

**Speech of H.E Mr. Kamel Meddouri, Prime Minister of the Republic of Tunisia**

*At the opening of the ministers' meeting during the fifth ordinary session of the African Union Specialized Commission on Public Service, Local Government, Urban Development, and Decentralization.*

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**In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful,**

**Honorable Ministers, Esteemed Guests,**

**Mrs. Amani Abou-Zeid, African Union Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy, Mr. Bankole Adeoye, African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security,**

**Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests of Tunisia,**

It is with great pride and honor that I am entrusted today with the task of opening the Ministerial Meeting of the 5th Ordinary Session of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Public Service, Local Government, Urban Development, and Decentralization. Tunisia is honored to host the meetings of its Bureau and preparatory works, starting on December 16, 2024.

Allow me, at the outset, to warmly welcome you to your country, dear brothers and friends, wishing you a pleasant stay with us.

I would like to express my happiness that Tunisia has been chosen to host the meetings of this session, especially since its themes and outcomes go beyond technical and practical aspects, to deeply intertwine with the

strategic plans of countries and their broader political choices. This contributes to further solidifying the principle of "African solutions to African challenges," as the most effective and only way to address the common challenges we face.

While I highly appreciate the African Union's initiative to hold this session in Tunisia, I wish to reaffirm Tunisia's commitment, under the leadership of His Excellency President Kais Saied, to strengthening cooperation and integration with our African brotherhood, underscoring Tunisia's deep attachment to its African roots and its dedication to supporting the bonds of brotherhood, friendship, and cooperation with all African nations.

Tunisia, which has long been a proud part of the African continent, having engaged with its African brothers in the struggle against colonialism and racial discrimination, and in efforts to support peace, security, and stability, is today more determined than ever to continue its work in cooperation and coordination with African countries to address the multiple challenges facing our continent on various fronts. This is rooted in our deep belief in the unity of destiny and the necessity of collective action.

Our hosting of this meeting, focusing on vital and citizen-centered areas such as public administration, aims at exploring ways to improve the delivery of services, enhance citizens' access to their entitlements, and secure dignified living standards for all. This reflects our deep awareness of the challenges ahead, and our steadfast determination to continue with reforms and to strengthen the foundations of democracy and the rule of law. We do this while relying on our own capabilities and human resources, as well as welcoming opportunities for collaboration with our partners based on mutual benefits and national sovereignty.

Tunisia, always committed to multilateralism, places great importance on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. We firmly believe that the 2030 Agenda, with its fundamental principle of “leaving no one behind,” and the African Union's Agenda 2063, under the theme "The Africa We Want," should serve as key tools in building a future that truly addresses the needs of sustainable development.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Our continent is rich in promising human resources, yet its public administration faces numerous challenges, requiring a series of reforms in public service to anticipate transitions, react to changes, and keep pace with current developments. Tunisia is committed to major reforms in this area, which have two main pillars:

- The first is primarily social: breaking away from precarious employment practices in the public sector by implementing measures to abolish outsourced labor in the public sector and regularizing the status of temporary and contract workers in public institutions.
- The second is technical: modernizing human resource management in public administration through a comprehensive review of the general legal framework for public service, encouraging staff mobility by offering financial and professional incentives, and renewing the individual performance evaluation system to align with best practices. We are also updating the administrative systems for human resources management as part of our digital transformation.

Furthermore, the Tunisian government is continuing to implement several projects to simplify administrative procedures for citizens and businesses, which will result in 88% of administrative processes being digitized in the near future, along with a 40% increase in decentralization. Additionally,

we are working to bring administrative services closer to the public by establishing administrative service centers across the entire country, especially in rural areas, as part of our unique digital transformation experience.

Tunisia has made significant strides in digital transition, as reflected in the United Nations 2024 report on digital government readiness, where Tunisia ranked first in Africa for digital transformation.

This progress is attributed to the political will to harness digital technologies for developing public services that place the citizen at their core. Key strategic directions in this context include:

- Developing digital infrastructure by expanding high-capacity networks and enhancing the capacity of national and sectoral data centers, as well as establishing an interconnection platform to exchange data across various state institutions. Recently, agreements were signed to issue licenses for 5G mobile networks, laying the groundwork for 5G telecommunications services.
- Digital and financial inclusion for social integration, through improving connectivity access rates in various regions and diversifying electronic payment methods to facilitate access to digital services locally and regionally.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Tunisia has always placed great importance on local governance within the context of defining national strategies and policies. Local government in Tunisia has undergone numerous phases since its inception, culminating in the adoption of the July 25, 2022 Constitution, which marks a new stage in decentralization and local governance, focusing on grassroots development, starting with elected local councils.

The new constitution established for the first time a National Council for Regions and Districts, composed of elected representatives from regional and district councils. Among its key responsibilities are reviewing projects related to the national budget and regional development plans, ensuring balance among regions, and overseeing the implementation of budgets and development plans.

To address developmental challenges at the local level, several programs and projects aimed at local development have been launched, including:

1. The Urban Development and Local Governance Program, which aims to strengthen local authorities' capacity to build municipal infrastructure and improve access to services in disadvantaged neighborhoods.
2. The Cities Development Strategies Program, which focuses on enhancing urban planning in Tunisian cities and reinforcing the role of cities in economic and social integration.

In the same vein, the government's housing strategy is one of the main aspects of Tunisia's social and participatory policy. It works to provide adequate housing for all citizens, in full alignment with international agreements. This strategy has allowed for the implementation of many projects aimed at addressing the housing needs of low-income and middle-class families, particularly by revising housing finance policies through increased involvement of the banking sector and various funds and programs.

The spatial and urban planning sector in Tunisia holds significant importance, given its impact on the economy, society, and environment. Tunisia has developed a comprehensive legal system for urban planning, first established in 1929, and subsequently revised with the 1994 Urban

Planning Code. This legal framework is currently under a comprehensive review to adapt to the changing urban landscape.

Regarding social housing, the Special Housing Program, established by law in 2012, has achieved notable results. By the first half of 2024, 7,244 substandard homes had been removed and replaced with new housing or renovated, and 4,002 social housing units were handed over, with 3,246 more currently under construction.

The Al-Ghabla Medical City project in Kairouan is a model initiative for bringing medical services closer to citizens. This integrated medical city in central and southwestern Tunisia will offer healthcare facilities, universities, medical industries, and residential and commercial spaces, alongside renewable energy and waste management stations. This project will contribute to creating jobs and boosting the economy in Tunisia's central and southern regions.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Hosting this meeting and presiding over the African Union's Specialized Committee on Public Service, Local Government, Urban Development, and Decentralization reflects Tunisia's ongoing commitment to working within the African Union to support initiatives that contribute to the real integration of the continent under the African Union Agenda 2063. I take this opportunity to reaffirm Tunisia's determination, under President Kais Saied's leadership, to collaborate with all parties in achieving the goals set out, contributing to the implementation of programs within the committee's scope, and offering Tunisia's experience and expertise in these fields to our African brothers and the African Union's relevant bodies.

As we commend the efforts made by the committee so far, we believe the time has come to make it the most effective tool to enhance the

capacities of member states and find appropriate solutions to the challenges facing our continent in public service reform, local government, urban development, and decentralization. This requires the concerted efforts of states, rationalizing expenditure, and coordinating efforts among various African Union institutions, while also enhancing cooperation with international partners to ensure greater effectiveness.

**Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests of Tunisia,**

In conclusion, I would like once again to warmly welcome you all to Tunisia, a country committed to the values of brotherhood and solidarity, and always eager to contribute actively to anything that will enhance the prosperity of our African continent. I wish you a pleasant stay with us and success in your deliberations, hoping that this session will yield decisions and recommendations that meet the challenges of the present and contribute to the development and growth of our continent.