

AFRICAN UNION

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Media Statement

2017 New Year Message of H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma Chairperson, African Union Commission (AUC)

The year 2016 has been particularly fruitful for the African Union Commission as it continues to work hard at the implementation of the first 10-year plan of Africa's Agenda 2063. We very pleased to see AU Member States and Regional Economic Communities intensify Agenda 2063 domestication. Certainly, a lot more work still needs to be done, to translate these aspirations to make a difference in the lives of Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora.

Our aspiration of free movement of people around the continent received a significant boost in 2016. We, again commend Ghana, Namibia, Benin and Togo that took steps toward joining Rwanda, Mauritius and Seychelles on visa-free-entry for all Africans. We hope in 2017, many more countries will follow suit with visa-on-arrival as we consider issuing the African Passport to citizens, within their national policies.

The 27th AU Summit of Heads of States and Government, hosted by Rwanda, was the best we have held. We must maintain the focus on issues of our common interest, while striving to get better in hosting subsequent Summits and meetings. The Kigali Summit was especially successful with the launch of the African Passport, decisions on Financing the AU through a 0.2% import Levy on eligible goods; Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) and the appointment of Judges of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The Kigali Summit also tasked President Paul Kagame of Rwanda to lead the reform of the African Union. A reformed African Union and a re-structured Commission would better place our continental body to deliver Agenda 2063 in a very efficient and relevant way, meeting the aspirations of Africans.

Held under the theme “**African Year of Human Rights, with Particular Focus on the Rights of Women**”, 2016 marked important milestones in the continental and global women’s agenda for gender equality and women empowerment.

As we begin 2017, the theme is **Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through investment in Youth**. The youth constitute over 70% of the African Population and remain a critical part of our most precious resources. We look forward to working with Regional Economic Communities, Civil Society, AU Organs, Member States and all partners in furthering the youth agenda.

Keeping true to the theme, the AU Commission is heading a focused **End Child Marriage Campaign** so as to ensure that the girl child is not diverted from attending school. The Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security also embarked on a **Stop Violence against Women in South Sudan Campaign** in response to the violent atrocities committed against women and children in South Sudan in the background of conflict.

We have repeatedly stated that Africa and the world cannot stand by and witness the suffering inflicted on the children, women, men and young people of South Sudan. Enough is enough. Africans deserve better, and we must all work towards better days, and towards peace, stability and development, not only in South Sudan, but also in Burundi, Central African Republic, The Gambia and others. Our people deserve peace & development.

Our governments and leadership are there to protect the vulnerable, to serve the people; not to be the cause of the people’s suffering and retrogression.

Several successful elections were held in Member States, and we congratulate the peoples and governments for their commitment at each election, ensuring smooth transitions, and moving a step further towards realizing the spirit and letter of the African Charter on Elections, Governance and Democracy. We urge Member States with electoral disputes to respect the will of the people, abide by their national and international obligations, as well as resort to all non-violent and legal means in resolving electoral disputes.

The AU remains committed to work with our Member States to ensure that lasting peace is restored under Agenda 2063 flagship project **Silencing the Guns by 2020**.

In 2017, our Heads of States and Government will elect a new Chairperson of the AU Commission at their 28th Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. For the first time, five candidates participated in a live televised Debate, termed *MjadalaAfrika*. It was organised by the AU Leadership Academy on 9 December 2016. It gave the African citizenry an opportunity to hear the plans of their would-be Chairperson. This debate was unprecedented and a milestone our history. We hope we can have more debates of this nature, around critical issues, including employment, economy, migration and many more.

I thank all staff, management and friends of the AU Commission for their continued support towards the realization of a prosperous and peaceful Africa. Moving into the New Year, I wish everyone good health, peace and prosperity in 2017.

H.E Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma
Chairperson, African Union Commission