



**OPENING REMARKS BY
H.E. DR. AISHA ABDULLAHI (AMB.)
COMMISSIONER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

AT THE AFRICAN REGIONAL FORUM ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

**DELIVERED ON HER BEHALF BY
DR. MAMADOU DIA
AG. DIRECTOR FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS**

**ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
17 SEPTEMBER 2014**

Your Excellency, Mr. Getachew Ambaye, Minister of Justice of Ethiopia

Your Excellency, Dr. Abdallah Hamdouk, Deputy Executive Director of UNECA

Your Excellencies, Dr. Michael Ado, Chairperson of the UN Working Group on Human Rights and Business and Distinguished Members present

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, Heads of Delegations and Members of the Diplomatic Corp

Mr. Idrissa Kane, Deputy Representative of the UN OHCHR-EARO

Distinguished Representatives of the UN Agencies

Distinguished Representatives of the National Human Rights Institutions

Distinguished Representatives of International and Regional Organizations,

Distinguished Representatives of the Civil Society Organizations,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a singular honour and a great privilege for me to address this gathering on behalf of H.E. Dr. Aisha Abdullahi, Commissioner for Political Affairs of the African Union Commission, who is unable to be present here today at this 2014 African Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights organized by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR), the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the Department of Political Affairs of the African Union Commission (DPA/AUC).

At the outset, allow me to express my gratitude to the Chairperson and Members of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights the commitment shown to the AU Human Rights Agenda by financially and technically cooperating with the DPA, OHCHR and UNECA to co-organize this important meeting here in Addis Ababa.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

The governance landscape in Africa is changing rapidly. A quick scan of the advancement in our governance structures and processes over the years shows a clear advancement in the quality and quantity of governance and democracy in Africa. Today, all the member states of the Union have become sovereign, a

fulfilment of the aspirations and dreams of the founding fathers. Also, democracy has become a more preferred method of governance than in the 1960s and even economically, many more African countries are climbing the ladder towards achieving middle income status than ever before. Even though there needs to be a more development oriented growth that lifts more people out of poverty, it is our believe that Africa is on the right track.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It is essential to note that the promotion and protection of human rights is each state's responsibility, but we should not forget to continue to remind ourselves of our individual responsibilities which is crucial for building the culture of respect for human dignity. Today, as we reflect on ways and means to promote business and human rights in African, allow me to indicate that during the recently concluded 16th African Union Summit of Heads of State and Government, Africa's leadership has again acknowledged that even though we have regional particularities, many of the values in governance, democracy and human rights are globally shared values. With such acknowledgement and global embrace, African Union Member States correctly affirmed that finding accommodation for differences and contextual particularities in a globalised world will and must continue to be a core strategy in the work of this Council and indeed in the work of all regional and global organizations.

As a result, the African Union Commission was mandated in January 2011 by the AU Assembly to establish an African Governance Architecture (AGA) and Platform. The AGA seeks to strengthen coordination, coherence and cooperation among AU organs, institutions and Regional Economic Communities with a formal mandate in the areas of democracy, governance and human rights. Its objectives are to enhance these organs and institutions capacity to optimize their impact on the destiny of our continent and people. The establishment of AGA is therefore an opportunity to engage and develop appropriate capacity and responses to Africa's governance challenges. It is the overall political and institutional framework for the promotion of democracy, governance and human rights in Africa.

The African Governance Platform is the coordinating mechanism for the AGA. As the central coordinating mechanism it seeks to monitor the compliance and

implementation of AU Shared Values instruments and in particular the Africa Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. The Platform is organized around five clusters: Constitutionalism and Rule of Law; Human Rights; Governance and Democracy as well as the Cluster on Humanitarian Affairs.

On another hand, the Human Rights Strategy for Africa, which was adopted by the AU Organs with a human rights mandate in Banjul in 2011, reiterated the fact that building the capacity of African human rights system has become a necessity in order to better promote and protect human and peoples' right in Africa. The Strategy is also meant to address current weaknesses in the human rights system in Africa and also to bring about convergence in the workings of the human rights operatives on the continent. This will help to strengthen and facilitate the development and coordination of human rights promotion and protection.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

The African human rights system has registered some key developments in the area mainly through the establishment by the African Commission on Human and People's Rights of the Working Group on Extractive Industries, Environment and Human Rights Violations in 2009. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights also adopted the 2010 Nairobi Implementation Guidelines on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in particular Articles 20, 21 and 24 of the Charter protecting the rights of peoples to pursue their social and economic development in terms of policies they have freely chosen; to freely dispose of their natural resources in the exclusive interest of the people; and to a generally satisfactory environment.

For many years, the African National Human Rights Institutions and the African Civil Society Organizations have become strong advocates of better governance structure to monitor implications of business transactions on human rights particularly in the face of growing investment opportunities in Africa in different fields. Many have already taken up the UN Guiding Principles and begun advocating for their implementation and domestication at the national level.

It is indeed true that the UN Guiding Principles present an opportunity for the African Union Commission to strengthen its work on the issue of business and human rights by integrating them in its relevant policies and strategies. This could also be done by

enhancing the capacity of the ACHPR's Working Group to explore the possibility of developing an African owned Guiding Principles based on the UN Guiding Principles.

I would also add that the signed Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Political Affairs of the African Union Commission and the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, presents opportunities for more cooperation and collaboration between the global and continental mechanisms to integrate the UN Guiding Principles, thus ensuring greater convergence and coherent concerted action for addressing business-related human rights challenges in Africa.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

This Forum is taking place here in Addis Ababa with the primary objective of promoting the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on Business and Human Rights in Africa. But let me add that it is our hope that the meeting will explore ways and means to develop an African owned framework based on the UN Guiding Principles.

I will conclude by restating the African Union Commission's support to this important Forum and I would like on behalf of the Department of Political Affairs to express our appreciation to the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the European Union Commission for working together to organize this very important gathering, and invite you to contribute your ideas and suggestions on how we can move forward together and make this Forum a success.

I thank you.