

REMARKS BY THE DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION, H.E AMB. KWESI QUARTEY DURING THE COMMEMORATION THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF VICTORY IN THE KARAMARA BATTLE AND OF THE BEGINNING OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR THE ETHIOPIANS IN CUBA.

African Union, 10th October 2018.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Brothers and Sisters,

I would like to acknowledge the presence of all of you Excellencies, distinguished brothers and sisters. It is my honour and privilege to join you as you commemorate the 40th anniversary of the battle and victory in the Karamara battle and of the beginning of the educational program for the Ethiopians in Cuba. This is another occasion to exchange ideas on how to harness our human and capital resources as well as deepen our cultural and historic ties, close as they are despite the physical distance.

Allow me to also convey the warm felicitations from African Union Commission Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, who due to other pressing official engagements, could not join us today.

Excellencies, Distinguished Brothers and Sisters,

I had an opportunity to visit Cuba again in April this year. I had an opportunity to lay a wreath in a remembrance ceremony to pay respects to the legendary revolutionary leader Fidel Castro. This was not only a nostalgic visit for me, but a reminder of the existing deep bonds of friendship between the African and Cuban people. I witnessed this brotherly relations first hand while meeting with the diaspora community and from the interaction between African students and their Cuban counterparts.

For this hospitality and many other reasons I could state, Cuba remains an inspiration to Africa moreso because we share a common history. A history that has stood the test of time and for that, Legendary revolutionary leader Fidel Castro's legacy will be cherished in our hearts for generations to come, for the solidarity and generosity he extended to Africa during the anti-colonial struggles and post-colonial era.

As a matter of fact, as we gather here in Ethiopia today, we are reminded of the historic event on November 25, 1977, when the Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz signed the Order to start the military "Operation Baraguá" to support Ethiopia against the Somali invasion in the Ethiopian Ogaden. This military campaign to preserve the sovereignty of Ethiopia saw the participation of more than 17,000 Cubans. Unfortunately, in that struggle, Cuba lost 163 of their gallant soldiers on Ethiopian soil. 1989 marked "Tribute Operation" when the remains of the fallen soldiers were taken back home. What strikes us about the sacrifice by the Cubans, is that it was made under the internationalist spirit and not on the premise of getting anything out of Ethiopia or Africa. That is true friendship.

Brothers and sisters,

We cannot talk about Cuba without mentioning the health component. In Africa, the Cuban health assistance program dates back to 1960s when a Cuban medical brigade was sent to Algeria. Cuba provided assistance to the Algerian liberation movement. In 1961, a Cuban ship docked in Casablanca with weapons for the Algerian revolutionary fighters, and the ship returned to Cuba with Algerian orphans who were to be cared for and educated in Cuba.

Two years later in 1963, another Cuban ship arrived in Algeria with 55 doctors, nurses and technicians to support the Algerian revolution.

Much of Cuba's focus from 1966 was on Guinea Bissau's liberation struggle, where Cuban doctors and troops remained until the country's independence in 1974. This

intervention was considered Cuba's most successful until its intervention in Angola in 1975. On the eve of Angola's independence, it intervened in support of the Peoples' Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

We are challenged to learn and borrow a leaf from the Cuban health system which is renowned for producing well-rounded health practitioners. They are trained to practise in diverse communities, from the cities to the deep rural areas.

The question then is, how did they get it right? Through their comprehensive healthcare system, based on the four levels of care, everyone in the health system focuses on advancing health rather than only on treating disease. Notably in Cuba's far superior level of efficiency, professionalism, staffing, equipment and national emphasis on the four levels of care.

Today, a number of our member states have all hosted Cuban doctors in various capacities. For us as the African Union Commission, we are looking at how we can refer to the Cuba's health system model and make the best of the local training they offer as we seek to advance the health component of our people. A healthy people is a key element to our development.

Distinguished Brothers and Sisters,

Cuba has and continues to demonstrate the significance of harnessing the dividend of the people through investments, moreso, in education. Having a numerate and literate people is the underlying baseline for the socio-economic development of our nations.

In 1978 revolutionist Fidel invited the first group of young Ethiopians to study in Cuba and since then over 5000 Ethiopians have been educated in Cuba and that is among the reasons we are gathered here, 40 years later, to join the Ethio-Cubans in this one-week of activities in meant to extend appreciation to Comandante Fidel, Cuba and its people for the opportunity to access quality education but most importantly for the love and

solidarity over their years of stay in Cuba. This has not only been extended to Ethiopians but to many Africa nations alike.

In my discussion with Amb. Angel Villa, Cuba's permanent representative to the African Union, I learned that of the 13,364 youth studying in Cuba, 8,638 of them, that is 64%, are Africans from 45 African countries.

Therefore, as we explore more opportunities of collaboration between the African Union and Cuba, education remains the master key. This aligns with the vision of the Union to have every child in school. And there many areas that we could learn this including from their UNESCO certified curriculum but also we could expand the UNESCO certified "Yo si puedo" –Yes I can-- Adults Literacy Program with a literacy turnaround period of 7 weeks of schooling.

The African Union is seeking to collaborate with Cuba to develop the vision of having every African child in school and to advance the medical education in the continent. We need and have to build this capacity within.

Distinguished Brothers and Sisters,

It is said the further back we look, the further ahead we see. For that reason, if we critically interrogated our historical origin, and built on the seminal works of WEB Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, Eric Williams, just to name a few, the works of these iconic scholars find expression in our common struggle against slavery, colonialism and racism.

A significant portion of the 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.

In Africa today, a new momentum for structural transformation is gathering steam. 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.

Excellencies, Brothers and Sisters,

As I conclude, I believe our interaction here 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.

But most importantly, let us use this opportunity to celebrate victory in the Karamara battle and the transformative essence of education.

I look forward to a great deliberations and I thank you for your kind attention.