

OPENING STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE 27TH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL BY HONOURABLE SIMBARASHE S. MUMBENGEWI THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE CHAIRPERSON OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL: 11 JUNE 2015: JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

Your Excellency, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr. Nkosazana-Dlamini Zuma;

The Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa, Hon. Maite Nkoana-Mashabane;

Hon. Ministers of the African Union Member States;

Members of the Permanent Representatives Committee and other Senior Government Officials;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Representatives of the Regional Economic Communities;

Invited Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Comrades and Friends;

I wish to welcome you, Honourable Ministers, to the 27th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council. Let me express my profound gratitude and appreciation to the Government and people of the Republic of South Africa for the warm welcome and the usual legendary hospitality accorded to me and my delegation, since our arrival in this bustling cosmopolitan city of Johannesburg. The excellent state-of-the-art facilities placed at our disposal provide us with the environment necessary for conducting our deliberations in preparation for the Assembly.

I wish to thank the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr. Nkosazana-Dlamini Zuma, and through her, all African Union Commission Staff for the sterling preparatory work. Your critical role in facilitating the functioning of our Union and its Organs, is fully appreciated.

Let me commend the Permanent Representatives Committee for their efforts and diligence in preparing for this meeting.

Honourable Ministers,

We held our 2nd Ministerial Retreat on 9 and 10 June 2015, during which we successfully deliberated on the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan of the African Union Agenda 2063 and its Financing Mechanisms; and Streamlining and improving the Working Methods and Rules of Procedure of the African Union.

In relation to Streamlining and improving the working of our Union, one cannot over-emphasize the importance of according ample and unbridled time to our Heads of State and Government to attend to issues that are strategic to the Continent. In line with this, it is imperative to review the Working Methods and Rules of Procedure of the other Organs of the Union in order to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness in the discharge of their various mandates.

Honourable Ministers,

As you will recall, the Assembly, at its 24th Ordinary Session held in January 2015 in Addis Ababa, took the strategic Decision to progressively increase Member States funding of the Union to make sure that at the end of five years, starting from 2016, Member States will be financing 100% of the Operations Budget, at least 75% of the Programmes Budget and at least 25% of its Peace-

keeping Operations Budget. That Decision, inevitably brings with it added responsibilities for Member States, particularly in the area of assessed contributions. The Decision was not only necessary, but was an important step taken by our Principals to ensure African control over and ownership of the Union and its programmes and activities. The old adage, “he who pays the piper calls the tune,” becomes relevant in our situation.

It is therefore imperative that as we seek alternative sources of financing the Union, our organisation should take measures to ensure that we operate within the confines of our Budget. This would enable the Union to avoid overdependence on our cooperating partners.

Honourable Ministers,

As we conduct our deliberations, let us also remember the challenges that are facing our great Continent. In so doing, let us take heart in the knowledge that none of these challenges are insurmountable. Africa, through the African Union Commission, took the lead to fight against Ebola, together with the support of the African private sector. This was no mean achievement as it showed what we can achieve with unity of purpose. Further, it was a clear demonstration of the desire and readiness of the African private sector to participate in the development of Africa.

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to emphasize the need to institute strong follow-up mechanisms as we prepare ourselves for the implementation of the First Ten-Year Plan of Agenda 2063. There is an old Chinese saying which says, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.” We have already taken that decisive first step. The journey over the next 50 years will be long and may even be riddled with

many hurdles which we must overcome together as we move towards our desired destination. With our collective knowledge, wisdom and political will, we should be able to achieve what is envisaged in the Agenda 2063 blueprint.

Honourable Ministers,

The African Union theme for 2015, is “Year of Women Empowerment and Development towards Africa’s Agenda 2063.” It is noteworthy that more than half of the population on the Continent are women. They form the backbones of our nations, regions and the continent, at large. It is, therefore, only logical to conclude that no sustainable development can take place without the input and involvement of African women. It is important that as we embark on the implementation of the Agenda 2063 blueprint, we ensure that the most important factor in our development process, the women and the youth, are given pride of place, not as an act of charity, but as clear recognition of their essential role in the actualisation of the seven aspirations under the Agenda 2063 blueprint, to lead us to an Africa that is, “integrated, prosperous and peaceful, driven by its citizens, and representing a dynamic force in the international arena.”

Honourable Ministers,

It is now my singular honour and privilege to declare this, the 27th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, officially open.

I thank you.