

**ADDRESS BY THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION CHAIRPERSON  
DR NKOSAZANA DLAMINI ZUMA  
African Union Headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Monday 15 October 2012**

Your Excellency, Dr Thomas Boni Yayi, Chairperson of the African Union, President of the Republic of Benin; Your Excellency Ato Hailemariam Dessalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; Dr Jean Ping, Outgoing Chairperson of the African Union Commission; Deputy Chairperson of the Commission, Members of the AU Commission and Staff Members of the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), Dr Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps in Addis Ababa  
Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I stand before you today as a humble servant of the African continent and its people, ready – together with the newly elected Commissioners – to join the hundreds of African Union Commission staff, who have held the banner of the African Union flying high.

This position has been held by an illustrious list of selfless and dedicated Africans who have had the privilege and honour of leading the Secretariat and Commission of our pre-eminent continental organisation, first the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and now the African Union (AU).

While I am filled with humility and honour that I have been elected into this position, the magnitude of the task does not escape me. Let me therefore say from the onset that I expect to stand on the shoulders of the giants that preceded me, working together with member states and other partners to create a prosperous Africa, which is at peace with itself and the world.

In this regard I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the current Chair of the African Union who is, not only here amongst us today, but who has given me his full support and encouragement since my election – the President of Benin, His Excellency, Dr Thomas Boni Yayi. We are honoured to have our Host, Ethiopian Prime Minister, His Excellency Ato Hailemariam Dessalegn with us. We wish to convey best wishes to him as he discharges the duties of the Office of Prime Minister of this great country, building a developmental state on the foundations of an ancient and progressive civilisation. At this moment, I also wish to pay tribute to one of Africa's great sons, a visionary and firm proponent of the renaissance of the continent, the late Prime Minister Ato Meles Zenawi, who made such a significant contribution to Ethiopia, Africa and humanity as a whole.

I also want to acknowledge the achievements and efforts of my predecessor and outgoing Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr Jean Ping. Mon frère, merci. Thank you Dr Ping for working tirelessly these past four and a half years to build on the work of those who have come before us, such as President Alpha Konare and others, including the founders of our organisation. Through your commitment and

dedication during your term of service, the African Union Commission has made many strides and I will therefore build on the foundation that you have laid. Merci mon frère.

Of course paying tribute to the outgoing chair of the Commission goes hand in hand with our appreciation to the rest of the Commissioners, who worked with him, because all of us are as good as our teams. Thank you to all the commissioners and the staff, for the achievements and progress.

Your Excellencies

The eve of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Organisation of African Union offers us an opportunity to take stock of where we have come from and where we are today, in order to assist us to plan for the journey ahead.

At this point I would like to quote from former President Mandela in his *Long walk to freedom*: “I have walked a long road to freedom. I tried not to falter, I have missed steps along the way, but I have discovered the secret that after climbing the Great Hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I’ve taken a moment to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me. To look at the distance I’ve come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities and I dare not linger. For my long walk is not ended.”

Although this referred to President Mandela’s long walk in South Africa, it can also be seen as the long walk of the continent. Indeed our long walk to a prosperous, peaceful and integrated Africa has not ended and there are many more hills to climb ahead of us.

Distinguished guest, Excellencies

Looking at the distance travelled, it might be interest to recall where we come from in the distance past. There is no doubt that Africa is the cradle of humanity and of advanced civilizations. We have had a very rich and proud history as Africans on this continent, we have advanced civilization, as evidence by the architecture as evidenced by the Egyptian sphinx and pyramids, the Tunisian city of Carthage, the Great Zimbabwe, the Old City of Timbuktu and many others. If we look at the intricate sculptures of Makhondo of Tanzania and Mozambique, the Benin Bronzes of Nigeria, and the beautiful rock paintings of the Drakensberg and Algeria.

We can also boast of highly organized kingdoms from Mesopotamia, the Ashanti and Monomatapa to name a few. We also have a rich astronomical heritage. The Dogon people of Mali have generational knowledge for instance of the star Sirius A & B which appears only once in fifty years, but scientists and astronauts are only now discovering what the Dogon people have known for generations.

Gender equality flourished in our ancient lands where women occupied positions of responsibility, for example, we had Queen Ann Nzinga of Angola, Makeda the Queen of Sheba in Ethiopia, Queen Ahmose-Nefertiti of Egypt, Nehanda of Zimbabwe, Yaa Asantewa of the Ashanti Empire, Dahia Al-Kahina of Mauritania, Buktu of Mali and many, many other women that held very great responsibilities in our ancient civilisations.

Of course, this great history was followed by the darker painful side of slavery and colonialism. The continent responded through the anti-colonial struggles and wars of liberation, made sure that we bring to an end this dark side of our history. Our forbearers were thus inspired to unite by creating the Organisation of African Unity.

At the launch of OAU of 1963 Haile Selassie as the first Chairperson said: *“We name as our first great task the final liberating of those Africans still dominated by foreign exploitation and control.” He continued, “As we renew our vow that all of Africa shall be free, let us also resolve that old wounds shall be healed and past scars forgotten and memories of the past injustice shall not divert us from more pressing business at hand. We shall live in peace with our former colonisers shunning recrimination and bitterness and forswearing the luxury of vengeance and retaliation, lest the acid of hatred erode our souls and poison our hearts.”*

So today we can say, without fear of contradiction, that indeed the founding generations defined and fulfilled their mission to liberate the continent from colonialism. It is up to us, to now define our own mission, it is up to us to fulfill it and not betray it.

Distinguished guests, Excellencies

Looking at the vistas that surround us today, we have come a long way.

Over the last two decades we have witnessed momentous changes to the political landscape of the African continent. Democratic elections have become the norm, demonstrating the commitment of African states to promote a political culture based on legitimacy and accountability. This development has not taken place in a vacuum, it has taken place within the context of the African Union efforts aimed at consolidating democracy on the continent.

In spite of this laudable progress, we must also acknowledge that there have been some difficulties and setbacks, with pockets of instability and conflict. It is therefore our responsibility as governments, as citizens, as regional bodies to ensure that the democratic process is irrevocable and to pledge ourselves to work for its success. For our part as the Commission, I would like to assure you that we will take proactive steps as has been done before to support member states and regional bodies in their efforts to promote, consolidate and expand citizen-centred, developmental and democratic governance.

One cannot over-emphasise the point that peace and stability are a prerequisite for social, economic and human development and good governance. While we should feel proud of our achievements in this regard, we must not forget that these pockets of conflict not only cause untold suffering, death and destruction, but also impede the social, political and economic development of the rest of the continent.

We will, therefore, spare no efforts to try and resolve the conflict in Mali and the Sahel region. This crisis has the potential to spread across the region and even the continent. We shall be working closely with the United Nations Security Council and of course with the regional organisation ECOWAS, who has been dealing with the matter up to now.

We will continue to provide the necessary support to the AU High Level Panel on Sudan so that it can help both the Republics of Sudan and South Sudan in finalising all outstanding issues between them. Continued support will also be provided to the newly elected Somali government to bring an end to the conflict that has ravaged this sister republic for over thirty years, and help build strong institutions of governance and public order. In light of the resurgence of armed conflict in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, we will support all efforts to bring about peace and stability in the DRC and the Great Lakes region as a whole. And of course we shall not forget Guinea Bissau.

Drawing on the lessons learnt from recent conflicts on the continent, we will take appropriate measures to improve cooperation and coordination with the United Nations, given its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The African Union, as the premier continental organization, will take leadership role in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in the continent, as well as in post-conflict reconstruction and development. Of course it will do this working with the regional organisations. This is in accordance with the principle of finding African solutions to African problems.

Excellencies,

Conflicts and conflict resolution, important as it may be, must be balanced with development, because the majority of our countries are stable and are developing. But if we neglect them, they may become unstable. It is therefore important to balance conflict resolution and development.

Excellencies,

Africa accounts for more than one quarter of the world's arable land and land is a source of livelihood of 70% of our people. However Africa currently generates only 10% of global agricultural output and imports tens of billions of dollars of food a year. As a continent we must strive towards food security. Access to food is the most basic right. No nation or continent can develop to its full potential if cannot feed itself. If we invest in increasing the productivity of our land we can have food security, export and generate revenue and also save the resources we use to import food. All these resources can be used for development. The continent and AU have taken decisions on these measures, and we know there is the CADAP programme. We must accelerate its implementation.

Our continent is also well endowed with mineral and other natural resources, with estimations that Africa accounts for 30% of the world's mineral reserves. The people of the continent have not seen the full benefit of these resources, neither have the exploitation of our national resources been used to develop the productive economies of our continent. The situation that President Nkrumah described still prevails. In his words, "that is why we have in Africa the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty and scarcity in the midst of abundance." So its important that we all try to use these resources to improve our productive capacities and for the benefit of all our people and their development

As we speak, African has an unacceptable high maternal and infant mortality. What women in other countries – especially in the developed world – take for granted as a normal physiological

function of giving birth and ensuring the continuation of the human race, in our continent, it means putting your life at risk. The death of the mother is not just a death of an individual. It means survival of the young children that she may be leaving behind is not guaranteed, and if they survive, they may not reach their full potential in life. And of course a loss of a mother is a loss to the family and the community.

At the formation of the OAU in 1963, the African population was just above 250 million. Now we stand at over a billion and this figure is expected to rise to two billion by 2050. Africa has the advantage of having a youthful population, unlike many developed countries which are struggling with aging populations.

We must therefore harness the energy, resourcefulness and enthusiasm of our young people so that they contribute positively to our societies, nations and the continent. Our increased investment in young people, in their education and training, in youth employment, in their general economic and social participation must assist them to reach their full potential. An investment in the youth is therefore an investment for the future.

We are also a continent where at least 50% of our people are women (in fact a little bit more). Let us look at this not only as a human rights issue, but also as a resource that we must develop by prioritising investment in the education and health of women and girl children. To this end, we must accelerate the implementation of programmes related to the Decade of Women, in our efforts to advance and accelerate gender equality. At a time when prospects look bright for our continent, we should ensure that women have access and control of productive resources, including in agriculture and in business in general. Proactive measures should be taken to bring women into the mainstream of decision-making processes and structures at all levels of society. Of course this decision was taken long time ago by the Heads of States, we must make sure that we implement this decision.

Excellencies, Distinguished guests

Contemporary literature on Africa paints a positive vista of the continent's prospects, portraying it as the Eldorado of the 21st century. The narrative on Africa as the next pole of growth and prosperity has come to be accepted by all. This confirms the prophecy of our leaders, who on the eve of the new millennium in 1999, declared that the next century will be the 'African Century'.

This more robust economic performance is also having an effect on socioeconomic conditions and human development in general. The 2010 and 2011 UN reports, assessing the 2015 Millennium Development Goals, indicate that in sub-Saharan Africa progress has been made in reducing absolute poverty, with improvements in primary education enrolment and a decline in under-five infant mortality rates.

Our common objective remains to define and build a trajectory that extracts the continent from poverty and underdevelopment. Amongst the core attributes of such an African agenda are the shared values of consistent political and democratic freedom; the development and modernisation of African productive forces.

All this must take place within the context of renewed momentum for the continent's economic

integration, and we must take the necessary steps to speed up this process, to ensure that the ultimate goal of an African Economic Community (AEC) does not remain a distant dream.

Key to integration is the development of our infrastructure and connectivity between our countries and regions to facilitate people-to-people relations and facilitate intra-Africa trade and tourism.

Excellencies,

The only way to ensure success in our continent's endeavours is to move together as one united continent and people. Unity is our watchword, unity is our salvation.

Indeed, as Prime Minister Lumumba said in 1960, "*We all know, and the whole world knows it, that Algeria is not French, that Angola is not Portuguese, that Kenya is not English, that Ruanda-Urundi is not Belgian. We know that Africa is neither French, nor British, nor American, nor Russian, ... that it is African.*"

Excellencies, Distinguished guests,

As we approach the next set of hills, let us recall the vision for our continent as articulated by the African Union, and which guides the work of the Commission: An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena.

Next year of course we will be celebrating our 50th anniversary of the founding of the Organisation of African Unity. We must celebrate the achievements, but also indicate to ourselves and the world where we want to go in the next fifty years.

Therefore, when we gather to celebrate in May 2013, we should chart a way forward for the continent for the next fifty years. This should be our agenda for the coming months, and beyond this summit.

Excellencies, Distinguished guests,

All these challenges require an organisational machinery that is equal to the task of implementing our vision of an integrated, prosperous, peaceful and peoplecentred Africa. There has been progress in strengthening and improving the capacity of the AU Commission, but we are not there yet, in the words of the Deputy Chairperson as he bid farewell to the outgoing Chairperson yesterday.

An urgent priority will therefore be to ensure that the African Union Commission is effective, responsive and efficient in its work, and that it represents the organisational and shared values of collective leadership, hard work, inclusivity and a people-centred approach.

As I take this responsibility I would like to work very closely with United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank as we are three organization with different but complementary mandates to advance the African agenda.

The African Union is founded on the building blocks of regions. We will therefore have robust and dynamic relations with the Regional Economic Communities and encourage the different Regional Economic Communities to work closer to share best practice and information. As building blocks of integration, we will work closely with the RECs on the issues of integration, peace-building and economic, social and human development across the length and breadth of the continent.

Every decision taken by the policy organs of the AU is important and must be implemented. On our part as a Commission we will do our best to implement those decisions assigned to us. I am mindful however that the member states and the RECs are at the core face and main agents for implementation of the bulk of those decisions. The impact of the policies of the Union can only be measured by how they affect our people on the ground and this can only happen if these policies enunciated in the decisions of the AU are implemented.

The Commission is an instrument created by and for the member states of the Union. It does not exist in a vacuum and cannot work in a vacuum. It shall therefore maintain close contact with the member states through the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), which plays a critical role in implementing the decisions of the African Union Heads of State and the vision of our continent.

**I just like to refer to the London Olympycs, one evening I was watching the track events and we saw in action the great talent on the African continent and from the diaspora. We must therefore continue to build relations with our brothers and sisters in the diaspora, and ensure that they make an even greater input into the development of our continent.**

We must also improve our resource mobilization for our continental and regional programmes. A lot more needs to be done to mobilise resources from within our continent, in addition to the support that we get from our partners. We must provide for our own development whilst not cutting ourselves global support that we graciously receive from our cooperation partners.

To our global partners, we express our appreciation for the support to the African Union. We must continue to work and re-evaluate our strategic partnerships, with a view to enhance them and ensure that they focus on the strategic priorities of the continent. We must build partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

Excellencies,

I would like to reiterate that we should look at ourselves as a continent, not only as individual countries. We are a formidable force as a continent if we are united, but if we are divided we are weak. Nobody can ignore us united. Nobody can fail to see the continent as a force for global change, if we look at ourselves as a continent.

I accept this responsibility encouraged by the fact that the continent is full of possibilities and opportunities.

I take this responsibility with the hope that together, united in our diversity, driven by our love of our continent and its people, shall every day do our best to bring to reality the declaration of the 21st Century as the Africans Century.

So together with the team of the Commission we shall do our best, and we hope we shall get all the support that we need.

I would like to thank our host for the continued support to the AU and the Commission. I wish the outgoing Chairperson bon voyage and good health, and we will be in touch.

I thank you.