

AFRICAN UNION

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Statement by Chairperson of the African Union Commission
HE Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma,

to the

**Opening Session of the 4th Ministerial Retreat of the
African Union Executive Council**

5-7 May 2016, Nairobi KENYA

Your Excellency, Minister Amina Mohamed, Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kenya and our Gracious Host

Foreign Minister of Libya, representing the Bureau of the Executive Council of the African Union

Excellencies Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Leaders of AU Organs

Honourable Representatives from the Nairobi City Government and the Government of Kenya

Deputy Chairperson Erastus Mwencha and Commissioners

Dr. Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa

Excellencies, Executive Secretaries of the Regional Economic Communities

Representatives of the African Development Bank and the African Capacity Building Foundation

Esteemed Panelists and Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome to the 4th Ministerial Retreat of the African Union Executive Council, in the beautiful city of Nairobi. A heartfelt thank you to the Government and People of Kenya for hosting this meeting, and for the warm hospitality since our arrival.

The city of Nairobi is a fitting setting for the discussion before this Retreat, on what our generations need to do to resolve the African paradox, of a continent rich in human, natural and other resources, yet its people are poor.

In talking about this paradox, we have to understand it in its historical context; its economic, social, cultural and political dimensions; to understand the local as well as global circumstances that continue to shape it. And, we must discuss what to do to change African mindsets so that we can act to change this situation.

In the words of one of the daughters and citizens of the city of Nairobi, Wangari Maathai: *You cannot continue to enslave a mind that knows itself, that values itself, that understands itself.*

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Nairobi is indeed an appropriate setting to have these discussions - with its rich history founded at the crossroads of the railways that connect the region, its links to cities and towns across the continent, from Addis Ababa, Kampala, and Cairo to Kimberley and Cape Town.

It is home to the cultural, ethnic, language and religious diversity of our beautiful continent, and was at the centre of the national movement against colonialism.

Today, it represents both the seeds of the Africa we want: a bustling, growing city powered by the creativity and innovations of its entrepreneurs, and artists, its city government and activists; its resilient, men, women and young people, and the African paradox in the contrast between its beautiful skyscrapers, its lush landscapes, fertile soil and its slums.

This Africa paradox, as we noted at our last Retreat in Mek'elle, manifests itself in the thousands of ships, which we don't own, that each year that leave our shores, loaded with raw materials and oil that the world needs in its manufacturing, to power itself, and yet we are unable to provide jobs and economic opportunities for the millions of young men and women that each year join our labour markets.

It is a paradox of an Africa of lakes, fertile land, forests, wildlife, livestock and oceans, and yet we have children stunted by malnutrition, whilst we continue to import 83% of the processed food that we consume.

It is the paradox of an Africa of over twenty three oil producing countries, countless more with natural gas, a continent that is home to all the precious minerals and metals, and who indeed mines and export them, and yet thirty three (33) out of the world's forty eight (48) least developed countries are in Africa.

It is this paradox that Agenda 2063, our fifty year vision of the Africa we want seeks to address and resolve. The African Union Ministerial Retreat of the Executive Council, which has been meeting in this form since 2014, has been pre-occupied with this matter: advocating for the African skills revolution, to re-orientate our education systems towards sciences, mathematics, technology and engineering, so that our young men and women can indeed drive transformation and innovation.

The Ministerial retreat, also focuses on the other Agenda 2063 priorities: infrastructure development to power and connect our countries, cities and rural areas through roads, aviation, rail (including highspeed rail), ICT and power lines; manufacturing so that we beneficiate and add value to our raw materials; and agriculture and agro-processing so that we can feed ourselves and the world.

Agenda 2063 recognises that our people are our most important resources, and that women and young people must be empowered and engaged to drive our transformation.

Across the length and breadth of the continent, these are the issues that occupy the minds of our people, expecting that their governments, the regional economic communities, and indeed the African Union lead the way in creating a better life for all Africans, a live free from hunger and war, from squalor and

disease, and free from ignorance. Our people expect us to honour our pledge to silence the guns by 2020.

And indeed, across the continent, the majority of our countries place these issues at the top of their agendas, thus the over 5% growth we've seen over the last decade, the advances in infrastructure, in education and health and in building inclusive, democratic and peaceful societies.

But, as we keep reminding ourselves on every occasion that we meet as an Executive Council, much more needs to be done, and must be done faster, in order to transform the continent and build a better life for all Africans.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Since the first Retreat of this nature in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, the Executive Council, the RECs and our sister organisations - UNECA, the African Development Bank, the African Capacity Building Foundation - have used these occasions to reflect on where we are, and what strategic interventions are necessary to move forward our Agenda 2063, to construct the Africa we want.

This weekend's Executive Council Ministerial retreat has a tough task ahead of it, to help us to understand the reasons why change is not happening faster, and what needs to be done to speed up transformation in our continent.

Some of these reasons include the need for us to be masters of our own solutions, whether it is about charting an African path towards industrialization and integration; about promoting African entrepreneurs, businesses and innovators; or about the use of our history, indigenous knowledge and our cultures and heritage, so that our people are involved in their own development. It is about our commitment to the Pan African values of solidarity and self-reliance.

Since we do live in a world and global political and economic systems that is not of our making, what we do today, must and should therefore break the mold, otherwise it will continue to define us, to constrain our choices as well as determine our opportunities.

Excellencies

Our sister Wangari Maathai said about her own experiences: *If you understand and you are sufficiently disturbed, you are moved to action.*

As the generations of the present, we should be sufficiently disturbed about the African paradox, to understand it, so that we all act in unity to bring about this change - in our lifetimes.

The Executive Council of the African Union has an important role to play, and so has the leadership of our continent in all different sectors - civil society, faith based and cultural organisations, youth, women, business and trade union movements. Indeed it is a task that rests on the shoulders of all African citizens.

I am confident that our discussions at this Retreat, and the common understanding we develop, will once again spur us to action.

I Thank you