

**STATEMENT BY THE RT HON PRIME MINISTER
OF THE KINGDOM OF SWAZILAND**

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**WELCOMING STATEMENT AT THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC
PLATFORM**

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MAURITIUS

MONDAY 20 MARCH 2017

Honourable Heads of State and Government
Delegates
Members of the Business Community
Members of Academia
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my great pleasure, on behalf of the Bureau of the African Union, to welcome you all to this, the Inaugural African Economic Platform. Today marks a significant step for the African Union as we bring together leaders of government, captains of industry and our best academic minds to discuss how we can work together to identify and address the key areas that will drive Africa's continental agenda for integration and inclusive growth and development, as espoused in Africa's Agenda 2063.

Ladies and Gentlemen, for too long Africa has sat on the sidelines of similar settings where issues of investment, business opportunities and economic development in Africa are discussed but which may not, of necessity, prioritise Africa's drive for inclusive growth and development. We have focused on topics such as the opportunities that Africa represents as a source of minerals, the use of our large tracts of land for commercial agriculture, to feed the world, and the vast market and revenue potential for goods and services due to Africa's significant population size. But we do not often take into consideration what holistic benefits can be derived for Africans.

In addition, as valuable as other forums may be for creating spaces for knowledge sharing in relation to investing Africa, too often we see that key components are missing from the discussions. Matters such as how to effectively address the skills gap on the continent, to ensure that our education systems are producing what Africa's industries require for economic growth, are often not at the forefront of discussions. Furthermore we often see lacking in these forums the urgent need to integrate our economic systems beyond national borders. This would greatly promote the movement of people, resources, and the cross fertilization of ideas necessary for the growth of the private sector. This situation is often as a result of the invisible barrier between public sector and business – a barrier that creates tension and loss of opportunity to collaborate on key issues.

As the African Union, we recognized that, for Africa to achieve its ambitious goals for Agenda 2063, it was imperative that the ‘invisible barrier’ be brought down, and that policy makers, private sector businesses and academia needed to come together to start a conversation about issues affecting Africa and how the continent can harness its vast resources to enhance the development of the African people.

As I look around the room I am pleased to see the collection of great minds who have taken the time to come here today to put their stake in the ground and declare that they want to take up the mantle to define Africa’s future. I see individuals who recognize that Africa’s future development is highly dependent on us working together collaboratively as policy makers, investors, and skills enablers to determine how we will attain the Pan African Vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens, and representing a dynamic force in the international arena.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, the foundation of any development agenda is the knowledge and skills necessary to concretise the ideas and bring them to life. We have ambitious goals in relation to industrialization. But these goals will come to naught if we do not have the requisite competencies within the African workforce. There is an urgent need to re-define our academic curricula in line with what industries require, to grow and create a balance between the arts, science and technology subjects, as well as reinvigorating and elevating vocational training. Academia is well represented here today as a

reflection of our understanding that, to revolutionise Africa's skills base and to harness our demographic dividend we must have an alignment between social needs and industry wants.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the presence of key African industrialists and business leaders, who are changing the African commercial landscape, demonstrates the importance that the private sector plays in meeting Africa's development agenda. The private sector has the potential to create employment at all levels of society. From the self-employed mechanic to the large corporation, the scope of the private sector to contribute to addressing the issues of unemployment among Africa's youth is significant. In addition, the expertise and knowledge inherent in regional private sector entities can greatly contribute to the creation of integrated cross-border value chains that will enhance economic development.

At the core and providing key linkages for socio-economic development are the policy makers who must have an understanding of the commercial interests of business and the societal needs for integrated and inclusive growth. At this African Economic Platform we are looking at issues such as the free movement of goods and people, the establishment of continental free trade areas, facilitating a business-friendly environment, and re-defining our educational policies. As we do so, the leaders of government present here today have a key role to play in creating the policy space necessary for fruitful discussion and, even more, the implementation of decisions which will drive Africa towards its ambitious goals.

Africa has a bold vision enshrined in our Agenda 2063, and today marks one of many steps being taken to ensure we achieve our aspirations. Let us use this opportunity of meeting here to develop the framework for collaboration that will ensure our collective success.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, with these few remarks it is with profound pleasure that I declare the Inaugural Africa Economic Platform officially open.

Thank you.