

**My Co-Chair, H.E Ambassador Dr Erieka Bennet,  
H.E. Ms. Xernona Clayton,  
H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, former Chairperson of the  
African Union Commission,  
Hon Baleka Mbete, Speaker of the National Assembly of the  
Republic of South Africa,  
H.E. Mrs. Samira Bawumia, Second Lady of the Republic of Ghana,  
Representatives of the African National Congress Women's  
League,  
Members of the Diaspora African Forum,  
Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

I am deeply humbled by your invitation to me to address this gathering to celebrate and honour women of Africa and the Diaspora who have contributed to Africa's independence and development. The African Union Commission is delighted to be associated with the African Women of Excellence Award. As the premier Award that has since 2015 recognized the most outstanding African and African American women in the World including former female Heads of States and Government and the first female Chairperson of the AUC, it is a great honour.

In this regard, I wish to congratulate the Awardees tonight and also recognize Living Legends who are here with us, such H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma the former Chairperson of the AUC and also Legends that have since departed, including Mama Winnie Mandikizela Mandela, Ruth

Sando Perry and Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin. On the same breath allow me to offer my condolences to the people of the Republic of South Africa on the untimely passing of Hon. Mrs. Edna Molewa, Minister of Environmental Affairs. She was one of the women leaders who contributed to the liberation struggle and achievement of freedom and women's rights in South Africa and one of few who dedicated their professional life to environmental protection. Robala ka Kagiso (Rest in Peace).

ONE MINUTE OF SILENCE – EDNA MOLEWA; MAMA WINNIE MANDELA.

### **Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

I am delighted, humbled and flattered by your invitation to be a part of this evening's event in the Republic of South Africa. South Africa, through its magnificent history of oppression, apartheid, liberation, forgiveness and reconciliation, demonstrates all that is in the African people. And by the African people, I refer not only to Africans on the continent, but to the entire African family of the diaspora.

I should like to pay tribute to all the gallant sisters who have contributed to our liberation as African People - Sisters like Yaa Asantewaa of Asante, Nanny Moore of Accompong in Jamaica, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, Mama Albertina Sisulu, Coretta Scott King, among others.

## **Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

While AWEA was conceptualised to Award Women, in 2017, the AWEA deviated from its tradition of awarding distinguished women, when it partnered with the AU Commission through the Women Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) to award the President of Rwanda H.E. Paul Kagame for making history by putting Rwanda at the top of female Parliamentary representation (64%) globally, when Rwanda hosted the AU Summit, in Kigali.

In preparation for the 4th AWEA Awards, the AU-Diaspora Forum collaborated with the AUC yet again to host the AWEA 2018 Awards and partly in celebration of the Pan- African Women's Day. As we celebrate this day allow me to specially thank HE Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, for her excellent work in the African Union Commission, and for her Legacy of the African Union's Agenda 2063. ***Her letter to Kwame***, still rings in our ears today. Mama - SIYABONGA.

It was Kwame, who said that the measure of a people's political maturity, is the political leadership of her women. That is why the education of women and girls is a critical sine qua non for Africa's liberation.

Our vision as an African Union, is to have every African child in school. We are striving towards a literate and a numerate Africa, as the foundation for our transformation as a continent, seeking to leverage science and technology in our development. That is the only way we can fully imbibe capital and technology to achieve the Africa we want, and so urgently need.

**Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We have a sacred task of preserving the legacies of these women of excellence and to ensure that their sacrifices are not in vain.

For us at the African Union Commission, we value the great contributions that women of Africa and the Diaspora have made in the liberation struggles against apartheid and colonialism and the role they continue to play in the development of the Continent. I am happy to affirm the announcement that a monument and historic African women's sculpture garden will be erected at a place of prominence in the African Union Commission compound, symbolizing the centrality of women's role in Africa's liberation and development. Portraits of the founding mothers of Africa and historic African women will also be displayed alongside the current portraits of the founding Fathers of Africa, indeed to demonstrate that women played key roles in the birth of the OAU now AU and in the continued struggles for economic freedom for Africa.

As you are aware, the AU has also granted Specialized Agency Status to the Pan-African Women's Organisation (also called PAWO), Africa's longest women's organization that was established in 1962, a year before the founding of the Organisation of African Unity now African Union. Today, in this gathering, we stand on the heels of those women of valor, women of fortitude and strength who stood together to be their *sisters' keepers* and ensured that women's concerns are integrated in the African liberation struggle agenda. Today, women, still remain the priority of the African Union.

During the 30th Assembly of AU Heads of State and Government in January 2018, the AU adopted a decision on women's quotas, committing to take specific measures by the year 2025, to achieve equal representation of women (i.e. 50/50) in the African Union Commission in all positions and to ensure that 35% of the AU workforce is made up of youth. This decision, reinforces an earlier parity decision that saw the election of the first women Chairperson of the African Union Commission. We believe that in order to have the Africa that we all want, which is prosperous and peaceful, women, who form the majority of citizens, must participate equally, fully and effectively in the affairs of the continent at all levels.

**Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The AU has also recently adopted a new Strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, which seeks to strengthen women's agency in Africa and ensure that women's voices are amplified and their concerns

addressed through, among others effective legislation implementation, proper financing of gender equality work.

**Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The AU also recognises that for Africa to reach its full potential and to be able to implement the above programmes with excellence, all Africans including peoples of African descent in the Diaspora must be fully integrated in all aspects of development of the continent. To that effect, the Diaspora African Forum is a very critical partner as it continues to support the AU's efforts and serves to bridge the gap with AU citizens from all works of life in Africa and abroad.

**Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In closing, I'd like to use this opportunity to reaffirm the African Union's commitment to ensure the integration of all people of African descent in African affairs and to strengthen collaboration with the Diaspora African Forum.

I salute every woman of excellence in this room and those celebrating this occasion from their homes. I wish you an enjoyable evening and wish you fruitful deliberations during the chat session.

**SIYABONGA**