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ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA P. O. Box 3243 TELEPHONE: 011-551 7700
FAX: 011-551 7844, WEBSITE: www.africa-union.org

**Statement by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, HE
Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma to the
26th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union**

26 January 2015, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Her Excellency, Fatma Vall Mint Soueinae Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and Chairperson of the Executive Council.

Honorable Ministers Members of the Executive Council,

Your Excellency Carlos Lopez, Executive Secretary of the UN ECA,

Your Excellency Erastus Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson of the AU Commission and Fellow Commissioners,

Honorable Members of the PRC,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Officials from the capitals of Member states

Representatives of the AU Organs and Leaders of the RECs

Invited Guests,

I welcome my Sister, Fatma Vall Mint Soueinae, the new Foreign Minister of Mauritania to this small, but ever-increasing number of women in the African Union.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the AU headquarters once more for the 26th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council. A very warm welcome to the new Honorable Ministers who have joined us and we look forward to working very closely with them. Since we see most of you for the first time this year, a very happy 2015, that this year will be better than the last and that all your wishes are fulfilled through all our efforts.

The Annual report on the activities of the Commission in 2014 has been submitted for your consideration. The report highlights the work of the Commission on Agenda 2063 and steps undertaken, with the RECs and Member states, to accelerate continental integration and realize the aspirations of the peoples for a united, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its people and acting as a dynamic force in global affairs.

After two years of consultations, with civil society, the Diaspora, the citizens, experts and planners, governments of Member States, the RECs and AU organs, we are presenting Agenda 2063 for adoption by this Summit. We will also report on the work in progress with regards to the first Agenda 2063 10-year plan so that it can be ready for adoption at the June Summit.

Soon after the Summit we shall convene a meeting of the RECs, sectoral experts, civil society and planners from Member states, to do more work on the 10-year plan as well as the process of integration and domestication of Agenda 2063 in national and regional development plans.

The work on the 10-year Plan means a concerted shift towards focusing on implementation of this continental vision. A number of critical issues arise from this, which we would like to bring to the attention of the Executive Council.

Firstly, as mandated by Malabo, we have done work on the Agenda 2063 flagship projects, which will be covered in the report of the Bahir Dar Ministerial Follow-up committee. These flagship integration projects - such as the Single Aviation Market; the Grand Inga Dam and other energy projects, the Pan African University; the high-speed rail and road network project; Pan e-Network, the Continental Free Trade Area, the African passport and the Commodities strategy, the Malabo Plan on Agriculture - should form the basis of this 10 year plan – and must signal decisive movement in areas of continental priority.

The centrality of human development and security in all of this cannot be over-estimated, as we are learning the hard lessons from the Ebola Virus Outbreak on the need to have resilient public health systems, and for integrated responses.

Secondly, we will review the capacity required for the implementation of Agenda 2063, through a study led by the African Capacity Building Foundation. This includes the institutional capacities required by Member states, RECs and the AU, as well as civil society. It will look at the broader African human resource context: the technical, professional and other skills - but especially in the areas of science, technology, engineering, research, project management and innovation - required for the implementation of the various flagship project and our vision as a whole.

In the areas where we have skills deficits, we will have to take continental and regional approaches, such as we are doing through the Pan African University, our focus on virtual education and also draw on skills from our Diaspora. We will continue engagements with the African university, vocational and private sectors on these issues, such as at the upcoming Higher Education Summit in Dakar in March this year.

Thirdly, we must assess the institutional appropriateness of the current AU structures, processes and working methods for the implementation of Agenda 2063. Work has started on a comparative study between the AU and other similar regional organisations. In addition, we must also look at rationalization of work between the AU Commission, the NEPAD Agency and the RECs, so that we have more efficient division of labour and stronger complementarity in the implementation of Agenda 2063. Of course, we must even look at our working methods, how the RECs participate as building blocks of integration in how they participate in AU meetings, and we must look at this in our closed session.

Fourthly, integration remains central to our continental vision. We are encouraged by ongoing initiatives within and across regions to accelerate infrastructure development, and agreements implemented on free trade zones or the free movement of people and goods. I must commend

ECOWAS and the East African Community in this regard who are leading the way, and other RECs should be accelerating their processes.

We will present a comprehensive report on the State of Integration in the context of Agenda 2063 to the June summit for discussions, with lessons from the different RECs, as well as areas requiring concerted push.

Fifthly, we shall continue to highlight domestic resource mobilisation as a critical success factor - to ensure predictable funding of our institutions and programmes, ranging from funding of elections, integration, project preparations for infrastructure and implementation of the African Mining Vision, to mention a few. The report of the Ministers of Economy and Finance on alternative sources of funding the AU will serve before this Summit and our sister Min. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala will present this as Chair of the CAMEF. In addition, the upcoming meeting of the Ministers of Economy and Finance meeting in March will look at the broader issue of funding for Agenda 2063. Later this year, Ethiopia will host the global conference on development financing, and our Ministers of Economy and Finance will also prepare for this.

Excellencies, as we prepare for the implementation of Agenda 2063 at all levels, as governments, RECs and civil society, we have to pay attention to the risks (both internal and external) that we face on the road. The detailed Agenda 2063 Transformation Framework mentions some, including the grave risk if we fail to silence the guns and neutralize the threats of terrorism, intolerance and extremism; the risk of slow movement on integration, infrastructure and diversification of our economies due to both internal and external challenges; and the largest risk, failure to finance our development. It is not enough to identify the risks, we must go the next step to plan what to do to mitigate these risks, and we will therefore prepare for a discussion at the next session of the Executive Council on this.

**Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

Population projections estimate that by the time we celebrate the first centenary of the founding of the OAU/AU, Africa will be the most youthful continent in the world (and I'm sure most of us will be there during these celebrations!).

I have said many times before: these projections are an opportunity to urgently scale up investments in our young people to prepare them to assume a leadership role in all aspects of human endeavor, especially in entrepreneurship, science, innovation, technology, in politics.

This can be achieved. Take the internet. Africa's young women and men have wholly embraced the revolution in the technologies of information. Many have become innovators and entrepreneurs in their own right. Across the continent, opening an internet school or a cyber-café, or developing a mobile application, has become the first order of business for many young entrepreneurs as well as a job provider for many more looking for a job.

Unfortunately, the youth has set to us that one of their biggest handicaps is access to startup capital, and internet services across the continent remain a serious obstacle to the development of this predominantly youth-led sector. There are pockets of success, but we need to do much more.

We must do more and better for African youth. Our report on the activities of the Commission outlines a number of measures for your consideration, including increasing investments in education in science and technology, skills development through vocational training, and better treatment of teachers, not to mention lowering the cost of access to internet services and expanding internet coverage to enable virtual education in order to massify access to further and higher education. This Summit should also consider other recommendations from the Ougadougou+10 process.

These measures aimed at giving our young people a stake in their countries and continent, are the surest way of tackling the problem of African youth migration and trafficking, and them falling prey to extremism. Trafficking is just the modern form of slavery.

On the whole, there is much that remains to be done on the socio-economic front. But I am encouraged by the progress we are realizing, particularly on some of the key Millennium Development Goals, including access to education, the reduction of maternal and infant mortality, reduction of poverty and progress on gender equality. But more needs to be done.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The AU efforts for peace, stability and the consolidation of democracy and good governance are also paying off. Through the African Peace and Security Architecture, working closely with Member states, the RECs and international partners, we were able to address crisis situations before they become entrenched and took too many lives of our people.

However, I am deeply horrified by the tragedy Boko Haram continue to inflict on our people, kidnapping young girls from school, torching villages, terrorizing whole communities and the senseless killing. We should all declare this state of affairs as unacceptable!

Furthermore, what started off as a localized criminal gang is now spreading into West and Central Africa. We must act now, and act collectively against this progressing threat. We must work diligently towards silencing the guns by the year 2020, and nip in the bud this threat to African prosperity, peace and human security.

I thank the Government of Chad for its readiness to assist Cameroon in this fight. The Commission has accelerated its ongoing consultations with member states, the RECs and other partners on how to deal with Boko Haram and it will be on the agenda of the Peace and Security Council, who will report to Summit.

This is not just a threat to some countries. It is a threat to the whole continent. It is a global threat that must be met globally, but with Africa in the lead.

Let me take this opportunity to again express our deep appreciation to our peacekeepers, our men and women in uniform across the continent, for

their heroic contribution to peace and to service of their continent and its people. We should have a monument for our AU peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the duty of the peoples of the continent. I hope this can be discussed and that we should have a decision.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the challenges, we should not lose sight of the progress in the areas of democracy, good governance and human rights. Throughout 2014, we had generally peaceful elections and successful transitions. And where contestations took place, they usually followed the legal framework and confined themselves to the courts.

The outcome of these electoral processes reinforces our conviction that the involvement of the African citizenry in owning and taking responsibility for their destiny is critical to the realization of Agenda 2063 and a prosperous and peaceful Africa.

Excellencies,

After some initial setbacks, our collective fight against the Ebola Virus Disease gathered momentum and is showing results.

I wish to express my profound gratitude to the Heads of State and Government, to this Council, the RECs, civil society organizations, and, especially, fellow Africans for their positive, rapid and effective response to the call for African health workers to be deployed in the three Ebola-affected countries. So far, over 800 medical and health professionals in the field in the three countries and will scale that up to 1000. It is paying off, as we begin to see the decline in mortality and infections.

We must pay special tribute to young men and women that volunteered in the AU-ASEOWA and ECOWAS mission in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, as a demonstration of the spirit of Pan Africanism and solidarity. The first volunteers were individuals, who gave up their jobs and volunteered.

My thanks also go to the captains of industries and business leaders from various parts of Africa and businesses operating on the continent. We are

working closely with them to mobilise resources to keep our health workers on the ground until the countries are officially Ebola-free, and in the medium to longterm help build health resilience through the African Centre for Disease Control.

We also thank the telecommunication companies on the continent in December 2014 launched an SMS campaign with us aimed at reaching out to ordinary Africans and seeking their contribution to Africa's fight against Ebola. The campaign is going well and is now running in over thirty of our Member states. This is a campaign that every single African country should be part of. I don't understand why it is only thirty something and not fifty something. We therefore call on the countries that have not joined yet, to become part of this African solidarity effort and enable African citizens to contribute.

I also want to pay tribute to the Commission and the Commissioner, the AU staff, ECOWAS and General Julius Oketta, who leads THE AU-ASEOWA efforts. I also thank the UNECA and ADB, who are part of all our efforts on Ebola.

Honorable Ministers,

Looking ahead, our theme for 2015 is the Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Agenda 2063. Over the last few days, in a series of pre-Summit meetings of women, with participation from civil society, our Ministers of Gender, gender focal points of RECs, our partners in the ADB, UNECA, UN Women and UNDP met to consider the theme and the Beijing plus 20 process.

They discussed the practical actions required to ensure that during this focus year, we make a difference in the lives of many African women, through practical initiatives in agriculture and agro-processing; science, technology, innovation and education; business development and financial inclusion; health and reproductive rights, and our campaigns against gender-based violence, sexual violence in conflicts and child marriages.

We must also do more this year to increase the representation of women in government, in the judiciary and other public and private institutions and their participation at the tables in peace negotiations.

I am quite sure that although this is a year of women, it is about our entire communities. That is why we look to you, our dear Brothers to ensure that we work together to achieve objectives of the year.

After this year, we must really have an irreversible momentum towards the emancipation of women on the continent.

Excellencies,

We are concluding the Year of Agriculture and Food Security, with a much better sense of what needs to be done: including improving women's access to land; provision of rural infrastructure such as roads, irrigation; access to agricultural inputs, markets and finances for especially small holder farmers; modernization of agricultural tools and mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

Yesterday, we attended the 3rd Conference of Parties of the African Risk Capacity, and it is an example that we should look at as part of our success stories. Firstly, this is pooled resources of Member states to address an African problem; secondly they work to strengthen capacity in Member states; and thirdly they have already started paying out to Member states facing drought this year.

The global negotiations on the post-2015 agenda, on climate change and sustainable development goals make this a critical year for Africa, and we must ensure that we remain united and take forward our common African positions.

IN CONCLUSION

We take inspiration from the resolve we have collectively demonstrated in the responses of our people in the formulation of Agenda 2063, in the fight against Ebola, and in the ongoing and collective work to build a better life for all Africans.

During our Emergency Executive meeting in September, the Minister of Sudan suggested that the Commission gives some of its budget to the Ebola affected countries, we pointed towards the difficulties. But it made us thought what we can do, and thus the Commission convened the Business roundtable on Ebola in November 2014 and started the SMS campaign with mobile network operators.

The Commission takes seriously your suggestions, and we look forward to another vibrant and fruitful session of this 26th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council.