

Your Excellency Félix Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo and outgoing Chairperson of the African Union,

Your Excellency Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal and incoming Chairperson of the African Union,

Your Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,

Excellencies Heads of State and Government,

Distinguished Ministers,

Commissioners,

Excellencies Ambassadors,

Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, let me welcome you all to the Land of Origins on behalf of the people and government of Ethiopia.

Let me also take this opportunity to celebrate our reunion in Addis Ababa after a two-year disruption caused by the COVID19 pandemic. In this regard, I wish to express my appreciation to the entire leadership of our Union, and particularly to His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa, for providing exemplary leadership in our collective response to the challenges of the pandemic.

Over the past two years, we have struggled not only against the human cost of the pandemic but also an inequitable system of vaccine distribution, arbitrary travel bans, border closures, lockdowns and misinformation about the value of vaccines.

Most importantly, as Africans, we have also learnt that cooperation and collaboration is vital not only for our health but also for our collective survival.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Our Union has committed to undertake ambitious plans designed to transform our continent and create the Africa We Want.

We want a prosperous Africa based on sustainable and equitable development.

We want a politically united continent that aspires to fulfill the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of an African Renaissance.

Fulfilling our aim of birthing the Africa We Want through robust implementation of Agenda 2063 and its flagship projects will require us to make extraordinary efforts collectively.

Our theme for 2022 is nutrition and food security.

Over the past year, acute food insecurity in Africa has increased by over 60 percent as the effects of COVID19 continue to aggravate our fragile economies.

Floods, droughts, desert locust and other climate-related natural disasters have increased food insecurity for millions of our citizens.

With 60% of the world's arable land in Africa, it is of utmost importance that we need to use our natural assets to maximize agricultural output and feed our people without reliance on external assistance.

In the past two years, Ethiopia has made substantial investments in intensifying summer wheat production through irrigation. Our farmers have been able to control and manage production factors to maximize yields using irrigation. Nationally, we have attained production of 20 million quintals of irrigated wheat farmed on over 500,000 hectares. This has generated nearly 60 billion birr in income to our farmers.

These efforts are generating great results and will, in the imaginable future, begin to contribute to our food security and self-sufficiency, despite the climate variability our region is confronted with.

One of the toughest challenges we face in Ethiopia is dealing with the effects of deforestation. While a century ago, Ethiopia's forest coverage was 35 percent, over the past two decades, our forest coverage stands at just 4 per cent.

We believe afforestation is one of the most effective ways of climate change mitigation. Beginning in 2019, we launched a major reforestation initiative under the slogan "Green Legacy".

Our aim was to plant 20 billion trees across the country over the course of a four-year period. In a mere three years, we managed to plant 18 billion seedlings. And this year, with the Green Legacy initiative in its final year, we will not only meet our national target, but plan to surpass the target by reaching 25 billion.

Additionally, through this initiative, we have sent seedlings to neighboring countries to inspire regional efforts.

If we can collaborate to spread the message of "Green Legacy" in the continent and implement measures that maximize our food security and self-sufficiency, we will be able to guarantee our citizens the basic necessities of life without reliance on charity.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Africa's voice on the world stage needs to be heard loud and clear.

Africa must also be represented on important international bodies.

Today, more than seven decades after the creation of the United Nations, Africa remains a junior partner without meaningful input or role in the system of international governance. This is particularly true of the United Nations where Africa lacks representation on the Security Council and is underrepresented in a variety of ways.

It is the right time to reform and revitalize the United Nations system to reflect current global realities and ensure that it is a more representative and equitable body. Only fair representation and transparency in those institutions can usher in a just era in multilateralism.

Consistent with our Ezulwini Consensus of 2005, we should collectively insist that Africa's reasonable request for no less than two permanent seats and five non-permanent seats in the UN Security Council be adopted.

Equally important is Africa's media representation on the international stage.

Africa is often portrayed in the international media negatively. The endless representation as a continent troubled by civil wars, hunger, corruption, greed, disease and poverty is demeaning and dehumanizing and likely driven by a calculated strategy and agenda.

The stereotypical and negative media representations of Africa not only disinform the rest of the world about our continent, but it also shapes the way we see ourselves as Africans.

Telling our own stories and shaping our own narratives must be our top priority.

In this regard, I would like to propose to this august body the establishment of an African Union Continental Media House.

This media house could be organized to provide authoritative news and information on our continent, fight disinformation, promote our collective agenda and offer opportunities for Pan African voices to be heard.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Peace and security are critical issues affecting our continent.

Despite the African Union's intensive engagement in addressing peace and security challenges of the continent, guided by the maxim "African Solutions to African Problems", new and complex problems that undermine our unity and sovereignty continue to emerge.

In this respect, the past year was particularly challenging to our continent in general, and my own country Ethiopia in particular.

Ethiopia's challenge was internal in nature and a matter of maintaining law and order.

But resolution of our internal matters was made exceedingly difficult by the role played by external actors.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support, solidarity and understanding as we underwent these trying times.

As you are aware, despite the intransigence of the other side in this conflict, my Government has taken a variety of measures to minimize the loss of life and destruction of property.

We have implemented unilateral withdrawal from conflict areas and used force that is necessary to ensure law and order.

As a gesture of good will, we have released high profile suspects with a view to creating a conducive environment for peace.

We shall leave no stone unturned in our search for peace in our country.

Consistent with our commitment to peaceful resolution of conflict, we have recently launched an inclusive national dialogue platform with formal legislation.

Our commitment to pursuing a lasting and durable peace in our country shall remain steadfast.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The greatest lesson that Ethiopia has learned over the past year is that without the solidarity of our African brothers and sisters, our existence as a nation would have been at great risk.

This affirms the wisdom of our forefathers and foremothers in their dream of Pan Africanism.

The old saying is true. United we stand, divided we fall. Today, we stand proud and tall as Africans in the shadow of those who struggled to liberate and unite Africa. Our steadfast unity is the anchor and foundation of our Agenda 2063.

A continent of 1.3 billion people, a substantial percentage of them young and dynamic, will drive Africa's prosperity and pull it out of poverty as we set forth in our Agenda 2063.

Also, our continental free trade agreement holds the greatest promise for effectively realizing continental integration and development. The potential for increased intra-Africa trade, free movement of people and investments and self-reliance is a beacon for Africa's renaissance.

Instead of depending solely on trade out of Africa, our collective effort to boost intra-Africa trade will protect us from the fluctuations of global economic and political changes.

Similarly, the potential for continent wide tourism remains untapped. It is part of Aspiration 5 of Agenda 2063 which seeks to create an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics. The more we know each other, the more we are able to cooperate and resist the forces that seek to divide and undermine us.

You may recall a mere two months ago efforts were underway by some in the international community to create an atmosphere of fear to drive expatriates out of Ethiopia and discourage travel to Ethiopia. Those efforts were not successful. And will not be successful!

Indeed, many fellow Africans joined the Great Ethiopian Diaspora Homecoming challenge and proved to the world Ethiopia is a safe and culturally rich tourist destination.

As a key pillar of our national reform agenda, tourism potential within Ethiopia has been augmented greatly in the past two years with many natural endowments developed to complement the historical and cultural heritage that already exists. Ethiopia remains open and welcomes all of our fellow African brothers and sisters!

Finally, let me once again convey the warm welcome of the Ethiopian people, and reiterate Ethiopia's commitment to do everything in our power to continue to create an enabling environment for the African Union in our collective efforts to deliver the Africa We Want through robust implementation of Agenda 2063.

**God Bless Ethiopia
God Bless Africa
I Thank You!**

February 5, 2022