

AFRICAN UNION

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STATEMENT OF CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

H.E. DR. NKOSAZANA DLAMINI ZUMA

ON THE OCCASION OF THE COMMEMORATION OF THE AFRICA DAY

GENEVA, 24 MAY 2016

Excellencies Ministers of Health and Leaders of delegations;

Excellencies my sisters and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs from Kenya and Rwanda;

Director General of the WHO;

Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Representatives from the WHO and other UN Agencies;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am honoured to be with you tonight. This occasion marks the 53rd Anniversary of the founding of the Organization of the African Unity, now the African Union.

As we gather here today, Africans from all walks of life have occupied themselves with the task related to building an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful continent as set out in our 50-year vision Agenda 2063. Key in these tasks is securing human rights for all our people. We also remain conscious that our vision and goals will not be met, until all of our society is fully involved – including women.

Consequently, our theme for 2016 is the Year Human Rights, with a special focus on the Rights of Women.

This theme, rededicates us to work together to ensure that the basic rights of the African people are progressively advanced. The rights to health, shelter, nutrition, water, sanitation and clean energy, to healthcare and education, to economic opportunities and therefore human security can no longer take a back seat to the what are often called the “*efficacies of government*”, since access to these rights by our citizens ought to be what government must be about.

It is therefore befitting that we host this year’s African Day celebrations on the margins of the World Health Organization governing bodies meeting, given the centrality of health as an indicator of general societal well-being.

Poverty and the lack of access to clean water, clean energy, sanitation, shelter and nutrition all have the most profound impact on the health of our people. The eradication of poverty, the provision of basic services and creating shared prosperity are therefore central to improving the quality of life of African people, as set out in Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. Progress on these basic human rights of our people, will have the most significant impact on health indicators more generally.

Excellencies, Our emphasis on the rights of Women in our 2016 theme is also no coincidence, because we know that the empowerment and education of women and girls has an immediate and multiplier effect and impact. This effect and impact leads to healthier families and communities. Through ensuring that girl children receive a substantially greater education than previous generations we ensure that the cycle of poverty is broken. Our campaigns against child marriages, to reduce maternal, infant and child mortality, and for women's reproductive rights are part of this drive. By educating the girl child we ensure that girls reach their full potential, because it is their right. Through the education of the girl child we will ensure that no one dies giving birth to life and that women take full control of their own bodies.

Excellencies, The Ebola virus epidemic in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone last year, in a very powerful and tragic way brought to the fore the importance of health to socio-economic wellbeing, and the need for investments in strong public health systems.

It is also notable that Africa proved its mantle and Africans from all walks of life and Africa's private, public and civil society sectors united together in our fight against Ebola.

As our struggles against HIV, AIDS, Malaria, TB, Ebola, Zika, Avian Flu, yellow fever and other infectious diseases have shown, these diseases know no borders. We must therefore strengthen our cooperation as regions and the international community.

We are also proud that the operationalization of the African Centre for Disease Control is on track, with its first Governing Body meeting having taken place over the last few weeks. The Centre will provide us with quick responses and will be facilitated for the sharing of experiences and expertise whilst also building national capacities through the regional Centres.

This coupled with our continental frameworks to promote health system, strengthen health insurance, and the African Manufacturing Plan, are key to achieving the health indicators set in our Agenda 2063's First Ten Year Implementation Plans and the SDGs.

Africa is taking control of her future and destiny, with an added focus on manufacturing and world-class infrastructure. We are set and ready to be the next frontier for development. Ours will be a sustainable development which will secure an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, The WHO needs a new leader with a strong track record of achieving results. What we need is a Director General who can effectively lead this global organization towards achieving meaningful impact.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and former Minister for Health, is a visionary leader, transformer and a diplomat *par excellence*. It is for these reasons that the African Union Heads of State and Government endorsed his candidacy for the Director General of the WHO. Dr. Tedros is the best we have to offer. I am certain we can count on your support and thank you for celebrating the 53rd Africa Day celebrations with us.

Thank you.

Merci.

Shukran.

Mucho Gracias.

Asante Sane