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**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR ERASTUS MWENCHA
DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION
COMMISSION
AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE JOINT MEETING OF
AFRICA**

ARAB COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

**MALABO, EQUATORIAL GUINEA
21 NOVEMBER 2016**

Your Excellency Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, Sheik Sagah Khalid Alhamao Alsabah

Your Excellency Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Mr. Agapito Mba Mokuy

Your Excellency Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Chad, Mr. Moussa Faki

Your Excellency Secretary General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Ahmed AboulGheit

Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;

I am honoured to address this august gathering, the Joint Africa-Arab Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Economy, Trade and Finance. On behalf of the Chairperson of the Commission, H.E. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, may I at the outset convey our profound gratitude to His Excellency the President Teodoro Obiang Ngema Mbazogo, the Government and people of Equatorial Guinea, for the warm

welcome and excellent facilities accorded to us and for hosting this important meeting here in the beautiful city of Malabo.

The Afro–Arab Partnership is very important in our quest for sustainable development and economic transformation for the mutual benefit of our people “In 2015, the combined Africa-Arab population represented 1,3 Billion people with a combined GDP of USD 4.4 Trillion. The two regions combined with such wealth and resources have the hallmark of gestating into a gigantic partnership in view of our historical and cultural affinities as well as geographical proximity and shared destiny.

This year’s Summit is being held under the theme: “Together for Sustainable Development and Economic Cooperation. ”This is a befitting theme that takes into account the outcome of the 3rd Africa – Arab Summit that took place in 2013, in Kuwait.

That Summit agreed, through the Resolution adopted by the Joint Summit to establish an Africa-Arab Joint Financing Coordination Mechanism to facilitate implementation of agreed programmes. We all are looking forward to the outcomes of that process.

It is for this reason that the joint meeting of Ministers of Economy, Finance and Trade which was planned to be held here under the theme of “Enhancing Investment Opportunities through Financing and Cross Border Infrastructure Development Goals”, and parallel to the joint meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, to deliberate on strategies that seek to advance the realization of the interests of our two regions in line with decisions taken in Sirte and Kuwait.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;

On the Africa side, Agenda 2063 and its First Ten-Year Implementation Plan 2014–2023 represents the priority areas and targets for transformation and inclusive growth

of the continent. Additionally there are flagship projects in agriculture, energy, transport, infrastructure development, and trade, among others to propel growth on the continent and shared benefits.

These flagship projects will benefit our two regions by boosting growth in trade, investment, energy, transport logistics and therefore should constitute the basis of our joint action. We of course remain open minded on proposals from the Arab side.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;

As agreed in Kuwait and in follow up meetings, agenda of the Ministers of Economy, Finance and Trade would consider, among other items, Africa-Arab Cooperation and Economic Development for both regions, and reflect on the mobilization of resources for the proposed Africa-Arab partnership Action Plan 2017 – 2021.

As you are aware, this meeting is taking place at a time when more inter-regional dialogues between Africa and the Arab nations are increasingly providing opportunities for engagements and partnerships between our inter-linked regions. These are essential for unleashing the potentials of the two regions in shaping their positions within the global arena. Since the inception of the Africa – Arab relations in 1977, joint programmes for mutual development have been carefully crafted to benefit our two regions and our people. However, our partnership has continually faced some challenges, particularly financing of mutually agreed plan of action.

Overcoming such a challenge will require a deeper collaboration between African and Arab Ministers, in a bid to exploring innovative investment opportunities across the two regions. The Forum of Ministers of Economy, Finance and Trade as designed is to propose financing mechanisms for our joint programmes, for implementing our joint programmes. I believe that we are all persuaded

that there is need to come up with concrete recommendations with respect to the more effective financial mechanisms to finance our development process. At this juncture let me assure this joint session that no effort will be spared on the African side to work with the League of Arab States in this enterprise.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Senior Officials from both sides have worked tirelessly in the last few days to prepare for the Ministerial meeting. We commend them for the outcome of their meeting. However, it is our hope that both sides will continue to work closely together to finalise the Joint Plan of Action and its implementation and follow up mechanisms that would have meaningful impact on the socio-economic development of the two regions, taking into account the Ten Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063, the 2030 Sustainable development Goal and other programs and strategies of the two regions and present it to an extra-ordinary Session

of Council of Ministers for adoption, within a period not exceeding six months from the end of this Summit.

Hopefully the Joint Action Plan will shift orientation of the Africa-Arab Partnership from being largely bilateral to equally embrace regional and continental programs and at the same time from a based process to a more concrete undertakings that would tangibly benefit larger number of countries and citizens of the two regions.

To this end, deliberations of this meeting are critical in shaping the future of our partnership.

Your Excellencies,

Honourable Ministers,

I thank you very much, and I wish this meeting a resounding success.