



**STATEMENT BY THE DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON OF THE
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION H.E KWESI QUARTEY**

**XVII INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AFRICAN AND
AFRO-AMERICAN CULTURE**

SANTIAGO DE CUBA

11 APRIL, 2018

Your Excellencies,

Mi Hermanos

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I bring you warm felicitations from African Union Commission Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat. It is my honour and privilege to partake in this XVII International Conference which focuses on African and Afro-American Culture. I would like to acknowledge the presence of all of you distinguished brothers and sisters, here present and to thank our host - the Government and people of Cuba - for making it possible for us to gather here, in this beautiful city of Santiago de Cuba. It is indeed, a milestone for our Africa family.

It is also, another occasion, to exchange ideas on how to harness our resources – human and capital – as well as deepen our cultural and historic ties.

Excellencies

Distinguished Brothers and Sisters

We share a common history. A history that has stood the test of time. And one, that has advanced tremendously, particularly, through our political dialogue, our institutions of higher learning, tourism and cultural exchanges, among several others.

We need to critically interrogate our historical origin, and build on the seminal works of WEB Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, Eric Williams, just to name a few, of our Great Scholars.

The works of these iconic scholars find expression in our common struggle against slavery, colonialism and racism. We need to reinforce our common identity as a platform for collaboration to enable us address our myriad challenges.

As we are all aware, the predecessor organization of the African Union, the Organization of African Unity, focused mainly on the political decolonization of the continent. This having been largely attained, the Organization of African Unity agenda transitioned to focus on emerging challenges, particularly, sustainable growth and economic development.

The African Union was, therefore, established with a central focus on its people as the engine for the continent's development, and is committed to strengthening partnerships with the African citizenry across the globe.

A significant portion of this African community resides outside Africa, mainly in America and the Caribbean. This diaspora community was created as a result of slavery and migration, and recent waves of emigration have tended to be directed towards advanced industrial economies and social systems.

Within this context, therefore, the African Union seeks to reconnect the African diaspora community to Africa, through a process of regional diaspora networks and explore ways to promote our common agenda.

Indeed, what is required now, is to engage, constructively, on how to promote our common agenda of meeting the aspirations of our peoples.

In Africa today, a new momentum for structural transformation is gathering steam. After years of conflict, turmoil and economic stagnation, Africa's fortunes have turned for the better. Africa is once again on a positive path of growth as well as political and socio-economic transformation, despite the strong headwinds caused by the global economic downturn, in the not too distant past.

At continental and regional levels, Africa continues to make significant strides in building the institutions required for political and economic integration. A plethora of protocols, frameworks and plans of action are leading to increased harmonization of policies and actions within member states of our Union, and advances in key domains such as infrastructure, trade, agriculture, aviation and other fields, are laying a solid foundation for our future progress. The African Union Agenda 2063, the blue print for Africa's development, provides direction with key flagship projects; among which are the following:

- The signing of a Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) by member states of the Africa Union, in April last month, in Kigali, Rwanda to boost trade within Africa; and
- The launch of the Single African Air Transport Market, during the January 2018 Summit of Heads of State and Government, to create a Single Unified Air Transport Market, as an impetus to our economic integration agenda to ensure intra-regional connectivity between our capital cities as well as air carrier efficiencies.

The AfCFTA will create a wider market of more than 1.2 billion people with a combined GDP of US\$2.19 trillion. This will scale up investments, resulting in the pooling of African resources to enhance structural transformation and the development of regional value chains.

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Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many challenges, however, still remain. There are still too many people living in abject poverty, lack of decent jobs is pervasive, especially for the youth, and the continent lags behind other regions of the world with respect to socio-economic development indicators. The progress made is also threatened by rising inequalities of incomes and opportunity, particularly, for our youth and women.

Furthermore, Africa remains marginalized in the global governance system, and lacks full control over her resources and destiny.

In spite of recent positive growth, African economies have not been sufficiently transformed and continue to be commodity-based, with weak value addition, poor manufacturing and industrialization – in short, there has been limited transformation of the structure of our economies. Most of the benefits of recent growth have not been widely shared, as the main drivers of this growth i.e. extractive industries, have not created sustainable required jobs.

Our interaction here, therefore, offers us an opportunity to interrogate the issues which draw us back as Africans and African diaspora, tied with a common destiny. Our historical links, cultures and philosophies are certainly germane to our deliberations in order to cross fertilize ideas and share knowledge. A key aspect of this endeavour, resides in the need to interrogate the origin of the African State, which can be traced to the proceedings of the Berlin Conference of 1884/85 where Africa was divided up by European Powers.

Indeed, I recall quite distinctly that as Executive Secretary to His Excellency President John Dramani Mahama, I had the privilege to accompany him to Berlin. It was during the Berlin/Africa Conference in 2016. In the course of the proceedings, we had a private conversation with former German President Horst Köhler. President Horst had been German Finance Minister, German Foreign Minister and later President of the World Bank before becoming President of the Federal Republic of Germany, clearly, a man of great wisdom and experience. In his conversation with President Mahama, he referred to the Africa Hall where, in November/December 1984/85, the Berlin Africa Conference took place. He said since he was no longer in public office, he was now in a position to speak freely. He suggested that African delegations should seize the opportunity whilst in Berlin to visit the Africa Hall, where a very important part of Africa's history lay. Of course, we did not. In his inaugural address as President of Germany, in a reference to Africa in 2004, he had stated, "In my view the humanity of the world can be measured against the fate of Africa. What happens in Africa impacts on its relations with the world".

According to Nelson Mandela, the great Madiba, "sustainable growth and development therefore requires peace, security and stability. And they require the unity of the African continent. Peace is the greatest weapon for development."

So what, concretely, is our situation as Africa, the continent once dubbed by the *Economist* as the hopeless continent, and by then Prime Minister Tony Blair as a scar on the conscience of mankind? Africa, in 2004, exported goods to the value of \$232 billion, equivalent to 2.6 percent of global trade, and imported goods up to the value of \$212 billion, equivalent to 2.3 percent of global trade. Of its exports, manufactured products accounted for \$58.1 billion, agricultural products \$28 billion and fuels and mining products \$137 billion. Taking fuels, mining and agricultural products together, unprocessed goods accounted for 71 percent of Africa's total merchandise exported in 2004. Only 10 percent of goods exported were traded within Africa, 42.8 percent to Europe, and Asia 16.8 percent, 5.8 percent to China alone.

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These, therefore, reinforces our quest for a literate and numerate Africa. An Africa which will provide every African child with quality education and imbibe science, technology, engineering and mathematics, to productive capacities, for our teeming youth to meet the market and industry demands of this century and beyond.

We would like to pay glowing tribute to the Government and people of Cuba for their remarkable achievements in ensuring a 100% literate and numerate

population and for their immense contribution towards world health and education as well as several other disciplines. For us in Africa, we share a common history and culture with Cuba and the Caribbean at large.

Our history, demography as well as our geo-strategic location places us in an advantageous position more than ever. Available statistics have indicated that Africa will account for 80% of the projected 4 billion increase in global population by 2100. This projected increase in Africa's working young population, would create a window of opportunity, which if properly harnessed, would translate into higher economic growth and yield demographic dividends. Investment in quality education, therefore, cannot be overemphasized. The magnitude of these demographic dividends will be transformational for Africa and will also have major implications for the African diaspora.

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"Emancipate yourself from mental slavery", Bob Marley told us, "and have no fear for atomic energy, for none of them can stop the time". The future is for those who dare to dream, and to act on their dreams.

In conclusion, let us aim for practical and concrete recommendations that will strengthen our collaborative efforts in our quest for sustainable development and improving the lot of our peoples. On this note, I wish you fruitful deliberations and thank you for your polite attention.

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