

AFRICAN UNION

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Opening Remarks of the Chairperson of the African Union
Commission, HE Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma

to the

**33rd Ordinary Session of the
Permanent Representative Committee of the African Union**

**AU Headquarters, Addis Ababa
22 January 2017**

Excellency Mr. Cherif Mahamat Zene, Ambassador of the Republic of Chad and Chairperson of the PRC,

Excellency Deputy Chairperson,

Excellencies Commissioners,

Excellencies Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives,

Excellencies leaders of AU Organs

Liaison officers of RECs

Officials from Capitals and from the Organs, RECs, Commission, from Representative Offices, Specialised Agencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A Happy and Prosperous New Year to all Members of the Permanent Representative Committee, officials from Capitals, Organs, RECs, Representative offices, the Commission and your beloved families and friends.

I hope 2017 will be a source of inspiration for our Union, to continue to tackle the challenges we face, through joint and sustained efforts.

Excellencies

The coming Summit will once again deal with matters that are of concern to citizens and to the future of Africa.

How we deal with them, from the work of Specialised Technical Committees and Organs, to the critical integration and development projects of Agenda 2063: peace, security, democracy and governance; the issues of financing and the

reforms of our Union, will have implications for whether we make progress or let opportunities pass us by.

As we ponder these issues, we turn to the early Pan Africanists, the visionaries who helped to shape our Union today.

Emperor Haile Selassie, in his opening statement to the 1963 Conference that founded the Organisation of African Unity declared:

What we require is a single African organization through which Africa's single voice may be heard, within which Africa's problems may be studied and resolved.

We need a single institution, to which we all belong.

Excellencies,

This organisation that the founders talked about fifty-three years ago, is today in our hands.

During the four years of our term, the African Union - the Assembly, Executive Council, PRC, Member States, RECs, Organs, the Commission and Citizens - grappled with the issues that also occupied our Founders.

Guided by our 50th anniversary pledge to silence the guns, we are determined to resolve the conflicts in Mali, South Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, Central African Republic; and to face the common threat of terrorism and extremism.

Acting together, we worked to avert a crisis in The Gambia. We pay tribute to the resolute and decisive leadership of ECOWAS, and the Peace and Security Council as they remain seized with the matter.

I also want to pay a special tribute to the Gambian Ambassador to the AU, H.E Mr Mass AxiGye who during this difficult period stood firm and told the truth as a true patriot of his country and Pan-Africanist. We thank him for that.

Under the umbrella of Agenda 2063, we recorded progress in the modernization of agriculture and agro-processing; in tackling backlogs in energy, transport, water and sanitation and in making sure that Africa is not bypassed in the information highways and knowledge economy through investing in ICT.

The Agenda 2063 Ten Year Implementation Plan provides the goals we all work towards - to push the African skills revolution, to build vibrant cities, to empower women and youth, and to ensure access to health for all, including adequate nutrition, water, sanitation and food security.

This year, we have a major task to adopt the African Continental Free Trade Area. This, along with our industrialization programme, the Commodities Strategy, and work on the blue oceans economy, are critical to resolving the African paradox of a continent with virtually every natural resource at its disposal, and yet its people are poor and it is marginal to global production.

Excellencies,

The work with Member states, RECs and organs to domesticate Agenda 2063, is proceeding very well. This ensures that our Agenda and the SDGs are reflected in national and regional development plans and budgets.

The Commission will present its Annual Report, which gives a detailed account of activities in the various domains, as we conclude the third year of the fifty-year journey towards the realization of our Agenda 2063.

All this is to ensure that the Africa we leave behind for future generations, is a better place than the one we found and lived in.

This is important as we celebrate 2017 as the year of investments in the youth. The crown and precondition of our success will be to place our young people at the centre of Africa's Agenda 2063.

Excellencies,

We must acknowledge that in spite of the achievements, a lot still needs to be done.

In all our work, we must espouse and uphold the values of Pan Africanism, which include putting Africa first; the commitment to the African people, their dignity and aspirations; and our passion for democracy, peace, integration and development. We must build unity of purpose even in the face of difficult challenges, within '*a single institution to which we all belong*'.

The AU Commission has an important role to play in this regard, to facilitate, coordinate and promote the implementation of our continental vision and frameworks, as set out in the Constitutive Act and Statutes. It therefore must be more efficient and effective, and its leadership and staff, diligent, prudent and Pan African in their outlook.

The Permanent Representative Committee also has to play its role.

As Permanent Representatives of Member States to the African Union, you have to find the balance between national interests and the Pan African agenda.

Just as the Commission and its members are expected to be Pan-African in the execution of their duties and not prioritise their countries at the expense of the African agenda, so should the PRC.

In this gathering, unfortunately, we sometimes see a nationalist position instead of a Pan-African one. Even as you advise your Ministers it should be done with the intention of furthering the continent's agenda.

The Commission and PRC are therefore critical links of the same chain. If one of the links is weak, the entire chain is weak.

As you therefore prepare for the Executive Council and the Summit, let us continue to work together to build this great continental institution, to which we all belong. It is very important in the coming years, the world is changing and presenting unfamiliar terrain. Africa must therefore be resolute about implementing its agenda, so that we build a prosperous,

Once again, I wish you a bright new year, fruitful deliberations and good working together.

Thank you.