

President Mahama's speech at 20th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Heads of States and Government and the 22nd Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union

Your Excellency Mr. Yayi Boni, Chairperson of the African Union and President of the Republic of Benin, Colleague Heads of State and Government, Your Excellency Mr. Ban ki-Moon, Secretary – General of the United Nations, Your Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union Honourable Ministers, Your Excellencies, members of the Diplomatic Corps, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with a profound sense of honour and gratitude that I join you at this Twentieth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union. My delegation and I are grateful for the warm welcome and other courtesies accorded to us by the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia since our arrival here yesterday.

We also commend the Commission of the African Union for the excellent facilities and arrangements made for this Summit.

Let me also use this occasion to acknowledge and extend warmest congratulations to Her Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, the newly-elected Chairperson of the African Union Commission

Madam Chairperson,

We take pride in your appointment not merely because you are the first woman to hold this key position in our organization. In fact, the weight of your own credentials bear ample testimony of the sterling personal qualities and wealth of experience that you bring into this office.

Our excitement and optimism derive from the impact your work and achievements could make on the lives of millions of women across the continent and even beyond. You can, therefore, count on Ghana's full support during your tenure. In the same breadth, I wish to pay well-deserved tribute to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Jean Ping, who ably led the AU Commission and worked tirelessly in furtherance of the ideals of the African Union. We wish him every success in the next phase of his distinguished career.

Let me also acknowledge outgoing Chair of the AU President Boni Yayi for the boundless energy he has shown during his tenure in office.

Your Excellencies,

Last December, My country Ghana held successful Presidential and Parliamentary election. I had the honour and privilege of being entrusted with the hopes and aspirations of my fellow countrymen and women by being elected to the high office of President of the Republic.

In accepting that challenge I fully recognize how intimately bound the fortunes of my country are with those of our entire continent. Our struggle to overcome poverty, disease and illiteracy, is a common one whose success is dependent on the solidarity that exists between us. This solidarity has always made us deeply appreciative of how much we owe our country's continuing stability and steady advancement in democracy to the friendship and cooperation we have enjoyed with a great many countries since our independence in March 1957.

Ghanaians have also not forgotten how you stood head and shoulder with us in the dark days when our nation was overcome with grief, following the sudden and untimely demise of President John Evans Atta Mills.

I am, therefore, here today fully conscious of the encouragement and generous support that have been consistently extended to Ghana over the years, by the international community among whom this unique continental union of African states enjoys a pride of place.

On behalf of the Government and people of Ghana, I wish to extend our deepest gratitude to the Chairman of the African Union, His Excellency President Yayi Boni, and all the other distinguished colleague Heads of State and Government who came to grace the swearing-in ceremony of my Vice-President and myself on January 7, either in person or through their able and eminent representatives.

We are similarly grateful to the numerous observers from various countries, inter-governmental, non-governmental organizations and civil society groups who came to witness the elections. My government regards them as indispensable partners in striving for the highest standards of transparency and integrity in our electoral process.

Your Excellencies, it is for all these reasons that Ghana has watched with grave concern the deadly threat posed to the peace and progress of our continent by the events unfolding in the North of Mali.

We fully support the on-going international intervention in Mali and trust that it will lead to a speedy resolution of the crisis and the full recovery of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a much- treasured sister African country.

Your Excellencies, a few months from now, our organization will mark its Golden Jubilee. I am aware that a preparatory committee is already hard at work trying to put together a befitting programme for that momentous occasion. I wish to commend members of the committee and wish them every success in their efforts. Whatever the outcome of their work, it is my hope that it will successfully capture the essence not only

of times past and present but, above all, the bright new future we envision for this great continent of ours.

I am certain many of us are already caught up in retrospection about the golden age of African liberation and our revered national heroes. There is no question that it was their selflessness and exemplary courage which inspired the faith and optimism that gave birth to the OAU in May 1963. Ghanaians take pride in the special honour recently conferred on Dr. Kwame Nkrumah whose statue stands prominently in front of the Commission's imposing office complex. At the same time, we recognize that notwithstanding that Ghana was his birthplace, Kwame Nkrumah's vision for our continent and his unshakeable commitment to its unity made him a citizen Africa. We who now wield the mantle of leadership on the continent are challenged by this 50th Anniversary to rise to up to occasion. With Africa's vast human and material resources as well as unprecedented access to technology, there is no reason why we cannot succeed if only we could muster the political will and seize the moment.

For, in spite of the highs and lows of the last few decades, there is still much to be thankful as well as hopeful for. We cannot remain entrapped in the grim episodes of our past. Nor must we allow our future to be overshadowed by the dire situations that persist in places such as Somalia, eastern DRC and lately Mali, among others.

If we can recapture as a people the same spirit of selflessness and patriotism that brought us out of colonial domination, I have no doubt that the dreams that inspired the heroic pioneers of independence and development will surely materialize in a generation.

Africa is making progress. As said by earlier speakers, some of the fastest growing economies in the world are in Africa. Most African countries now go through regular democratic elections for selection of leaders. The era of military juntas and unconstitutional governments is behind us. We are making steady progress in meeting the millennium development goals. Women are making progress in taking their place as partners rather than subordinates in the scheme of things. We can accelerate this progress if we recognize our successes and build on them rather than remain focused on our failings. We will easier fill the cup if we recognize it as half full rather than if we continue to perceive it as half empty.

May I also take the opportunity to convey to you, Excellencies my sincere gratitude and thanks to you for your support which you have graciously given for the candidature of Dr. Alan Kwadwo Kyerematen for the position of Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as Africa's candidate. I look forward to your continued support as he begins to go through the processes of selection associated with this strategic position. Fifty years after the formation of the OAU/AU, Africa is more than ready to lead this crucial world body through the much needed process of reform that will enhance Africa's prospects as an equal partner in the world trade system.

I thank you for your attention.

