



Opening Remarks

By

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«Specialised Technical Committee (STC) on Migration, Refugees And Displaced Persons 2nd Ordinary Session Experts Meeting»

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PROTOCOL

Your Excellences Member of the Diplomatic Corps here present

Distinguished Experts from Member States

Distinguished Colleagues from the UN and other Partners

It is an honour and privilege for me to deliver these remarks on behalf of the African Union Commission at the opening session of the Experts Meeting of the **2nd Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons**. I bring you warm greetings from the Chairperson of the Commission, HE Moussa Facki Mahamet and the Commissioners for Social Affairs, HE. Amira El Fadil and Political Affairs Mainata Samate Cessouma.

Distinguished Colleagues

Throughout its history, Africa has experienced important migratory movements, both voluntary and forced, which have contributed to its contemporary demographic landscape. At present, Africa is faced with an unprecedented number of voluntary and forced migration, as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs) resulting from labour migration, conflicts climate change, and natural disasters. These factors are not new, they have driven migration in history. Undoubtedly, this has posed certain social, economic and political challenges in the management of migration, protection of refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs. How do we tackle the root causes of

irregular and forced migration? How do we prevent our young people from dying in the desert and the mediterranean as they head towards Europe and the Gulf?

On the other hand, the huge challenge for Africa is that most migration is within the continent and represents 4 out of 5 migrants i.e. more than 80% of African migrants remain in the continent. This implies the need to refocus the policies and measures to address migration inside Africa, in addition to overseas migration. As African economies are largely dominated by urban informal economy and agriculture, as well as in industry and services; by and large the migrant workers inside the continent are found in these vulnerable economic settings characterized by low incomes and wages, lack of social protection, and low skills portfolios. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has estimated that the number of labour migrants in the continent constituted one fifth of the global total and that by 2025 one in ten Africans will live and work outside their countries of origin. Given that the number of migrants is increasing and that this trend is likely to persist in the foreseeable future, the management of migration has necessarily become one of the critical challenges for AU Member States.

The African Union understands the importance of migration in development and issues of migration and mobility have pre-occupied the minds of our Heads of State and Government for quite some time now, given the centrality of human movement within Africa for continental integration.

Recently, bold steps have taken towards putting in place a legal framework for the management of migration and mobility in the continent. **Assembly Declaration (Assembly/AU/Decl. 6(XXV)) on Migration** adopted in Johannesburg, South Africa in June 2015 reaffirmed the commitment of our leaders towards promoting regional integration through mobility while addressing irregular migration. The Declaration mandated the Commission of the African Union to, among others, speed up the development of a Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and the implementation of continent-wide visa free regimes including issuance of visas at ports of entry for Africans; offer all Africans the same opportunities accorded to citizens of countries within our respective Regional Economic Communities by 2018; expedite the operationalization of the African Passport that would facilitate the free movement of persons; establish a harmonized mechanism to ensure compatibility and comparability of higher education in Africa and enable recognition of credentials that will facilitate transferability of knowledge, skills and expertise particularly for the empowerment of African women and youth; and strengthen efforts to combat human trafficking and smuggling of migrants through enhanced international cooperation and capacity building.

In addition, **Assembly/AU/Dec. 607(XXVII) on Free Movement of Persons and the African Passport** adopted in Kigali, Rwanda in July 2016 requested the Commission to: (a) Provide technical support to Member States to enable them to produce and issue the African Passport to their citizens; (b) Put in place an implementation roadmap for the development of a Protocol on Free Movement of Persons in Africa by January 2018, which should come into effect immediately in Member States upon its adoption.

This political will to address migration issues on the continent is also evident in the current efforts towards

- i) Revising the AU Migration Policy Framework for Africa and formulation of a plan of action for its implementation;
- ii) Drafting a Common African Position (CAP) on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

These documents are the focus of our deliberations this week, and if adopted will make a great contribution towards the Africa we want.

Distinguished Colleagues

I would also like to share with you some flagship Continental initiatives that are geared towards ensuring safe, orderly and regular migration, and also ensuring that the Continent harnesses the development benefits of migration. These include the following:

- i. The establishment of the African Institute for Remittances which is working towards facilitating the flow, and reducing the cost of remittances on major remittance corridors into and within the Continent, leveraging remittances for social and economic development as well as prompting financial inclusiveness in Africa.
- ii. Implementation of the remaining Diaspora Legacy Projects adopted at the Diaspora Summit in Johannesburg in 2012; that is, the African Diaspora Investment Fund, African Diaspora Global Marketplace, African Diaspora Volunteer Corps, and African Diaspora Database.
- iii. The ***Joint Labour Migration Programme***; a 10-year continental programme the overall objective of which is to strengthen good governance and promote the regular migration of labour on the Continent. It also seeks to promote the free movement of labour on the Continent.
- iv. The AU Horn of Africa Initiative on Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants, including the establishment of a Regional Operational Centre

in Khartoum. The centre will facilitate the sharing of information on human trafficking and migrant smuggling in the Horn of Africa.

Distinguished Colleagues

Africa is at a historic moment. At the beginning of 2018, Africa is set to establish a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) and put in place Free Movement of Persons. Over the next three days therefore, we have a huge task ahead to complete the draft Protocol and its Implementation Plan. I urge that we avoid re-opening issues that we have painstakingly negotiated over the past 8 months but rather to focus on the big picture of an integrated prosperous and united Africa.

I wish us all fruitful deliberations. And thank you for your attention.