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Opening remarks to the Opening session of Retreat of the Executive Council by HE Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission

Bahir Dar, 24-26 January 2014

Your Excellency, Dr. Tedros, Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia and Chairperson of the Executive Council

Your Excellencies Foreign Ministers and Members of the Executive Council

Dr. Carlos Lopez, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

Honorable President of the Amhara National Region State

Excellencies, Chairperson and Members of the PRC and Officials from the Capitals

Deputy Chairperson of the AU Commission, HE Erastus Mwencha and fellow Commissioners,

AU Commission staff

Ladies and Gentlemen

We sincerely thank our host country, the Honourable Minister for bringing outside of Addis Ababa, to this beautiful part of Ethiopia. Our appreciation to the authorities, the Honourable Mayor and his team, for welcoming us to Bahir Dar and the

Amhara national region state and for the hospitality extended to us.

Bahir Dar is a living testimony that the growth and development recorded by Ethiopia over the last few years are not only restricted to the capital, but touches all corners of the country. Indeed the country as a whole is moving towards the target set in its National Development plan of reaching middle-income status by 2025. We congratulate the people of this city and region for these efforts, which can serve as an example for many regions of our continent.

Excellencies

Retreats such as these, especially at the level of the Executive Council, have been used to discuss issues pertinent to our continent that are complex and required in-depth and innovative reflection.

Having just emerged from the collective reflections on Pan Africanism and African Renaissance that grounded our Golden Jubilee celebrations, as we look ahead towards the next fifty years, we again have the opportunity to revisit some of the debates, in a more relaxed and convivial atmosphere.

Excellencies, retreats take place under different conditions from formal meetings. It must, therefore, provide space for all of us to step out of our comfort zones, and to think and indeed dream about our continent.

We are gathered in a retreat of the Executive Council to reflect on a critical matter before the Union and our people – about the future we want, the Agenda 2063. This retreat comes after a year of robust consultations with civil society on the future they want.

As Foreign Ministers of our countries and indeed as citizens of this great continent, we may well share some of the aspirations articulated by civil society.

At the same time, the Executive Council is an important collective body of opinion within the Union, which in its composition and outlook embodies the aspirations of Pan Africanism and the African Renaissance, coupled with a bird's eye view of Africa's place in the world.

The decision of the Chairperson of the Executive Council to have this retreat is therefore well-timed: to enable this august body to add its collective contribution towards the Africa we want and the milestones we must set towards this end.

In conclusion, I hope our contributions will be free-flowing, frank, inspirational, daring, challenging and provocative. The contributions are not national or official positions as such, but must be contributions that will inspire us towards the Africa we want, that is integrate, peaceful and prosperous.

I wish the retreat fruitful deliberations and interesting outcomes.