

# **ACCEPTANCE STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICAN PRESIDENT H.E CYRIL RAMAPHOSA ON ASSUMING THE CHAIR OF THE AFRICAN UNION FOR 2020**

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33<sup>rd</sup> SESSION OF THE AFRICAN UNION ASSEMBLY

09 FEBRUARY 2020

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

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Excellencies,

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Your Excellency, President El-Sisi, outgoing Chair of the African Union;

Your Majesties;

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government;

Your Excellency, Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AU Commission;

Your Excellency, Mr Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations;

Honourable Mohammed Shtayyeh, Prime Minister of the State of Palestine  
representing President Mahmoud Abbas;

Your Excellencies, former Heads of State and Government;

Heads of AU Organs;

Heads of Regional Economic Communities;

Commissioners of the AU Commission;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Fellow Africans,

I stand before you immensely humbled by this great honour that has been bestowed on South Africa. On behalf of the men and women of South Africa I graciously accept your collective decision that I should Chair the AU in 2020.

In executing this weighty responsibility I will rely on your continued support, wisdom and co-operation, especially that of the new Bureau members.

I want to thank our host, Nobel Peace Laureate Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the government and the people of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for the excellent hospitality extended to me and my delegation since our arrival here in Addis Ababa.

I also thank my Brother, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi for the outstanding and commendable manner in which he presided over the work of the AU during his term.

South Africa first chaired the African Union (AU) following its historic re-launch in South Africa in 2002 when President Thabo Mbeki, who is here with us today, became chair of the AU. We are indeed deeply humbled to have been afforded the opportunity once again to lead this august continental body of governance, and by the confidence that has been vested in us today.

Your Excellencies, we are mindful of our weighty mission, but also of the weight of history here in Ethiopia, a place with such deep and profound connections to Africa's ancient past.

Up in the highlands of the north of Ethiopia in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, our ancestors tamed the harsh terrain and established agriculture, herded livestock, minted their own coinage, created their own alphabetical script, built towering monuments that stand even to this day, and forged expansive trade routes across the region.

Over the passage of and in the context of the time, our forebears understood that true progress and development could be advanced through trade and working together.

Today we stand at the cusp of the greatest step towards continental unity since the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) that we adopted last year will enable us to work together through intra-Africa trade, as it will reignite industrialisation and pave the way for Africa's integration into the global economy as a player of considerable scale.

It is the realization of the dream of our forebears, to see the rich resources of Africa being marshalled for the collective benefit of Africans.

Indeed we are a continent that is rich.

Africa is rich in natural resources yes, but also in history, in intellectual output, in culture, in a sense of humanity and in human capital.

As Africans living in this new era, we shoulder the greatest of responsibilities, to ensure that Africa's wealth does not become her poverty; that her blessing does not become her curse; and that our endowment does not become our downfall.

It is to us that the task has fallen to build an Africa that is prosperous and at peace with itself.

An Africa that is capable of achieving the aspirations this august body set out in Agenda 2063.

An Africa connected through a vast network of roads and railways, enabling the free movement of goods, people and services.

An Africa whose vast tracts of land support agriculture, commerce and livelihoods.

An Africa whose mighty rivers are harnessed to create power and bring electricity to villages, towns, cities, homes and businesses.

As incoming AU Chair, we have set ourselves key priorities to enhance the progress that is already underway during the African Decade of Action.

We would like to deepen our work together in deepening the unity of our continent and advancing inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

Our collective work to ensure political and economic unity, good governance, and peace should be strengthened by supporting integration, industrialization, economic development, trade and investment.

In pursuit of this priority, we will host the 13th Extraordinary Summit on the AfCFTA to be held back-to-back with the Extraordinary Summit on Silencing of the Guns in May 2020.

Working closely with President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger in his capacity as the AU Champion on the AfCFTA, we will work for the finalization of outstanding issues around the agreement.

We must all ensure that the AfCFTA does not become a conduit for products with minimal African value addition to enter and penetrate our local markets under the guise of continental integration.

There must be a reasonable standard set for what constitutes a product that is Proudly Made in Africa.

We have to level the playing field for African businesses, so they are able to operate in a large-scale market unfettered by regulatory fragmentation. This is an integral part of rebalancing global trade relations.

The era of economic colonialism and imperialism, under which Africa is a pit stop in the global assembly line, has passed.

The success of the AfCTFA depends on Infrastructure development.

We must all drive the implementation of the Presidential Infrastructure Champion Initiative, so that priority and high-impact projects act as catalysts for the AfCFTA.

Beyond trade integration, we have trained our sights on supporting green growth on the continent, and on ensuring that the continent takes advantage of the opportunities presented by the green transition.

This includes new industries in energy, materials engineering, the circular economy, sustainable agriculture and clean production.

The 4th Industrial Revolution presents our continent with great opportunities. The uptake of digital technologies will lead to improved competitiveness and provides fresh opportunities for inclusive growth.

Millions of our continent's young citizens are digital natives, and we must drive a skills revolution to enable Africa to take a quantum leap into the economy of the future. To give full effect to our attention to this important area of work, we should

look to establish an Africa Artificial Intelligence (AI) Forum, that also includes the diaspora.

Your Excellencies

In this, the year that we conclude the Decade of African Women, we must advance women's economic and financial inclusion, we must address the scourge of gender-based violence.

We want to focus on ensuring that there is accountability to global gender commitments.

We have heard the calls of the women and girls of Africa for liberation from the shackles of patriarchy, violence and economic exclusion.

We recall the words of the Egyptian novelist and activist Nawal el Saadawi, that women are half the society. You cannot have a revolution without women. You cannot have democracy without women.

We intend to work closely with President Akufo-Addo of Ghana to ensure the interests of women are mainstreamed, and want the years 2020 to 2030 declared as the Decade of African Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion.

I believe that the work of the Pan African Women's Organisation PAWO, an organisation that was founded in 1962, a year before the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to promote human rights and gender equality should be strengthened in order for it to play its rightful role.

We have to find more practical and sustainable ways of empowering the women of our continent: ways that go beyond the clichés and pronouncements made from podiums as we are wont to do.

Public and private procurements offer great opportunities as they account for 30% of the GDP of many countries on the continent.

Agenda 2063 calls for the allocation of at least 25 per cent of public procurement to be for women-owned businesses, yet women owned-businesses are given less than 1% of procurement.

We have to change this.

It is not unreasonable to advocate for preferential public procurement legislation to advantage women-owned businesses, and for the establishment of preferential trade and customs regimes for women.

The empowerment of women on our continent can be done. It must be done!

The representation of women in decision making structures in governments, parliaments and other sectors is far too low.

The women of our continent want and demand to occupy their rightful place in all decision making structures. They deserve 50% representation.

Those amongst us who have enabled the participation of more women in decision making structures have benefited immensely from the inherent wisdom, insights and energy. The women of our continent want to play a meaningful role in developing our continent. Let us not hold them back.

Violence against women continues to rage on our continent.

We will make the adoption of a AU Convention on Violence Against Women a priority, and for member states to ratify international protocols that outlaw gender discrimination.

We will support the good governance and democracy agenda, leveraging the excellent work of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) that we have been asked to chair.

We now have 40 member states that have joined the APRM. We will engage those Member States that have not ratified to do so, with a view to achieving universal accession by 2030.

We will make a contribution to promote peace and security in our collective effort to Silence the Guns.

Through the AU Peace and Security Council, the AU Commission and the collective membership, we will focus our efforts on conflict resolution across the African continent, especially those experiencing protracted conflicts.

We will work with President Denis Sasso N’Guesso, in his capacity as the Chairperson of the AU High Level Committee on Libya to convene an intra-Libyan Conference to promote ceasefire and dialogue.

We will continue to work the parties in South Sudan with a view to implementing the outstanding issues of the Revitalised Agreement, in order to pave the way for the formation of the Government of National Unity.

South Africa will also host the Extra-Ordinary Summit on Silencing of the Guns in May 2020 to look at the implementation of the AU Master Roadmap, and at the same time respond to emerging circumstances on the African peace and security landscape.

The Summit must come up with real actions we as Africans must take to end conflicts, and deal with acts of terrorism that are raging in many countries and regions such as the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and now spreading to other parts of Southern Africa as well.

We must also deal with the actions of other countries outside our continent that are fighting proxy wars and fuelling the ongoing conflicts.



The principle of finding African solutions for African problems must be our overriding theme in addressing all the conflicts on our continent as we work within the frameworks of the AU and the UN.

During our chair-ship we will champion the positioning of Africa as a strong, resilient and influential global player, and advancing AU-UN cooperation will be key. We must ensure that Africa continues to play an even greater role on the world stage.

It is therefore an imperative of the time that as Africa we continue to assert the primacy of multilateralism in world affairs. We must continue to advance this through bolstering the AU's relationship with the United Nations (UN).

We must focus on the reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC), advancing the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), and giving effect to the 2016 UN commitments on HIV/Aids.

Our collective fortunes rely on international cooperation, and in ensuring we leave no-one behind.

That is why the African Union must continue with its support for the struggles of people everywhere that still suffer under the yoke of oppression.

Today we reaffirm our unwavering support and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their legitimate quest for an independent and sovereign State, as well as the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination.

We must ensure that our independence and freedom as the peoples of this continent should be universal.

As the internationally acclaimed musician Jonas Gwangwa sang: "Freedom for some is Freedom for none".

Our international cooperation must extend to the continental effort to address the global climate crisis.

As Chair of the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC) South Africa will prioritise all three Global Goals in the Paris Agreement, namely mitigation, adaptation and support.

Your Excellencies,

Our Union stands as a testament to the power of political unity.

Let us now resume the onward march towards economic integration, development, progress, growth and shared prosperity.

Our continent is definitely on the ascent.

It is indeed a regeneration moral and eternal, as described by the South African revolutionary Pixley isaka Seme.

Let us build the Africa we Want.

Let the Guns be Silenced.

Let our swords be beaten to ploughshares, and our spears turned into pruning hooks.

It is the actions that we take from this day onwards that will determine our continent's destiny.

If we pursue our objectives with diligence and determination, and mobilize our people to support them, I am certain that ours can be a meaningful, effective and impactful Union.

In the words of the great son of the African soil, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o :

“Today is tomorrow’s treasury. Tomorrow is the harvest of what we plant today.”

Fellow African leaders, we salute you.

Through your leadership you have sown the seeds for meaningful African unity.

With all the actions we take to consolidate the unity of our continent, to foster economic integration, to empower the women of Africa and to Silence the Guns, let us now look eagerly to the harvest.

Our people await the harvest of our work.

As glorious is our past, so too will be our future.

I thank you.