



OPENING REMARKS

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13TH AFRICAN UNION HUMANITARIAN SYMPOSIUM

***Spotlighting Crisis Hotspots: Triple Nexus Solutions through
Inclusion and Solidarity***

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**HON. POLILE SHAKANTU, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI,**

**YOUR EXCELLENCY AMBASSADOR MAMBA, AMBASSADOR OF THE
KINGDOM OF ESWATINI TO ETHIOPIA AND PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE TO THE AFRICAN UNION AND THE UNITED NATIONS
COMMISSION FOR AFRICA, REPRESENTING THE PRC SUB-COMMITTEE
ON REFUGEES, RETUENEES AND IDPS**

YOUR EXCELLENCIES AMBASSORS AND PR,

REPRESENTATIVES OF MEMBER STATES,

DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,

MEMBERS OF THE AU PARTNERS GROUP,

**COLLEAGUES FROM THE AU, UN AND HUMANITARIAN
ORGANISATIONS,**

YOUTH AND DIASPORA VOICES,

**AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, OUR DEAR REPRESENTATIVES OF
DISPLACED COMMUNITIES,**

Good morning to you all.

It is a profound honour to address you at the official opening of the 13th African Union Humanitarian Symposium, the first ever to be hosted in the SADC region. On behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, I extend our deepest gratitude to His Majesty King Mswati III, the Government and the people of Eswatini for warmly welcoming us to the beautiful city of Mbabane and for your steadfast commitment to the spirit of humanitarian solidarity.

This year's Symposium is especially significant, not only because of the immense humanitarian challenges confronting our continent, but also because of the enormous possibilities that lie ahead.

Across Africa, the scale and complexity of humanitarian emergencies have reached unprecedented levels. Armed conflict, climate shocks, economic fragility, forced displacement and public health crises continue to uproot millions



of our brothers and sisters. Today, Africa hosts one in every five of the world's refugees and nearly a third of all internally displaced persons.

This is deeply concerning to me personally, and to the African Union Commission as a whole, because these are not mere statistics. They represent lives disrupted, families uprooted, futures put on hold and entire communities shattered.

Yet even in the midst of adversity, we witness extraordinary resilience, reinforced by the solidarity consistently demonstrated by our Member States. Communities are adapting with ingenuity. Young people are leading with courage. Women are rebuilding with determination. Local organisations are stepping forward where systems are strained. This too is Africa: an Africa defined not only by crisis, but by strength, creativity and resolve.

The theme of this year's Symposium, "**Spotlighting Crisis Hotspots: Triple Nexus Solutions through Inclusion and Solidarity,**" is both timely and transformative. It challenges us to look beyond the headlines, to elevate forgotten crises and to embrace the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus not as a theoretical construct, but as a practical, people-centred pathway to durable solutions.

Let me be emphatic: **the Nexus is not a slogan.**

It is a commitment to coherence.

A promise that humanitarian assistance will not be a dead end, but a bridge to recovery, resilience and sustainable peace.

It is a recognition that humanitarian action must be inclusive, locally led and grounded in dignity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Symposium is our opportunity to bring that commitment to life.

Over the next three days, we will examine some of Africa's most urgent humanitarian hotspots: **the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, the Sahel, Sudan and South Sudan**, regions where conflict, poor governance, mismanagement, climate shocks and displacement have converged to create deep and persistent emergencies. Yet these same regions are also home to innovation, solidarity and powerful examples of local leadership.

In the **DRC**, despite decades of instability, youth and women continue to stand firm in their determination to build lasting peace.

In **Mozambique**, climate disasters collide with fragility, yet local responders continue to innovate, adapt and protect their communities.

In the **Sahel**, a complex and protracted crisis persists, but opportunities for cross-border collaboration and resilience continue to emerge.

And in **Sudan**, we see the devastating consequences of armed conflict, but also the courage of communities navigating displacement and hunger with dignity and hope. I am pleased to inform you that the Chairperson has established an interdepartmental task force on Sudan to strengthen AU engagement and coordination.

The situations mentioned above are not isolated, they mirror broader continental trends and they demand a continental response.

This is why the African Union, through the Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, remains committed to advancing the **Malabo Declaration on Humanitarian Effectiveness** and its **Plan of Action**. The forthcoming operationalisation of the **African Humanitarian Agency (AfHA)** will not simply establish another institution, it will serve as a catalyst for coordinated, inclusive and sustainable humanitarian action anchored in African leadership.

We are also advancing the ratification of the **AU Protocol on the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness**, because statelessness is a silent emergency that undermines protection, inclusion and development. **No African should be invisible in their own land.**

Admittedly, the African Union cannot achieve these ambitions alone.

We need Member States to translate continental commitments into national action.

We need Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms to harmonise efforts across borders.

We need African philanthropists, the private sector as well as global partners to invest boldly in resilience.

We need civil society, academia and affected populations to shape our agenda, not as beneficiaries, but as equal partners.

And we need donors to transition from short-term interventions to multi-year, flexible and predictable financing.

This Symposium is designed to foster such collaboration. It is a space for honest dialogue, experience-sharing and the co-creation of practical solutions. A space to demystify the Nexus, showcase scalable models of inclusion and solidarity and consolidate lessons that will inform policy and programming across the continent.

Let us seize this moment to elevate protection and inclusion. Let us advocate for policymakers to strengthen the integration of refugees, IDPs, returnees and stateless persons into national health, education and social protection systems. Humanitarian action is not only about saving lives it is about restoring rights, rebuilding systems and reclaiming futures.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We must also confront Africa's enduring **humanitarian financing gap**. Our appeals are consistently underfunded, forcing agencies to cut rations and essential services. This is unacceptable for a continent that contributes more



than half of the global resources that sustain livelihoods worldwide. As I see it, this is not merely a resource issue, it is a justice issue. We must, therefore, advocate collectively for equitable and sustainable financing and design innovative mechanisms that strengthen community resilience.

Finally, let us centre **African leadership**. Localisation is not a trend, it is a necessity. Africa's institutions, responders and communities must be empowered and resourced to lead. African solutions are the surest path to predictable, transformative recovery. The future of humanitarian action in Africa must be shaped—and owned—by Africa.

Excellencies, colleagues, friends,

This Symposium must not be just another annual gathering. **This year must be different.**

It must signal the beginning of a movement - stronger than any metal - anchored in solidarity, inclusion and durable solutions. **The time is now. There is no other.**

Let us honour the courage of those living through crisis.

Let us build a humanitarian architecture that truly reflects the values of our Union: **unity, dignity and shared humanity.**

I thank you.

Ngiyabonga

MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS US ALL AS HE BLESSES OUR GREAT CONTINENT, AFRICA.