

Welcoming Remarks

By

H.E. Mr. Gedu Andargachew

President of the Amhara National Regional State

At

The First Ministerial Retreat of the African Union

24 January 2014

Bahir Dar

***Excellency 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,***

Excellencies Ministers,

***Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma,
Chairperson of the African Union Commission,
Ambassadors and Commissioners,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,***

On behalf of the government and people of the Amhara National Regional State, I would like to warmly welcome you all to Bahir Dar. We are indeed very honoured and privileged to host this First Ministerial Retreat of the African Union, which will be held under the theme “Defining Agenda 2063: Towards a Peaceful, Integrated and Prosperous Africa”.

I believe this theme is only fitting at a time when Africans in all corners of our continent are celebrating the Golden Jubilee of the OAU/AU this year with an appreciation of their past history, present condition and future prospects. Let me express my sincere thanks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for giving us this opportunity to contribute our part to the collective reflection by hosting this important Ministerial Retreat.

***Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,***

We are indeed very much appreciative of the role played by our continental organization in promoting the unity and solidarity of African States and peoples over the last 50 years. We are, particularly, pleased to note that since the transformation of the OAU into the African Union, the organization has strengthened its capacity in addressing the multifaceted challenges confronting our continent as well as in enhancing Africa's standing in the international arena.

Most importantly, it is a source of great satisfaction to note that the African Union has become closer to the African people there by encouraging the active participation of all sections of the African society in the affairs of the Union. In this regard, we are hopeful that the holding of this Ministerial Retreat will offer a good opportunity for our people to enhance their understanding of our continental organization and its activities.

Since the past two weeks, we have been utilizing all media outlets in our regional State to promote the African Union and raise the awareness of our people and we will certainly continue to do so in the course of the next two days. In this regard, we have been working closely with the Directorate of Communication and Information of the African Union Commission to promote the African Union brand in our region – I am an African. I am the African Union". This is the added value of this Retreat of which we are very proud to be the venue.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Aside from your main business, we hope you will find time to explore Bahir Dar. I believe Bahir Dar represents the tremendous change that is happening in every corner of Ethiopia. This conference facility is built so as to symbolize the hope and aspirations of the martyrs who paid the ultimate sacrifice to bring about lasting peace, democracy and prosperity for our people. That is why it is situated in front of the memorial building constructed in honour of the martyrs.

Therefore, during your brief stay, I hope you will witness firsthand the progress we have made over the last two decades. We are, of course, mindful of the fact that we still have a long way to go in terms of achieving our country's vision. I am very glad to know that this Ministerial Retreat is also dedicated to charting the future of Africa with a view to achieving a peaceful, integrated and prosperous continent.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We would like to take this opportunity to promote Bahir Dar as a major tourist destination and a centre for conference tourism. The city offers a combination of natural, historical and cultural attractions. It is located on the shore of lake Tana – the largest lake in Ethiopia and home to so many monasteries. Lake Tana is also the source of the

Blue Nile River and the famous *Tis Esat* Blue Falls is a couple of hours drive from the city.

We have arranged a boat ride for you so that you could appreciate the beauty of Lake Tana and explore the history exhibited by the monasteries. Our region is also rich in culture and there are a number of places in this city where you can enjoy the Amhara culture and folk dance.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Recently, Bahir Dar has become a centre for conference tourism. Its state of the art conference facilities, the existence of standard hotels and its experience of hosting major national and international events have made it attractive for the organization of various conferences and seminars. We are committed to tap into this opportunity and we are ready to work with the African Union Commission in this regard.

Finally, I would like to assure you that we will do everything possible to ensure that your brief stay in Bahir Dar is as much productive and enjoyable as possible. Let me end by reiterating that we are happy to host you and we wish our efforts will be to your satisfaction.

I thank you