

Acceptance Statement

By

H.E. Mr. Hailemariam Dessalegn

**Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic
Republic of Ethiopia and Incoming Chairperson
of the African Union**

At

**The 20th ordinary session of the Assembly of
African Heads of State and Government**

27 January 2013

Addis Ababa

Excellencies Heads of State and Government,

**Excellencies Members of the African Union Commission,
Invited Guests,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It gives me great pleasure to warmly welcome you all to Addis Ababa for the 20th ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union. We are ready as always to make your brief stay in Addis Ababa as comfortable as possible. It is also my sincere desire that your stay will be productive and enjoyable.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is indeed with a great sense of honor and humility that I accept the Chairpersonship of our Union. I wish to express my heartfelt thanks for the opportunity to serve this half a century old organization for the next one year. I would like to affirm my determination to do my utmost in discharging the heavy responsibilities bestowed upon me as Chairperson of the Union.

I am committed to working in close consultation and coordination with member States as well as the Commission and other Organs to advance the objectives of our Union.

Let me express my profound appreciation to H.E. Dr. Boni Yayi, President of the Republic of Benin and outgoing Chairperson of the African Union, for all the good work that he has done over the last one year. Particularly, I wish to commend my dear brother for all his efforts in addressing issues of peace and security in our continent and for his constructive contribution relating to the election of members of the Commission.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I assumed the leadership of my country upon the untimely passing away of our esteemed leader, H.E. Mr. Meles Zenawi. The late Prime Minister was a man of vision who inspired many and devoted his life for the cause of peace, democracy, development and prosperity of his country, our region and Africa as a whole. The late Prime Minister was also an ardent pan-Africanist who earned well

deserved acclaim for his prominent role in advocating for Africa's common interests on the world stage.

On behalf of the people and government of Ethiopia and that of my own, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to this august Assembly for paying tribute to this illustrious son of Africa. I also wish to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee (HSGOC) for endorsing the proposal made by the NEPAD Agency to establish Meles Zenawi Centre for Sustainable Development to be located within its structures in recognition of the immense contribution of the late Prime Minister in championing the NEPAD programmes and giving strategic guidance to their implementation.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are a number of priority issues, which deserve our attention this year. We will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity, the precursor of the African Union. The theme of our Summit entitled "Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance" is, therefore, fitting as we

mark the Golden Jubilee of our premier continental organization. It affords us the opportunity to take stock of our achievements and challenges over the last 50 years and chart out a way forward to realize our vision of creating a peaceful, democratic, prosperous and united Africa taking its rightful place in the world.

Our founding fathers, in their wisdom and foresight, laid a solid foundation for the unity and solidarity of Africa when they met here in Addis Ababa 50 years ago and decided to establish the Organization of African Unity (OAU). As we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of our organization, we pay special tribute to the generations of Pan-Africanists and the Founding Fathers of the OAU who strived to promote unity, solidarity, cohesion and cooperation among the peoples of Africa and African States. In this regard, I believe it is appropriate to quote what Emperor Haile Selassie the First had stated in his statement delivered at the Addis Ababa Conference on 25 May 1963.

I quote "What we require is a single African organization through which Africa's single voice may be heard, within which Africa's problems may be studied and resolved....Let us, at this Conference, create a single institution to which we will all belong, based on principles to which we all subscribe, confident that in its councils our

voices will carry their proper weight, secure in the knowledge that the decision there will be dictated by Africans and only by Africans and that they will take full account of all vital African considerations" Unquote.

As we reflect on the last 50 years history of our organization, it gives us enormous satisfaction to note its achievements in successfully discharging its primary mandate of contributing in a significant way to the liberation of our continent from the shackles of colonialism and apartheid. It has also served as a common platform for Africa's collective efforts in its interaction with the rest of the world. These are issues that need to be studied and the lessons passed on to generations to come. I very much hope that our scholars will discuss and debate these issues and highlight the various aspects of the history of this great organization which is the history of our struggle for maintaining our dignity. At the most fundamental level that has been and is the mission of our collective effort which remains yet to be completed. Indeed, we have just begun.

We in Ethiopia are indeed very proud to have hosted the Headquarters of the OAU and now the African Union for the last 50

years and we are grateful to all of you for bestowing this confidence on our country. On our part, we have done everything possible, and we pledge to continue in this same tradition, to create a conducive environment for the smooth functioning of our organization. It is in this same spirit that we have begun undertaking the necessary preparation to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the OAU/AU in close collaboration with the Commission in accordance with the decision of the 16th ordinary session of the Assembly. In fact, the Chairperson of the Commission and myself will officially launch the celebration sometime this morning.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the last decade, Africa has managed to register robust economic growth. In spite of the global economic crisis, African economies have also shown remarkable resilience. As a result, our continent has emerged as a new pole of global growth and has attracted a growing interest as a new frontier for business and investment. It is in recognition of this fact that many developed and

emerging economies as well as regions have started to look at Africa as a continent of hope and opportunities.

In this connection, I wish to note that the 3rd Africa-South America Summit, the 5th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V), the 2nd Africa-Turkey Summit, the 3rd Afro-Arab Summit and the 4th Africa-EU Summit are expected to be held in the course of this year. Indeed, these meetings serve as an excellent platform to advance Africa's development agenda and we should endeavour to further strengthen these partnerships with a view to ensuring mutual benefit and win-win cooperation.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is no doubt that Africa needs to sustain the growth momentum that it has been able to achieve over the last decade. This can only be done if we manage to bring about structural transformation. We should, therefore, mobilize all our efforts to implement our flagship projects such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), the Comprehensive

Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) and the Action Plan for the Acceleration of Industrial Development in Africa (AIDA) towards realizing the desired structural transformation.

I am also of the opinion that the fundamental objective of the strategic plan of our Union for the years 2014-2017, which is being elaborated by the Commission, should be to sustain Africa's growth trajectory in the short and medium term with a view to achieving our vision of an integrated, prosperous, people-centred and peaceful continent.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The formulation of the Post-2015 development agenda marks an important milestone in the history of international development cooperation. The efforts by the international community over the last decade in implementing the MDGs have strengthened global partnership to attain a common objective of ending human misery. Though many countries in developing countries, including Africa, have made progress to achieve some of the targets of the MDGs,

much still remains to be done. The formulation of new international development goals should thus be based on a thorough assessment of the MDGs, taking stock of achievements and gaps. This is vital because for Africa, implementation of MDGs is still unfinished business.

Particularly, I wish to emphasize that it is in terms of achieving the health related MDGs that many of our countries are off-track. In this connection, I believe “the One Million Community Health Workers Campaign” which was announced in Davos on 24 January 2013, during the recently held World Economic Forum, will certainly go a long way in helping us make progress towards achieving the health related MDGs. I wish to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to my good friend and Brother President Paul Kagame, Novartis CEO Joseph Jimenez and Director of the Earth Institute Prof. Jeffery Sachs for launching this important initiative.

As we participate in the global efforts to chart the post-2015 development agenda, we should ensure that the progress achieved thus far is sustained and that Africa’s development priorities

beyond 2015 are fully taken into account. I believe we should draw lessons from our successful experience at Climate Change negotiations and speak with one voice in advocating for the common African position on the post-2015 development agenda, which is being crafted with the participation of all the relevant stakeholders. In this regard, we should constitute a group of African Heads of State and Government under the Chairmanship of our dear sister President Elen Johnson Sirleaf, who will lead the effort in canvassing support for Africa's development priorities in the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We can only unleash Africa's potential for the development and prosperity of our people in the prevalence of durable peace and stability in our continent. Over the last decade, we have certainly made significant headways in our collective resolve to find peaceful solutions to the different conflict situations plaguing our continent.

In this regard, for the first time since the last two decades, we are witnessing a glimmer of hope for peace and stability in Somalia. We should, therefore, consolidate the gains that have been made recently both in the political and security fronts and assist our Somali brothers and sisters in rebuilding their shattered nation.

Sudan and South Sudan have also made important progress in implementing the African Union Roadmap and United Nations Security Council resolution 2046 (2012) by signing a series of agreements on most of the outstanding issues of the post-independence period. The leaders of both countries have also agreed to address the problems encountered in the implementation of those agreements and make progress in their negotiations to resolve the remaining outstanding issues. We should continue to assist Sudan and South Sudan in achieving the objective of creating two viable states living side by side in peace and harmony.

On the other hand, we note with serious concern the emergence of new conflicts, which threaten peace and security in our continent. In this regard, we should do everything possible to help restore constitutional order in Mali, safeguard the sovereignty

and territorial integrity of the country and address the humanitarian crisis in collaboration with ECOWAS, the United Nations and other international partners.

We are following the latest development in that country and we commend the assistance provided by France at the request of the Malian authorities and in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 2085 (2012). We also appreciate member States of ECOWAS, which have started deploying their forces in Mali as part of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) and we hope others that have pledged to contribute their forces will do so as expeditiously as possible.

The situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo has also deteriorated recently. We note the efforts being made by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), under the leadership of President Yoweri Museveni, to de-escalate the situation. We should assist this regional initiative in order to address the complex security situation in the DRC.

Moreover, the situation in the Central African Republic has drastically worsened since last month undermining efforts so far

made to consolidate peace in that country. We recognize the efforts that have been made by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) to bring an end to the fighting and resolve the situation through political dialogue between the government and the rebel groups. In this regard, we welcome the signing of the Political Agreement between the Central African Republic parties in Libreville, on 11 January 2013, and the appointment of the new Prime Minister of the Government of National Unity established in accordance with the commitments made in the Political Agreement. We hope the parties will fully implement their commitments under the agreement.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have all made a solemn commitment to promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance in the Constitutive Act of our Union. It is indeed gratifying to note the progress that we have made over the last decade in terms of nurturing democratic governance and popular participation in our continent.

Several African countries will hold Presidential and Parliamentary elections this year and the smooth conduct of these elections will certainly go a long way in terms of expanding the frontiers of democratic governance in Africa. We should consolidate the gains that we have made over the last decade and deepen the roots of democratic governance so as to create a propitious condition for our socio-economic endeavor. No doubt, recent developments have also made it abundantly clear that for our efforts to build democratic governance to succeed, there is no substitute for ensuring the building of institutions and nurturing them.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To summarize, this year we have a lot of work to do to mark the Golden Jubilee of our organization, sustain Africa's growth momentum, strengthen our partnership with the rest of the world, adopt the strategic plan of our Union for the periods 2014-2017, advocate for Africa's development priorities in the framework of the ongoing discussions to chart the post-2015 global development

agenda, intensify our efforts to resolve conflicts and consolidate peace and stability in our continent and promote democratic governance.

In order to achieve these lofty objectives, there is no doubt that we need to build the institutional capacity of our Commission and enhance its efficiency and effectiveness in fulfilling its mandate. I am confident that members of the new leadership will make notable improvement in the overall functioning of the Commission and I am indeed encouraged by some of the important steps taken in this direction.

Finally, I hope we will have a fruitful discussion on a range of issues, which are vital for Africa's development. I will certainly count on your support in guiding the discussions and in successfully discharging my heavy responsibilities as Chairperson of the Union.

I thank you