



STATEMENT BY

**H.E. DR. AISHA L. ABDULLAHI
COMMISSIONER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS**

AT THE

**20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COMMEMORATION OF THE
RWANDA GENOCIDE**

**ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
11 APRIL 2014**

- Your Excellency, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma Chairperson of the African Union Commission,
- Your Excellency, Representative of the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,
- Your Excellencies, Deputy Chairperson and Fellow Commissioners,
- Your Excellency, Prof. Joseph Nsengimana, Ambassador of the Republic of Rwanda,
- Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
- Your Excellencies, Representatives of International and Regional Organizations,
- Distinguished Religious Leaders in Addis Ababa,
- Distinguished Members of the Rwandan Community,
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me first to welcome you all to this event and to express my sincere appreciation for the strong sense of African solidarity and support as epitomised by your presence here today in spite of your varied priorities and schedules.

We are gathered here today to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the Rwanda Genocide in solemn remembrance of our fallen mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters in the 1994 genocide. This genocide resulted in the systematic massacre of over 800,000 Rwandan citizens in less than 100 days and occurred while the international community closed its eyes. We join the World in saying 'Never Again'.

The social, economic and political loss as a result of the Genocide cannot be quantified. Its effect on the psyche of the victims is incomprehensible. The scars of the genocide are still very much etched in the minds of people who have lost loved ones. The international community, as evidenced by the various Kwibuka20 events holding all over the world, is today ever more conscious of the need to ensure that such impunities are never allowed again.

At the African Union, the annual commemoration of the Rwanda Genocide is an implementation of the Decision which was adopted by the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) during its special session on the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda. This commitment of the African Union to 'never again' experience genocide in Africa came in conformity with the AU Constitutive Act, in which the African Leaders

reiterated their strong commitment not to stand idle when the African peoples are facing genocide or internal strife.

The commitment was also reflected on the decision of the Second Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, held in N'Djamena, Chad, from 3 to 6, March 2003. This Decision, together with the UN Resolution, adopted by its 58th Session of the General Assembly, held in New York, on 23 December 2003, designated the 7th of April as an international day of reflection on the Genocide in Rwanda. In both instances, the reflection on and commemoration of the genocide is directed at ensuring that as we construct vision for the future, we should be mindful of past experiences and in particular, we should ensure that the future we are seeking to establish, does not accept the reoccurrence of experiences like this genocide.

We also remember other Africans in all regions of our continent who have died as a result of senseless conflicts past and recent. We also use this occasion to call on our brothers and sisters in the Central African Republic, South Sudan and other smouldering conflict areas on the continent to learn from the mistakes of the past and take lessons from today's Rwanda which has emerged from the horrible events of 1994 to becoming a shining star and a model of African Renaissance.

Excellencies
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Our beloved continent, mother Africa, is still grappling with finding lasting solutions to long-lasting conflicts in a number of its member states. Today, as we remember the fallen victims in Rwanda and other African countries, we should not be ignorant of the fact that the realities of situations that could wake up that bestial instinct of man to exterminate his kind, are still with us.

Since the establishment of the African Union (AU), Member States have placed a very strong emphasis on the need to promote and protect human and peoples' rights on the Continent. As we reflect on lessons learnt, we may be drawn to a conclusion that we need to build upon our success and move forward by reaffirming our commitment to the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights in Africa by joining our efforts to promote our African Shared Values.

This commemoration is taking place as we begin the implementation process of the African Union's Strategic Plan 2014-2017, which prioritised the promotion of human and peoples' rights, peace and stability, democracy and good governance as foundations for sustainable development and stable societies in Africa. This couldn't have been more apt as it clearly demonstrates the Commission's understanding of the nexus between peace, development and human rights.

The African Union through its organs and institutions will continue to make efforts at promoting and protect human and peoples' rights on the Continent. This is evident in the African Human Rights System with its various instruments and mechanisms which continues to pave the way for the advancement of human rights promotion and protection in Africa. The value of the African Union Human Rights Instruments and Mechanisms rests on their recognition and acceptance by Member States. Part of these efforts is the development of a Human Rights Strategy for Africa and its action plan with the participation of the AU organs and institutions. The Strategy also focuses on issues related to transitional justice, which has become a major preoccupation as we grapple with issues of post conflict reconstruction and development. The African Union Commission through the DPA is currently collaborating with AU Organs, partners and other stakeholders to jointly develop an African Union Transitional Justice Policy Framework for Africa - a framework which provides a set of principles to guide the process and address a range of imperatives and needs such as the achievement of peace, justice and accountability, national unity and cohesion, reconciliation, gender equity, development and victims' right to effective remedies and thus, positively impact the lives of our peoples.

The adoption of the Strategy comes as part of the African Governance Architecture (AGA), which is meant to strengthen coordination amongst AU organs and institutions with a formal mandate in governance, democracy and human rights as a measure of enhancing their capacity and optimise their impact. The Human Rights Strategy for Africa as an integral part of the overall African Governance Architecture will also contribute to the AU 2063 Agenda- the vision of a Continent that guarantees human and peoples' rights.

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In April 2004, on the tenth anniversary of the commemoration of the Rwanda Genocide the Permanent Representatives Committee of the AU passed a resolution to preserve part of *Alem Bekagn* as an AU Human Rights Memorial (AUHRM), dedicated to the victims of the Red Terror in Ethiopia, the Rwanda Genocide, the Apartheid in South Africa, and to victims of Slavery and Colonialism. On 28 January 2012, the foundation stone for the AU Human Rights Memorial was unveiled by the Heads of state and government. Establishing the AU Memorial is a reminder and recognition of a dark past, an affirmation of the resolve to respect the dignity of humankind, and a commitment to prevent future recurrence of such acts. As the AU pursues and intensifies its efforts towards the promotion and protection of human rights on the continent, the Memorial will emphasize the inseparable linkages between these issues, and build upon progress made by African peoples and institutions.

We recognize that the magnitude and the severity of the killings have made the Rwanda Genocide an unprecedented tragedy in the history of Africa and honouring the pledge to never experience genocide again will require not just exerting greater political will than we have seen in the past, but also developing a strategy built on the lessons learnt from the genocide of 1994. This is not only important for Rwanda but for every society which values life and liberty.

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Recently, we paid tribute to late President Mandela. The great champion of forgiveness and true reconciliation. He said:

‘True reconciliation does not consist in merely forgetting the past’ but also stated that ‘If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner’.

Today, as we commemorate the genocide and advocate for true reconciliation, we will be listening to short stories read by students from different schools on lessons learned from the Genocide in Rwanda and songs by the AU Choir as well as the AU Children Choir. This contribution of the African children is worthy of special acknowledgement and appreciation.

Our commemoration today is not only an opportunity for statements, but in fact it is an opportunity for all of us to reiterate our commitment to the assertion that no more genocide in our continent or anywhere in the world now or in future.

We join the World today in affirming that NEVER AGAIN will we allow genocide on our Continent! May the souls of the victims of Genocide rest in peace!

I thank you for your kind attention.