

AFRICAN UNION

الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA

P. O. Box 3243

Telephone: 011 552 5837

Fax: 0115 525840

**MESSAGE OF
H. E. MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT
CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION
ON THE OCCASION OF THE AFRICA DAY CELEBRATION**

UNDER THE THEME:

**"YEAR OF REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND IDPs: TOWARDS DURABLE
SOLUTIONS TO FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN AFRICA"**

MAY 25, 2019

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

**Fellow Africans,
Dear brothers and sisters of the Continent and the Diaspora,**

On this auspicious occasion as we celebrate the 56th anniversary of the birth of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), precursor of the African Union, I am pleased to convey to each and everyone of you this renewed message of faith in the realization of our common vision, namely "The Africa We Want", as enshrined in Agenda 2063. Indeed, it is here in Addis Ababa, following a protracted and heated debate that the Heads of State and Government of 32 newly independent African States created the OAU. After centuries of domination, oppression, enslavement and slave exploitation, Africa woke up and became aware of its strength and the underlying force behind that strength: its dignity in unity.

It is the solemn affirmation of this imperative that we celebrate today. However, there are still many hurdles to overcome before Africa's independence and unity fully blossom. This would only come about when every African lives in peace, has free access to quality universal education, to full physical and mental health, to decent and remunerative job, to social and cultural development, to good democratic governance in the strict respect of his fundamental rights.

We celebrate this memorable day under the theme: "Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa". This theme in itself sufficiently demonstrates the acuteness of our challenges and the urgent and imperative need to work together to ensure to all African citizens the inalienable right to live free, dignified and be productive.

It is needless to recall on this great day the primary duty of all African States to guarantee these fundamental and inalienable rights. The humanitarian organizations which I commend and thank for the assistance they continue to provide to the African refugees and returnees are called upon to redouble their efforts. In this connection, the States concerned should, in dignity and freedom, create the necessary and appropriate conditions for all their citizens to return home. This occasion is also a timely opportunity to thank host countries for their commendable efforts and sacrifices in favour of refugees. At the same time, I would like to underscore the need for all States to safeguard the principles enshrined in the 1969 Convention on the Specific Aspects of African Refugees, including the principles of non-refoulement and burden sharing, not to mention the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons, known as the Kampala Convention.

Our shared vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa driven by its own citizens is the irreplaceable tool of our influence on the international scene. This common vision is also the instrument to fast-track our integration through an African space of freedom, opportunities, progress and development. Our duty is to tackle head-on the

paradox that makes this potentially rich continent the continent with the largest number of poor countries.

It is intolerable that our young people, the engine of transformation and development, continue in successive waves to embark on perilous journeys across oceans and deserts, for want of projects that instil hope and lead to a positive future.

Since the Kigali Extraordinary Summit of 21 March 2018 on the Continental Free Trade Area, we are working hard to come up with prospects that hold for the future. Our hope is that Africa as a bloc will become a major and an indispensable partner in world trade. Parallel to this promising African integration project, more efforts are required regarding the protocol on the free movement of people and the African passport.

I welcome the growing number of states that have implemented relaxation measures of their entry visa policies for African citizens. I urge the Member States that have not yet done so to join without delay the Agreement on the Single African Air Transport Market, another flagship project that is mobilizing us in more ways than one.

Dear Fellow Africans,

Agricultural productivity, local processing of raw materials, product diversification, training, the sustainable enhancement of human resources, the extension of the industrial fabric, a vast network of infrastructure and the exploitation of the energy potential of the continent remain our job creation opportunities for young people, women and general social well-being.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) seeks to provide the most relevant answers possible to all these issues. Its official launch at the Extraordinary Summit scheduled to take place in Niamey on 7 July 2019, will mark an important and decisive step on the road to African integration.

Furthermore, the Institutional Reform which has made giant strides, will also reach its pinnacle at the next Coordination Summit, which I hope will bode well for a harmonious division of labour between the regional and continental levels.

In this collective effort, I would like to place special emphasis on the role of the grassroots actors namely the African civil society organizations, the youth and women who, over and above the activities of the States, are doing a remarkable work of sensitization and mobilization among the various strata of the population.

Their efforts exerted often under difficult conditions cement and strengthen the resilience of African people and their hold on shaping their own destiny.

I wish you all a happy Africa Day celebration in joy, unity and hope.