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**SPEECH BY H.E. DR. AISHA ABDULLAHI**

**COMMISSIONER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS AFRICAN UNION**

**COMMISSION**

**AT THE 2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL HIGH LEVEL DIALOGUE ON  
GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: TRENDS,  
CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**

**25-27 NOVEMBER 2013**

**DAKAR, SENEGAL**

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SENEGAL**

**YOUR EXCELLENCY MRS.AMINATA TOURÉ, PRIME MINISTER OF SENEGAL  
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**REPRESENTATIVES OF AU ORGANS, AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC  
COMMUNITIES**

**DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES**

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN**

Permit me your Excellency Mr. President, to begin my brief remarks by thanking you most sincerely for honouring our invitation and gracing the 2<sup>nd</sup> High Level Dialogue on Governance and Democracy in Africa. On behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr. Dlamini Zuma - who would have wished to be here today but due to unforeseen commitments was, at the very last minute, unable to join us this morning - I wish to express the Commission's profound gratitude to you, the Government and People of this Great Republic for the warm hospitality accorded to us since our arrival and for graciously hosting this dialogue for the second time.

Senegal's commitment to continental integration, unity and prosperity through strengthening governance and consolidating democracy is legendary. This country has not only been central to the African Union agenda but was also a significant role player in the crafting of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance whose norms and standards guide the AU and Member States in the promotion of democracy and good governance. As this instrument is so central to deliberations over the next days, permit me to highlight some of the key principles of this important instrument for emphasis and as demonstration of the progress this country has inspired. As will be recalled by many, the Charter has very specific provisions on access to and exercise of state power in accordance with the constitution of the State Party and the principle of the rule of law; separation of powers; and condemnation and total rejection of unconstitutional changes of government.

It is not a coincidence that we are back at this beautiful city of Dakar after last years highly successful inaugural convening of the High Level Dialogue to deepen, our reflections on challenges and progress on the Charter and how to realize these aspirations through effective implementation and compliance of Member States commitments.

**Your Excellency Mr. President,  
Distinguished Delegates**

We are most honoured to be here in this country which epitomizes what is beautiful about democracy in Africa, and indeed, the conscious efforts and sacrifices made by the Senegalese

people to ensure that the principles of upholding constitutionalism and the rule of law exist not merely on paper but in practice. Notwithstanding initial challenges, Senegal exemplifies a constitutional democracy. Your Government, Mr. President has been leading by example in building accountable governance democracy and in safeguarding the fundamental human and peoples' rights of the people.

It will be recalled that during this years 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OAU/AU we recommitted ourselves to ensure the African citizens are at the core of all our deliberations, and that indeed the AU and the regional integration agenda is truly citizen-centric. As we strive to “reclaim the African narrative - the narrative of our past, present and future - and to tell our own stories”. I would like to humbly implore all of us at this dialogue to explore those people centred solutions and ideas that can transform the continent to realize its potential economically, politically and socially. What better way to do so than to ensure that constitutionalism and the rule of law in each of our Member States guides our politics, interactions and polemics.

In co-hosting this dialogue on constitutionalism, and the rule of law, with the Government of Senegal we are inspired by the vision and dreams of our fore fathers and mothers - Leopold Sedar Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere among others. Today, we are blessed with the opportunity to gather and reflect on our last 50 years. It is our obligation to decide together how we will weave our shared values as Africans – integrity, continental unity, and economic justice – into our narrative for the future.

Africa has come along way indeed but I will be the first to concede as many here will do that we are yet to fully attain the continental unity, integration and prosperity that was dreamt by those who preceded us. In fact, I dare say that our dreams will remain just that - a mirage until we fully consolidate democracy and strengthen governance and realize human and peoples' rights. At the heart of Africa's democratization project lie the principles of constitutionalism and the rule of law - which will be the subject of our dialogue.

I wish to invite each one of us to open up, reflect and deliberate on the journey we have undertaken thus far, the challenges we have faced, opportunities and prospects for a better tomorrow and most importantly proffer practical ideas and strategies on how our Member States

can uphold the principle of constitutionalism and the rule of law. I must be quick to caution that we must be wary of the temptation to conflate constitutions with constitutionalism.

Indeed, while there is undoubted marked progress on the continent towards constitutional democracy with several countries adopting and reforming their constitutions, there are still remnants and emerging pockets of concern. Some of the emerging trends that invite deeper reflection include contested electoral processes and outcomes, popular uprisings, allegations of human rights abuses in some countries, unconstitutional changes in government through military coups or illegitimate and irregular change of constitutions, and threats to the independence of democratic institutions especially judiciaries. The imperative of upholding constitutional order and rule of law in Africa cannot be overemphasised. It is of vital importance in ensuring continental prosperity and transformative development.

**Your Excellency, Mr. President**

**Distinguished Delegates**

As a prelude to our own deliberations, allow me to convey some views that were shared by young people from across the continent who have been meeting here in Dakar for the last two days to contribute on the subject of our deliberation. They remind us that **“constitutions are not only designed to protect the interests of leaders but rather to emancipate and empower all citizens equitably”**. I must say I was humbled, fascinated and inspired by the young people who shared with us their thoughts and perspectives on building a better Africa - they were bold, courageous, visionary and innovative - calling on all of us to take the bull by the horns and ensure that constitutionalism and rule of law are realized in our lifetime. As one young lady from Uganda put it, “we have heard and are well aware of the Africa 2063 Agenda for development - but as young people we want to see concrete actions and don’t have the patience to wait until 2063 for the fruits of Uhuru”. Our call now and today is **let us help make these young dreams come true indeed**.

Our people across the continent remain hopeful of a better tomorrow. Africa beams of images of a continent on the rise, and is reflected in many statistics and numbers. The continent is embracing democracy, good governance, human rights, constitutionalism and the rule of law. We continue to hold regular elections and while there are several concerns over the fairness of

some of these elections, democracy assessments by the APRM and even by civil society led initiatives such as the MO-Ibrahim Index - which will be presented at this forum - point to marked progress. We are privileged to have among us at this dialogue public officials who work at the national, regional and local levels who are spearheading efforts to transform the lives of their people through public service by upholding rule of law and constitutionalism. We take pride, acknowledge and salute these leaders, but like Oliver Twist we shall ask them to do more - our people surely deserve way much more and its true that indeed we can do more.

**Your Excellency, Mr. President,  
Distinguished Delegates**

Finally, Distinguished delegates, colleagues and gentlemen, lets make the best use of this unique moment of our history to suggest and deliberate on how best to contribute to continental integration unity and prosperity though upholding constitutionalism and the rule of law. As challenged by our young people, let us be bold and constructive in our conversations, shift paradigms if need be and lets organize rather than agonize.

At the African Union Commission we have pledged ourselves to leading by example and commit to take forward your deliberations and policy recommendations within the unfolding African Governance Architecture and Platform. The Platform's Cluster on Constitutionalism and the Rule of Law, which was recently operationalized will publish the outcomes of this the meeting; support member states to uphold constitutionalism and the rule of law, through technical support to Member States constitution making and reforms; protection and promotion of human and peoples' rights; credible and legitimate electoral processes; monitoring and assessing the effective implementation of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and coordination and fostering synergy among AU organs and Regional Economic Communities charged with a democracy and governance mandate. We call upon each one of you to watch this space and continue to support these efforts. We are live at our Twitter handle **@AUC\_DPA** and trending at hashtag **DGTrends**.

Before I conclude, Mr. President, Excellencies, allow me to thank all in the African Union Commission who have worked tirelessly to put this Dialogue together in partnership and

with the collaboration of our generous partners. I would like to acknowledge, in particular, the support of Dr. Abdoulie Janneh of AGI, Mr. Lebogang Motlana, the Director of the UNDP Regional Center of Africa, Dr. Muna Abdalla of International IDEA and Dr. Runger Methchild of GIZ on behalf of the German Government.

**Your Excellency Mr. President,  
Distinguished Delegates**

I thank you once again most sincerely and wish each one of us fruitful deliberations and look forward to see you again in next years High Level Dialogue on Democracy and Governance Trends in Africa.