

Address by the Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Ms Candith Mashego-Dlamini, on the occasion of the Panel Discussing marking Africa Month, University of Limpopo, Turfloop Campus, 26 May 2021

Thank you, Programme Director,

All faculty representatives here today,

Students,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Yesterday, on 25 May, our country joined the rest of Africa in marking 58 years since the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

The OAU was formed on 25 May 1963 by representatives of 32 African countries; and their aim was to do the following, among other things:

- Eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa;
- Promote the unity and solidarity of African states;
- Defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of African states;
- Promote international cooperation, giving due regard to the Charter of the United Nations;

- Coordinate and harmonize members' political, diplomatic, economic, educational, cultural, health, welfare, scientific, technical and defence policies; and
- Coordinate and intensify efforts to achieve a better life for African peoples.

Until its rebirth in 2002 in Durban, South Africa, the OAU successfully steered the course of many African states in their quest for independence. Those of you who are studying history, politics and international relations are well placed to do a more thorough analysis of the life of the OAU and what we can learn from it going forward.

The formation of the African Union, of which our country was the birthplace, signaled renewed vigor among African countries to take the process of African integration beyond the anti-colonization, anti-apartheid route, and move full steam in the direction of economic integration.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Unlike in 1963 when representatives of only 32 countries met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to form the OAU; in 2002, there were 53 countries represented in the formation of the AU. This was because the OAU had succeeded in its mission to rid Africa of colonization;

and many more African states had at this stage achieved independence.

We all know that there are 55 countries in Africa at the moment. Absent from the formation of the AU in 2002 were the Kingdom of Morocco, which had quit its membership of the OAU after the OAU recognized Western Sahara, and the Republic of South Sudan, which was only formed in 2011 when South Sudan gained independence from the Republic of Sudan.

The AU is still vigorously pursuing the matter of the status of Western Sahara, and South Africa is fully committed to the struggle of the people of Western Sahara to hold an independence referendum as agreed to by the United Nations (UN).

In 1991, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 690 which established the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, which is commonly known by its French abbreviation, MINURSO. At a government-to-government level and even at a party-to-party level, South Africa and Western Sahara, and the ANC and the Polisario Front, continue to engage on ways in which we maintain solidarity and work towards the implementation of the UN Resolution 690.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we continue to reflect on the OUA/AU during this month of its

birth, I want to say that the AU continues to grapple with a number

of serious challenges in its mission to integrate and propel the African economy.

Armed conflicts persist in parts of our continent, including in the Sahel region (e.g. Libya, Mali, Chad) and, recently, even in our own region, where we have seen insurgents linked to some of the terrorist networks wanting to cause instability in the north of Mozambique.

On the issue of Chad, where militants took the unprecedented step of killing a sitting head of state, South Africa has strongly condemned this move, and we are resolute in our position that violence is not the solution to the problems facing Chad. On the issue of Mozambique, the SADC has taken a strong position and is holding a series of meetings at the highest level in order to bring a stop to the insurgency and restore peace and stability in Mozambique.

Notwithstanding these challenges, Africa is marching ahead and, on 01 January this year, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCTA) came into operation. The AFCTA is the flagship project of the AU'S agenda 2063. The AFCTA will boost intra-Africa Trade, enhance African's industrialization prospect and facilitate Africa's integration into global economy on terms which are more equal and fair.

The AFCFTA lays the basic for the establishment of a single African market comprising 54 Nations and 1, 2 billion people with a combined gross domestic product of over US\$ 3 Trillion.

You may recall that one of the priorities identify by President Cyril Ramaphosa for South Africa Chairship of the AU for 2020 was the support for integration, economic development ,trade and investment on the continent. To date 54 countries have signed the AFCFTA agreement and 36 countries have ratified the instrument. I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate President Ramaphosa's call for effort to be made by African government t create a conducive environment for youth and women to benefit in the fruits of the AFCFTA. Furthermore the small medium micro enterprise should be prioritized as appropriate beneficiaries from the AFCFTA. South Africa will continue to advocate and appeal to those member state of the AU that have not signed and ratify the AFCFTA to do so as soon as possible. A further call was made for member state to submit their tariff offers to the AU commission in order to take advantage of the benefit of the AFCFTA.

The Secretariat of the AFCTA is based in Accra, Ghana, and its first Secretary General is a South African economist, Mr Wamkele

Mene, who was previously served in our mission to the World Trade Organisation.

The AFCTA will help Africa do the following:

- Eliminate tariffs on intra-Africa trade, making it easier for our businesses to trade within the continent;
- Eliminate non-tariff barriers to trade; and, in the near future;
- Establish a Common Continental Market.

The AFCTA is one of the goals set in the AU's Agenda 2063, which is a 50-year continental vision document which sets out a number of targets towards a peaceful and prosperous Africa. I have no doubt that many of you have studied this document, Agenda 2063, and I am looking forward to hearing from you what it is that we should do to achieve its goals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On COVID 19

The priorities of South Africa Chairship namely:

1. Promotion of peace and security as part of the effort to Silencing the Guns in Africa.
2. Support Economic development and integration
3. Advance the economic empowerment of women.
4. Support good governance and democracy.

The outbreak of COVID 19 Pandemic in the Continent has resulted in the redirection of resources to fight the pandemic. South Africa Chairship was forced to refocus its priorities towards addressing the immediate challenge course by the scourge to the public health system in the continent. The Africa joined continental strategy for COVID 19 outbreak was endorse in March 2020. Its aim was to combat address and prevent the spread of the virus in the continent.

The Bureau of the Assembly of the AU under South Africa's leadership has taken a number of initiatives as espoused in the continental strategy to respond to the COVID 19 Virus. AU has established Covid-19 Respond Fund to assist with boosting the capacity of the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention as well as to assist Africa countries in combating and containing the spread of the virus.

The 34th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU appointed President Ramaphosa as the champion for the Covid-19 vaccine strategy and acquisition. In his role as a champion the President will be expected to advocate for equitable and timely access to covid-19 vaccine to all AU Members States, which will require additional mechanism to ensure at least 60% continental

population vaccinated, the speedy operationalization of the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and production of report by the commission of the finances and disbursement of the Covid-19 response fund. He also leading the advocacy regarding the AU's Related Aspect Intellectual Property in order for AU Member States to be able to produce Covid-19 related vaccine, therapeutics and equipment.

Ladies and gentleman

I wish to end my address with a challenge to yourselves, as academics and scholars. I want to say that the place of academics and scholars in the formulation and execution of foreign policy is very important.

As thought leaders, you also constitute part of the broader civil society movements, and your influence must never be understated. Moreover, your studies guide us as we continue to imagine an Africa free of armed conflict, an Africa that is united, truly independent and prosperous.

The civil society movement is highly entrenched in the practice of international relations, and it plays a very active advocacy role on many topics that are close to our hearts as South Africans. These include matters such as climate change and human rights.

These are matters on which we want to hear more African voices.

I thank you.