



ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT PAUL KAGAME

Report on the Implementation of the Institutional Reform
of the African Union

29th Summit of the African Union

Addis Ababa, 3 July 2017

I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation to their Excellencies, President Conde and President Deby, for their leadership and support in the task assigned to us of supervising the implementation of the reform.

I also congratulate Chairperson Moussa and his team for the progress that has been made.

I am grateful to the many Heads of State who have found the time to share their ideas, both in person and in writing, all the while reaffirming their unwavering commitment to following through on our decision.

Finally, we honour the foresight of the former Heads of State whose hard work and wisdom left us with a strong foundation for continental unity.

In short, we are as committed and united as we were at the outset. This fact is the first and most important item which I have to report to you today.



There is another critical point to be aware of. As evidence mounts that this reform is real and irreversible there have been expressions of polite surprise, bordering on discomfort, from external parties.

Accommodating an articulate and effective African Union in the world order challenges entrenched interests and assumptions. Even those who wish us well may have reason to discourage a more independent and organised Africa. We should be prepared to react accordingly.

This should only serve to remind us of the reasons we felt the need to make these changes in the first place. It is therefore important to prepare the framework for the upcoming partnership summit in Abidjan in advance, and within the spirit of our reform.

We are off to a good start in implementation. There are fewer obstacles than might have been expected. The African Union is an organisation of enormous complexity and significance, integrating the interests and aspirations of more than a billion people in 55 countries on the world's second-largest continent.

We have held a series of very fruitful consultations since January with the Chairperson of the Commission, the Supervising Heads of State, and members of the Executive Council and Permanent Representatives Committee.



That team of Heads of State comprises the Chairperson of the African Union, His Excellency President Alpha Conde, and his predecessor, His Excellency President Idriss Deby.

I would like to present some of the topics that have been raised during those consultations for our consideration. But before doing so, I would like to recall the wider context.

For any major institutional change, it is very normal for problems to be identified. Stakeholders are within their rights to do so. And indeed, many of the issues which have been raised are in order, and merit our attention.

The reform process contains the flexibility to improve as we go along, and we will continue to listen to each other and incorporate feedback.

The key principle we must insist on is not to allow political or technical dilemmas to override our strategic imperatives, but rather to address them as they arise. We must work together and find the solutions that allow us to keep moving forward.

The issue of the level of representation at the Assembly meetings was raised, and so I put it to you for consideration.

On the one hand, the decision we took was clear that Heads of State may not be represented by officials below certain levels, and that was Vice President, Prime Minister, or the equivalent.



This was because of the very important principle that this is a leaders' summit.

On the other hand, from time to time, there may be circumstances justifying representation by Foreign Ministers, who by their very nature are fully empowered to represent their governments. There should be a process to allow that to happen, as necessary.

The problem comes when the exception becomes routine. Soon enough, we are not getting the value out of these Summits that we need and expect.

Without going back on our original decision, we should discuss a formula to prevent this matter from becoming a self-defeating obstacle to our work.

The question of the location of summits was also raised. We might consider two perspectives in our discussion.

First, our starting point should be that our organisation has an established way of doing things, including hosting an annual Ordinary Summit at our Headquarters.

Second, there will be no shortage of major events for other Member States to host, including Extraordinary Summits when necessary, as well as the Coordination Summit between the African Union and Regional Economic Communities, every July.



The Implementation Matrix already handed to you leaders in this room is offered as a realistic guide to what it will take to deliver the reform in a timely manner.

The reform can be substantially complete by our Summit in January 2019, which would adequately reflect the urgency of seizing the narrow window of opportunity before us.

This target is ambitious, but also achievable, if we work together with the same spirit of openness and conviction that has brought us this far.

Maintaining this pace requires a very strong and capable Reform Implementation Unit. Since the structure and mandate of this group was often raised during our consultations, allow me to say a few words about it.

Chairperson Moussa's vision for the Unit fully meets our needs and expectations. What remains is to ensure he has the necessary cooperation and support for the Unit to discharge its responsibilities.

In this, it must be made clear that the Reform Implementation Unit is part of the Office of the Chairperson and is accountable to him. It has no other reporting lines. The Chairperson, in turn, answers to the committee of Heads of State that I mentioned earlier.

However, it goes without saying that the success of the Unit requires frequent consultation with all concerned organs, structures, and stakeholders.



The Unit cannot be, and will not be, an inaccessible agency that conducts its work in secret. It will be transparent because it works for, and on behalf of, all of us.

Finally, the implementation of the Johannesburg and Kigali Financing Decisions came up repeatedly throughout our consultations.

These measures are the nerve centre of everything else we are doing. The independence and self-reliance of the African Union is an existential question for our continent.

The Financing Decisions imply an increased level of financial commitment from all Member States. There is no way around that. We have agreed to pay or even make sacrifices where necessary. In fact, I am glad to say that around ten countries have already started to implement what we have agreed.

However, the burden must be shared equitably and fairly and we will always listen to each other and find solutions. There is enough flexibility built in to the Financing Decisions to deal with any challenges that might arise.

We have been here before in the past, only to retreat. We should maybe not want to repeat the same. We should look at this process as the last best chance for the African Union to fix its finances and enhance its capabilities and finally secure the esteem of the people we serve, of this continent.



The fact that many countries, almost one-fifth of our Members, have already begun to implement the 0.2 per cent levy on eligible imports shows that it can be done. Even more Member States are actively preparing to do so. They are all to be commended.

The issue of the timing of the budget process was also raised. However, I understand that the Finance Ministers will convene immediately after this Summit and proposals to address this technical matter will be ready for our consideration in due course.

I am very happy to report to you that implementation is well underway, and that none of the problems identified is a serious obstacle.

In the months ahead, a lot will be required of all of us, beginning especially with the Commission, but not forgetting the Heads of State.

And in fact, on this point, let me also remind us that sometimes when Heads of State and Government have made decisions, there have been problems where some lower levels have gone ahead and wanted to review these decisions.

I suggest that where matters are to be reviewed, the best way to do so is to bring the matter back to Heads of State to see what they can do differently. But not changing the decisions of Heads of State when they have pronounced themselves.



We will continue to keep you informed and seek your counsel all along the way. Each of us is needed, personally, to help carry this reform mandate.

It is up to us to drive it forward and keep up the momentum, with constant mobilisation. This is, after all, an undertaking of Heads of State and it must be therefore respected as such.

The stubborn culture, of going back and forth, I think we have spoken about that several times in the past, and maybe we will need to find ways of reining it in, because it comes to a level that shows, if I may say so, indiscipline. We cannot continue to operate like that. We have to do business differently.

When we say, let's be quick about these things, nobody is being disrespectful and it should not be construed as such. It is just how we should be conducting our affairs, with energy, purpose, and resolve.

We all have serious assignments before us. The next six months are the most intense and consequential period of the entire reform.

Numerous detailed proposals need to be submitted to the Assembly for debate and adoption at the next Summit in January 2018.

This is our window of opportunity. We cannot lose the momentum that has been built or allow the sense of urgency that has been driving us forward to fade away.



These reforms are long overdue. In Africa, too often, we keep promises the way we keep time; even the promises we make to ourselves and to our own future generations.

How is Africa supposed to rise, except by completing this reform? The much bolder initiatives that we envision will remain only dreams until we do so.

Where there is still some hesitation, let's not get too concerned about it. Most likely, it is the result of misunderstanding and failure to communicate adequately and we will sit as a family and address it, as we always do.

I wish to thank you for listening to me and for the support I have received from all of you. Thank you for your kind attention.