

AFRICAN UNION

الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

The 6th Meeting of the World Congress
for Freedom of Scientific Research
25 -26 February 2020
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

WELCOME REMARKS BY

H.E. Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor, Commissioner HRST

Prof. Marco Perduca, Co-founder and Coordinator Science for Democracy;

Mr. Marco Cappato, Co-founder and Coordinator Science for Democracy;

Ms. Filomena Gallo, Secretary General, Luca Coscioni Association for Freedom of Scientific Research;

Prof. Sir Richard John Robert, Nobel Prize Laureate in Physiology;

H.E. Amb. Pelodi from the Italian Embassy in Addis Ababa;

Distinguished guests and stakeholders in your different portfolios;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

As a teacher, I begin my class by saying, Good Morning Class! And my students respond, Good morning Professor. So, I imagine this arena as my classroom and I say Good morning Class.

On behalf of the Chairperson of the African union Commission, H.E. Dr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, I welcome each and every one of you to the Headquarters of the African union Commission as we celebrate the 6th World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research.

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome all the participants to the 6th World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research with the theme; *“The Right to Enjoy the Benefits of Science; An African Perspective”*, hosted and facilitated by the African Union Commission through the Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology, in Collaboration with the Associazione Luca Coscioni and Science Democracy. Let me thank these institutions. The goal of this Congress is to promote the right of every citizen to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications, to promote Freedom of Scientific Research and conservation, development, and diffusion of science, technology and innovation to ensure that the continent undertakes research and innovation that address our socio-economic development

challenges as articulated in our long-term Agenda 2063, and going beyond to the Sustainable Development Goals. Agenda 2063 vision is that vision of; “an integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa driven by its own competent and skillful citizens able to play in the global arena”.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Is it not interesting to say that science is a Human Right? That each person has the right to enjoy the fruits of Science?

Your very presence here today is a powerful reflection of our collective desire to see a positive change, through an effective and progressive response to our collective action to advance science, technology and innovation for the betterment of humanity by addressing pressing societal challenges such as food and nutrition security, escalating population growth; huge energy deficit; poverty and inequalities; diseases; adverse impact of climate change; weak research and associated digital infrastructures and low investment in science and technology to mention a few.

Africa is still disproportionately affected by all these known development challenges therefore advances in science, technology and innovation become very critical for our socio-economic development. Our continental development is anchored on our people centred and long-term AU Agenda 2063, which is “both a Vision for Africa and a Call to Action to all segments of our society, the Member States, Regional Economic Communities, regional institutions, private sector and our development partners to work together and systematically address our socio-economic challenges”.

The Commission considers Education, Youth and Capacity Development, Science, Technology and Innovation among the key enablers and tools for delivering on the aspirations of the African citizens and creation of long-term economic benefits for the continent

and beyond. In this regard we elaborated three distinct strategies for Education: the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (CESA-16-25); Technical and Vocational Education and Training; and Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA-2024) to drive human capital development, youth empowerment, productivity and economic growth. These strategies enable us to break down barriers that create a fragmented system on the continent through strengthening coordination and addressing weak levels of investment in these sectors. Hence, we are convinced that we need to reach out to key stakeholders across our countries, across sectors and policy spectrum to promote a multi-disciplinary approach that creates new value chains, adds value to our natural resources and accelerates the diffusion of breakthrough innovations into industries and society.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Congress creates an important platform for cross fertilization of ideas expected to tackle the global debates surrounding the “Right to Science”, which constitutes the object of the latest “General Comment” of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It is indeed through the activation of essential debates by such communities represented at this congress that substantial, meaningful and relevant inputs are gathered in order to give policy guidance to the Member States that we serve. It is for this reason we say; *“UBUNTU, I Am Because We Are”*.

I agree with you Prof. Marco Perduca that, every one of the 17 SDG should have an aspect of science to be accomplished. But also, Agenda 2063 speaks to a transformed Africa. Its vision and the 7 Aspirations ofcourse align to a foundation of Science. How do we achieve zero hunger, health, portable water and clean energy without promoting science, technology and innovation?

This congress launched in 2014 to foster science among the community and Government is very important because policy makers need to know the importance of science to mankind. The Africa Union recognizes the need for us to promote science and Technology and Innovation for the transformation of the “Africa We Want”. Hence our Science Strategy seen through STISA 2024 speaks to the African Perspective of STI as well as aligns itself to the theme of this 6th Congress. The strategy is firmly anchored on 6 distinct priority areas that contribute to the AU vision. These priority areas are:

- 1- Eradication of Hunger and achieving Food Security;
- 2- Prevention and control of Diseases;
- 3- Communication (Physical and Intellectual mobility)
- 4- Protection of our space;
- 5- Live together - build the society and;
- 6- Wealth creation.

How do we achieve these six distinct priority areas if we do not build on STI or upgrade research infrastructures as well as consolidate on STI and Research and Development?

Because we believe that science can benefit our people and it is a right to conducive and sustainable development, STI becomes the tool that will address societal needs and challenges such as to improve human capital, technical competence, infrastructure, enabling environment, Agriculture and clean energy, education and health. We need to dedicate more investments on Education, STI and Research and Development for the transformation of the “Africa We Want”. Science is a common good of the human life.

“The Rights to Enjoy the Benefits of Science: An African Perspective”, is a theme that speaks to our own Aspirations as a Department. We want a science that can speak to our poverty and impoverished situation, climate change, portable water, clean energy, and so on. This is very important because we must ensure that the human right for

science can be achieved. To do this, we need to create cooperation opportunities, partnerships and financing. Scientists can help to achieve prosperity and success if only governments and policy makers can provide enabling environment for STI.

Together we are stronger. It is said that “coming together is the beginning, working together is progress, but staying together is success”. We need to stay together harnessing our efforts to achieve our goals and visions. Indeed what affects Africa, affects the world and vice versa. It therefore means we must use an integrative approach.

One way for Africans to enjoy the “benefits of science” is for us to upscale our traditional medicine through medicinal Plant Research so that these indigenous traditional medicine can become competing pharmaceutical products that can benefit our people.

Let me once again, thank you for your participation and all those involved in the organization of the congress for a timely dialogue on Freedom of Scientific Research, “*The Right to Enjoy the Benefits of Science; An African Perspective*” and I have no doubt that the recommendations from this Congress will impact the world, and empower us to raise the profile and the central role of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation for sustainable development in Africa.

Lasting gratitude to the organisers, Stakeholders and all participants.

I wish you successful deliberations! Thank you! Merci Beaucoup! Obrigado! Shokran!