunity for concerted action."

We must therefore renew the vision of Pan Africanism and the ideal of Renaissance to extricate ourselves from cynicism and fatalism. Africa must build confidence in itself, in its ability and obligation to be drivers of its destiny.

The people of any civilization are its greatest resource, and if the collective mindset is attuned towards self-belief, solidarity and self-reliance, then that civilization will triumph against all odds.

These, Your Excellencies, are but some of our thoughts and we look forward to the debate and conversations.

Bonne fête à tout le monde.

I thank you