

AFRICAN UNION

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Statement of the
Chairperson of the AU Commission,
Her Excellency
Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma to
**27th Ordinary Session of the Executive
Council of the African Union**

11 June 2015, Johannesburg

Your Excellency, Honorable Shimbaradze, Chairperson of the Executive Council, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Zimbabwe
Honorable Ministers Member of the Executive Council, and Heads of Delegation,
Honorable Ministers and High-level Officials from the capitals, here present
Dr. Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of the UNECA
Your Excellency Erastus Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson of the AU Commission and other Commissioners
Your Excellencies Members of the PRC,
Dear Colleagues Commissioners,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Representatives of International Organizations
Distinguished Invited Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen and Fellow Africans

I warmly welcome you to this 27th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, during this crispy winter of Gauteng, which means place of gold.

As we gather here in Johannesburg this week, the eyes of African women, young and old, from all walks of life are on this Summit, held under the theme Women's Empowerment and Development for the realization of Agenda 2063.

Women and girls pin their hopes on the Union, to act decisively - together with our governments, civil society, faith-based organisations, business and workers associations, the women's and youth movements - to ensure that women everywhere in the continent have access to land, to capital, to clean and affordable energy, to water and sanitation, to jobs and sustainable livelihoods and to health care. They expect to partipate in all areas of human endeavour

Our girls and young women in particular yearn for opportunities to, along with their brothers have access to education, including in the vocations and in areas of science, engineering, technology, research

and innovation. As our Minister of Botswana likes to say: if we deny the African child an education, we deny them a life.

During this Summit, a number of gender and women's events are therefore being held, to emerge with a call to action on the empowerment of women, guided by our theme for 2015.

During the first part of this year, we have already begun to see the mobilisation by the women's movement on such issues as access to land, to capital, financial inclusion and on the representation of women in all areas of human endeavor.

Excellencies, women in Somalia, Central African Republic, eastern DRC, South Sudan, Darfur, northern Mali, the north of Nigeria are yearning for peace: for themselves, their children, their families and communities, to live normal lives, to plough their fields, and to educate their children. We must silence the guns.

These issues highlighted by women are already contained in our instruments - such as the Maputo Gender Protocol, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality.

The challenge, Your Excellencies, is that if we continue at the same pace of gender transformation as we did since the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference, it will take us another 80 years to reach full gender parity.

As African women and girls, and progressive minded men, we agree that this is unacceptable. We can't wait for another 80 years. We have to do more to ensure that the continent operates at its full capacity, by including women, so that we can implement our Agenda 2063 effectively.

As indicated earlier this, we will therefore launch at this Summit the inaugural African Gender Scorecard, as an instrument to monitor progress, share best practice, and hold each other accountable. We would like to thank the UNECA for their hard work to have this done by the Summit.

During 2014, the Year of Agriculture women farmers from across the continent called on us to consign the handheld hoe to the museums

and to assist them with access to modern technology, land, credit and extension services.

As we speak, the 2nd AU High level Panel on Gender with Ministers of Gender and Women from civil society is in progress under the theme '*Financial inclusion of women in Agribusinesses*', and we look forward to their recommendations.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The Executive Council just emerged from a two-day Retreat, where we discussed the first 10 Year Plan of Action for Agenda 2063. We also strategise on the challenges of integration, with a focus on free movement of people and goods, as well as the harmonization of higher education in Africa.

Trade amongst African countries remain below global standards, although a number of regions through their Economic Communities (RECs) are making progress - especially in the East African Community, in SADC, ECOWAS and COMESA.

The trade agreement reached by the latter three RECs yesterday, and the launch of the African Continental Free Trade negotiations this year, are therefor all aimed at growing trade amongst ourselves and therefore jobs and creation of wealth.

The Council retreat recognized that the Agenda 2063 priorities, including the African skills revolution and connecting the continent through transport, energy and ICT infrastructure are critical enablers for increasing economic integration and shared prosperity. We must therefore continue to push ahead with progress on these matters.

Our discussion on the harmonization of higher education was prompted by the calls from across the continent by students and young professionals and entrepreneurs, expressed forcefully during the Agenda 2063 consultations - that they want to be able to study, work and have their qualifications recognized everywhere in the continent.

We must therefore move faster to ensure that higher education in Africa is comparable and compatible, with recognition of credentials that facilitate transferability of skills, knowledge and expertise.

We want to ensure that African citizens, especially our young people, can use their qualifications to work anywhere in Africa.

A related matter is therefore our continental discussions on speeding up the free movement of people and goods. Within RECs we see a lot of progress, but we also need to duplicate the best practice between and amongst RECS so that we eventually have free movement across the continent

We must therefore keep in mind the concerns of the majority of our continent's population, our young men and women, for access to opportunities and a voice.

Excellencies, the challenge of xenophobia and the tragedy of thousands of young Africans undertaking perilous journeys across the seas to look for greener pastures has to motivate us to speed up the implementation of our Agenda 2063 so that the Africans have skills on our continent, have job on our continent; that they only move across the seas because they want to move, not because they have to move.

We have to move on the skills and vocational revolution, especially in the areas of science, technology, innovation, engineering and mathematics.

This will also help us to industrialise and build manufacturing, so that we stop exporting jobs and revenue, along with the raw materials we continue to export.

We must empower our young people to contribute as innovators, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, traders, scientists, inventors, professionals, workers, farmers - in all areas so that they become the drivers of our transformation.

Excellencies,

We just returned from the World Summit on the Ocean, and it was indeed an illuminating experience. For me

The Deputy Chairperson of the Commission, likes to say, talking in the context of the African Integrated Maritime Strategy 2050, that Africa is a large island, with smaller island states. All the matters

discussed at this Ocean Summit therefore impact on Africa, but there were very few Africans present at this summit.

The Blue economy includes both economic aspects (deep sea prospecting, fishing, etc), as well as environmental concerns for marine life and against pollution of the oceans with plastics and other pollutants.

A few months ago, the first ever Women in Maritime Africa conference was held in Luanda, Angola to mobilise women in the sector and look at Pan African cooperation to ensure greater African ownership and participation.

We also know that a number of African countries have or are in the process of looking at the establishment of centres for maritime studies, to increase the number of African skills and research in this area.

I want to remind the Excellencies, that on 25 July this year, in accordance with AIM 2050, we will launch the start of the Decade of African Oceans and Seas, as an important step towards the continent reclaiming its ownership of this critical part of our natural resources, and managing it in the interest of all Africans, including future generations.

We shall have a central event, but we also encourage our coastal countries, countries with inland waterways and island states to organise events that focus on African Oceans, Seas and Lakes and other waterways on this day.

Excellencies,

In conclusion, the adoption of the First Ten year Plan of Action for Agenda 2063 will take us to the next step of implementation. This will enable us to

It will help move forward our unstoppable quest for a peaceful, integrated, prosperous and people centered Africa, that takes its rightful place in the world.

I wish the Executive meeting fruitful discussions that will take us a step forward in our quest for a prosperous Africa.

I thank you