

Remarks

By

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At

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***Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,***

I am delighted to be here in this prestigious think tank to share my thoughts about Africa's recent history, present state of affairs and its aspirations. Let me first of all express my heartfelt thanks to Chatham House, home of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, for arranging this important forum, which I believe will afford us the opportunity to particularly reflect on the last 50 years towards African Unity and the collective aspirations of African States and peoples for the continent's socio-economic transformation.

The topic of our discussion entitled "***The Future of the AU: Fifty Years of the Organization of African Unity-African Union***" is indeed timely and relevant in light of the celebrations of the Golden Jubilee of the OAU/AU giving us an opportunity to take stock of the achievements and shortcomings as well as the prospects and challenges of our continental organization. In this process, the role of the think tank is no doubt important in undertaking analytical research and facilitating academic debate on this important issue.

Distinguished Participants,

As we all know, Africa has passed through a difficult and gruesome history associated with slavery, colonial subjugation and racial discrimination. Successive generations of Africans paid the ultimate sacrifice in the struggle against all forms of injustice and subjugation so as to restore the freedom and dignity of peoples of Africa. In this painstaking struggle, Ethiopia feels enormously proud, as the only country that has never been colonized, to have served as a beacon of hope for other African brothers and sisters that were fighting to liberate themselves from the yoke of subjugation and other forms of oppression. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the victory of Adwa by the gallant Ethiopian fighters against Italian invaders in 1896 has been a symbol of African pride and dignity and it served as a source of great inspiration for the liberation struggle throughout the continent and beyond. A scholar in a recent book on the epic of the battle has rightly characterized it an "African victory in the age of empire".

Although African countries have ultimately succeeded in liberating themselves, they have long understood that their freedom and independence will be in vain without their unity. As the Pan-Africanist Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah aptly put it, "United we stand, divided we fall" was the motto during the 1950s and 60s. That is why successive generations of African leaders strongly advanced the objective of unity and solidarity between African

States and peoples as embodied in the ideals of Pan-Africanism. There were, of course, divergent views about the approach towards achieving African unity. While some advocated immediate political integration, others were in favour of a gradual approach. Finally, 32 independent African States signed the Charter establishing the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on 25 May 1963, at Addis Ababa thereby laying a solid foundation for the unity and solidarity of Africa.

That Ethiopia played a critical role in narrowing the differences between the various groupings and facilitating the establishment of the OAU is indeed a matter of historical record. It was in recognition of this contribution that the member States chose Addis Ababa to serve as the Headquarters of the OAU. Ethiopia is very proud to have played host to this premier continental organization for the last fifty years and it has never shirked from discharging its heavy responsibilities in this regard.

Distinguished Participants,

Undoubtedly, the OAU successfully carried out its primary responsibility of liberating Africa from the vestiges of colonialism and Apartheid. Particularly, it is noteworthy that the OAU Liberation Committee, based in Dar es Salaam at the time, played a historic role in providing all forms of support to liberation movements that were waging struggle against colonial subjugation and racial discrimination. Moreover, I would like to underscore OAU's valuable

contribution as a useful platform for Africa's collective engagement with the rest of the world.

Following the successful completion of the period of decolonization, at the turn of the 21st century, African States recognized the need to accelerate the continent's socio-economic integration to forestall its marginalization in the era of globalization. This necessitated the need to transform the OAU into the African Union in order to better respond to the challenges facing the continent and realize the vision of the founding fathers for a peaceful, prosperous and united Africa. In accordance with its Constitutive Act, the African Union now strives to accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent.

In this context, African leaders have developed a blue print for the continent's socio-economic transformation based on the fundamental principle of ownership and partnership. In this connection, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is the embodiment of their collective resolve for the realization of the African Renaissance. Within this framework, the African Union is implementing a number of important flagship projects such as the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), the Programme for Infrastructural Development in Africa (PIDA) and the Accelerated Industrial Development in Africa (AIDA), which will be instrumental in realizing the continent's transformation agenda.

Over the last decade, improved macro-economic governance coupled with better prices for African commodities on the international market have also enabled several African countries to register robust economic growth. In spite of the global economic crisis, African economies by and large have weathered the storm and some of the countries like Ethiopia are now among the fastest growing economies in the world. Therefore, what was once the marginalized continent has now emerged as some put it "the new Eldorado" at a time when much of the developed world is suffering from economic slump. Accordingly, Africa is attracting a growing interest both from developed and emerging economies as a new frontier for untapped business and investment opportunities. More than ever before, this has rekindled a great sense of hope and optimism for the continent's transformation.

Africa has also started to speak with one voice on issues of common interest to our continent and as such the African Union has become an important vehicle for developing the African common position on a range of international issues such as climate change. This has certainly raised Africa's profile on the world stage and it is no exaggeration to state that Africa has become a force to be reckoned with.

Distinguished Participants,

African leaders have long recognized the fact that no single internal factor has contributed more to our socio-economic predicament in the

Continent and the suffering of the civilian population than the scourge of intra and inter-State conflicts although we have less of the latter than the former. In this regard, they have committed themselves to provide African solutions to African problems as clearly reflected in the Constitutive Act and the Protocol Establishing the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. In this regard, I wish to highlight Article 4 (h) of the Constitutive Act and 4(J) of the PSC Protocol, which give the African Union the right to intervene in a member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. This is indeed a clear departure from the days of the OAU, which used to uphold the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States. Under Article 4 (J) of the Act, member States also have the right to request intervention to restore peace and security, which is unprecedented in the history of international organizations.

Distinguished Participants,

The African Union has been striving to promote peace, security and stability in Africa and create a favorable environment for sustainable development in line with its mandate. Particularly, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) comprising of the Peace and Security Council, the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System and the African Standby Force (ASF) have become the veritable mechanisms of the African Union for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in our

continent. These mechanisms have indeed enabled the African Union to play a proactive role in the search for the peaceful resolution of conflicts in Africa. This could be exemplified by the deployment of peacekeeping missions such as in Burundi, Somalia and Darfur as well as high level mediation such as the African Union High Level Panel (AUHIP) facilitating dialogue between Sudan and South Sudan on outstanding issues of the Post-independence period. It is, therefore, gratifying to note that Africa has made remarkable progress over the last decade in terms of promoting peace and stability in our continent despite the existence of few hotspots here and there.

Moreover, African leaders have also committed themselves to promote democratic governance, respect for human and people's rights and ensure the rule of law. This is clearly reflected, among others, in the Constitutive Act of the African Union and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. Over the last decades, significant progress has been made in terms of expanding the frontiers of democratic governance in Africa and it is encouraging to note that governments coming to power through competitive election have increasingly become the norm rather than the exception. Several African countries will conduct presidential and parliamentary elections this year and the successful elections held in Kenya and Djibouti, among others, are encouraging developments.

Distinguished Participants,

While we in Africa are satisfied with the remarkable progress achieved over the last fifty years in several areas, we are also cognizant of the fact that it has not been smooth sailing. Internal problems within Africa coupled with the adverse external environment have certainly impeded the efforts made towards the realization of our cardinal objectives enshrined in the Charter of the OAU and now in the Constitutive Act of the African Union. In all candor, I must admit that the last decade has been slow because reorienting the direction of the organization took more time than we have expected. In hindsight, it was worth involving in such type of exercise. It helped reach a solid consensus to implement agreed programs.

Looking forward, I am confident the Commission will make further progress towards the realization of the objectives of our Union. As we chart the way forward, I believe there is a clear need to mobilize our efforts to consolidate peace and stability, deepen the roots of democratic governance and bring about structural transformation to sustain the growth momentum. This is essentially the major focus of our short, medium and long term strategies. In this regard, I wish to indicate that the African Union has developed a strategic plan for the years 2014-2017, which aims to accelerate progress towards creating the foundations of an integrated, prosperous, people-centred and peaceful continent in the short and medium term. The plan identifies eight strategic

priorities and concerns to be addressed, which include promoting peace and stability, increasing agricultural production, fostering inclusive economic development and industrialization, building Africa's human capacity, mainstreaming the participation of women and youth, implementing strategies of resource mobilization, strengthening a people-centred Union and enhancing the institutional capacity of the Commission and other organs of the Union as well as the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), which are the building blocks of our Union.

In the light of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations, the African Union is also in the process of elaborating the Strategic Framework for Vision 2063, which will guide the work of the African Union in the coming years and decades. The Strategic Framework will outline Africa's agenda for the next 50 years to realize the vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa. In this regard, the strategic framework is expected to identify the main challenges, strategic issues and priorities facing our continent over the next 50 years and how best to address them. It will also provide greater coherence in the actions and initiatives of the African Union, its organs and other key stakeholders to achieve Vision 2063.

Finally, despite our problems which incidentally also manifest themselves in other similar international organizations, I believe the future of our continent is bright. This is not unbridled optimism but a realist expectation. According to projections by the African Development Bank, "the

next half century in Africa offers good prospects for realizing the African vision of a dynamic, diversified and competitive economic zone in which extreme poverty is eliminated within peaceful, stable and vibrant societies". Particularly, AfDB estimates that Africa's GDP is expected to reach US\$ 15 trillion by the year 2060 and many African countries are expected to achieve upper middle income status thereby significantly improving the standard of living of the African people and addressing extreme poverty. The objective of the Strategic Framework for Vision 2063 is to draw a long term perspective towards the realization of this fundamental objective.

In the Special Summit, which will take place on 25 May 2013, to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the OAU/AU, African leaders are expected to express their firm commitment to the realization of this objective by adopting a Proclamation, which speaks to future generations. As a way forward, the draft Proclamation outlines the following objectives anchored on Vision 2063:-

- Ensuring the realization of the objectives outlined in the Constitutive Act of the African Union and other related legal documents such as the Abuja Treaty on the establishment of the African Economic Community;
- Creating a continent that is free from the scourge of conflict and abject poverty where African countries will have achieved upper middle income status;

- Achieving the total eradication of racial discrimination and colonialism in all its forms through peaceful means;
- Promoting other important drivers of change including democracy and good governance, peace and security, science, technology and innovation, human development, management of natural resources endowment, climate-conscious development, capable developmental States and harnessing regional integration,
- Mobilizing the African people to develop their continent and enhance institutional capabilities, resource mobilization and advance knowledge and innovation.
- Enhancing Africa's position as a dynamic force on global affairs.

Therefore, if we continue to build on our achievements and try to overcome the challenges facing us, there is no reason why we will not be able to translate the dreams of our Founding Fathers into a reality. If South East Asian economies like Korea and Singapore achieved middle income status in three decades, I am confident that Africa will make it in the next five decades or less.

With these few remarks, I hope we will enrich our insights through an interactive discussion.

I thank you.