OFFICIAL LAUNCH PAN AFRICAN VIRTUAL AND E-UNIVERSITY UNDER THE HIGH PATRONAGE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON

YAOUNDE, CAMEROON
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SPEECH

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Commissioner for Human Resources, Science & Technology
African Union Commission
It is my great pleasure and honor to address you today on this auspicious occasion of the Official Launch of the Pan African Virtual and E-University under the high patronage of the President of The Republic of Cameroon, H.E. Paul Biya. Please accept greetings from the Chairperson of the African Union Commission H.E Dr. Moussa Faki Mahamat who extends congratulatory messages of good will, gratitude and best wishes during the coming festive season.

At the onset, allow me to start by expressing my profound gratitude to the
Government of Cameroon for hosting this inaugural launch of the Pan African Virtual and E-University. Lasting gratitude to the Prime Minister, the Minister for External Relations, the Minister of State and Minister of Higher Education, distinguished Government officials of the Republic of Cameroon for your continuous support, and for ensuring a successful launch in a most suitable and safe environment and the use of this facility.

Pooolah

Excellences, Distinguished ladies and Gentleman

Today marks a milestone in the actualization of one of a dozen flagship projects of the African Union’s Agenda 2063, the Pan African Africa Virtual and E-University (PAVEU). The proposal to operationalize PAVEU as an ODeL (Open, Distance and E-learning) arm of the PAU was endorsed by the Executive Council in January 2018 (Executive Council Decision EX.CL/Dec 987 (XXXII) Rev.1. And as you are aware, PAVEU is currently hosted at the PAU Rectorate Headquarters in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

In Africa, young people’s population is rising rapidly. Africa’s current youth population of more than 226million is predicted to more than double by 2050. Youth population growth has widespread social and economic implications for youth unemployment, intergenerational poverty and political unrest. Equally, when harnessed properly, growth in youth population creates the opportunity for democratic dividend through abundance of working age people in productive sectors leading to higher productivity, economic growth, sustainable development and security for all. However, unlike in any other region, because of rising youth unemployment, living conditions for many young Africans are far from desirable. Of those that are in employment, especially women, Africa has the highest global share of the youth population classified as the
‘working poor’. This is because many of them are either under-employed or in vulnerable informal employment under precarious conditions, as such, with low productivity. Apart from this, there is the related issue of skills mismatch between the education our young people have received and labor market needs. Moreover, access to quality and relevant education and training as well as options to develop entrepreneurial skills as a way to resolve the pressing challenge of ‘school-to-work transition’ are lacking for many young Africans. Consequently, many educated youths across the continent, frustrated with their own state of joblessness and under-productivity have become somewhat disillusioned. As a result, serious questions must be asked about the relevance and the quality of the education and training that we provide to our young people, particularly to women, the disabled and the under-represented rural youth population.

Excellences, Distinguished ladies and Gentleman, Education in Africa is facing a critical challenge to meet new demands of the 21st century, with its ever-increasing youthful population seeking primary, secondary, and tertiary education opportunities. In addition, it is also clear that educational institutions in Africa are not expanding enough to accommodate the increasing numbers of students seeking access to higher education. Knowing that Africa urgently needs qualified and skilled professionals to fuel development and address the challenges confronting the continent, there is a need to provide a more flexible educational system for students. To reverse these conditions, thereby realize our vision of the ‘Africa We Want’ under Agenda 2063, which is: “An integrated, peaceful, prosperous Africa, driven by its own citizens to take up its rightful place in the global arena”, unhindered access to quality education,
training and support for youth entrepreneurship is vital. As architects of their own future, it is important to recognize that young African’s have aspirations far broader in scope and ambition than mere education certificates. Thus, their ideas and future employment priorities must be valued, nurtured and supported at all times through a new vision to Higher Education (H.E) provision that embraces the Agenda 2063 framework. This entails supporting Africa’s vibrant youth population based on collaboration, knowledge exchange and partnership, particularly in the areas of education, vocational training and skills development for self-employment. We need to look at the future of work.

The Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL), which with its multi-faceted formats, provides the most viable additional option for those seeking higher education and continuing learning. The PAVEU aims at capitalizing on the digital revolution and global knowledge to multiply access to higher education, reaching large numbers of students and professionals in multiple sites simultaneously, any time at any place. The Vision of PAVEU is to be a leading Center of excellence in providing open access to online higher education and researchers for the advancement of Africa.

**Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen,**

With rapidly changing work environments and increasing need for higher education in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), and content in employability and entrepreneurial skills, more workers and graduates will require unusual mechanisms to access learning opportunities. Furthermore, even regular institutions of learning will benefit from upgrading to technology-enabled and technology-compatible environments and will require exemplars and models.
What HRST/AUC is doing to champion this new vision of Africa’s HE provision
Our new vision of HE provision envisages working with a wide-range of continental and international partners and experts to achieve our demographic dividend by developing a world class human capital to drive Africa’s economic and technological transformation agenda through universal access to quality Higher Education in enterprise creation and management under the Continental Education Strategy of Africa (CESA 16-25). CESA 16-25 aims to develop competent human resources to achieve the vision of the African Union through investments made by Member States and the private sector. A broad range of initiatives and education programmes seeking to emulate this inclusive approach to supporting our young people have been launched in recent times led by the African Union Commission (AUC) in collaboration with key development partners dedicated to youth entrepreneurship promotion in Africa. Chief amongst these initiatives is the ‘One Million By 2021 Initiative’ launched in April 2014 spearheaded by the AUC Chairperson, His office alongside the Department of Human Resource, Science and Technology (HRST). Prior to this, there have been a number of continent-wide education initiatives targeted at African youths, particularly under the Pan-Africa University (PAU). As a key part of advancing this initiative, one of AU’s flagship projects for realizing the vision of Agenda 2063 under PAU is the Pan African Virtual and E- University (PAVEU). The PAVEU aims to accelerate development of human capital, science and technology and innovation through increasing access to continuing education in Africa by capitalizing on the digital revolution and global knowledge; reaching large numbers of students and professionals in multiple sites simultaneously- anywhere, anytime; and by consolidating African initiatives and strategies on accelerated development of human capital; science, technology and innovation.
• **PAVEU at a glance**

PAVEU shall use modern, adaptive and emerging technologies to make higher education available to students all over Africa and beyond. All course materials and assignments will be accessible online via an e-learning platform. In addition to the core learning objectives, the eLearning platform shall expose students to the emerging technologies on the internet and enable them to acquire communication skills that are critical for professionals in the international arena. At the end of the course at PAUVE, students will have a solid grounding and good understanding of the fundamental concepts of entrepreneurship and digital literacy and be able to develop an entrepreneurial mindset, start their own business and be supported to scale through access to market and investors. Our students will also be supported to protect their own intellectual assets and innovation through exposure to a comprehensive and most sophisticated intellectual frameworks that uphold industry practices. The technologies and ways of learning shall allow for the following:

**Flexibility:** students can access learning experiences that are self-paced from anywhere at any time at their convenience. Such flexibility could allow a multi-disciplinary and modular approach to customizing their degree. It will link blended learning opportunities by utilizing existing PAU infrastructure and those of our partners;

**Supportive:** tutors and facilitators will provide academic guidance, advice to help students in all aspects of study;

**Social:** students will have the opportunity to get together through online conferencing, study networks and course forums;

**Self-Paced:** due to the self-paced delivery and reception of the learning materials, students will have more time to assimilate course materials and concepts through
initiative, goal-setting, responsibility and leadership, thereby contribute to shaping their own aspiration and future.

The advantage of the PAVEU is the creation of conditions for all interested and motivated students to work in their respective comfortable environment and take courses of interest without being restricted to the classroom and work at a pace the student finds convenient. Prescribed textbooks and materials useful to the student will be made available online.

To realize its strategic vision and mission, the following are the expected outcomes of the PAVEU Project:

- Sustained and technology enhanced contribution to the capacity building and generation of knowledge for present and future African Union stakeholders;
- Enhanced attractiveness of African higher education and research institutions for effective development and retention of young African talent, while attracting the best intellectual capital from across the globe, including the African Diaspora;
- Invigorated dynamic and productive partnership with public and private sectors;
- Greater visibility and proportionate contribution of African scholars to the global knowledge arena;
• Creating and empowering innovators and entrepreneurs for the ever expanding and often demanding job market, especially for the African youth;

• Reaching out to the less-human-resource-endowed parts of Africa.

In conclusion, the PAVEU shall build its unique reputation and identity in terms of Agenda 2013 aspirations, and then look for partnerships that would bring the best value based on a needs analysis. And I wish to thank in a special way our partners such as VMware, UNESCO, African Virtual University (AVU) and Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative (GESCI) who have allowed us to fly on their wings during this launch. I also wish to thank the PAVEU Taskforce and Panel of experts who have voluntarily tirelessly walked with us through this arduous journey. Kudos as you today witness the fruits of your effort. And to all of you, I wish you a Merry Christmas, Happy New year and Gods Grace.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION