

Remarks H.E. Ambassador Kongit Sinegiorgis

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H.E. Ambassador Kongit Sinegiorgis

Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the African Union and UNECA and Chairperson
of the Permanent Representatives Committee

At the Quarterly Briefing to Ambassadors by the Executive Secretary of UNECA

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Excellency Dr. Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of UNECA,

Excellencies and Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me, first of all, to express my profound appreciation to our friend and colleague Dr. Carlos Lopes for institutionalizing this quarterly briefing to Ambassadors resident in Addis Ababa on the activities of UNECA. I am sure we all agree that the regular briefing that we are receiving has indeed given us valuable insights not only on the work of this important continental organization but also on current issues of common interest and concern both to Africa and the world at large.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to have been asked to brief you on the annual retreat of African Permanent Representatives to the United Nations, which was held from 19-20 April 2013, in New York under the theme: "*Transformative Agenda for Africa: Position Africa on Global Development Issues*". The retreat was jointly organized by the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the United Nations, UNECA, Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (OSAA), UNIDO, the UNSG Special Adviser on the Post 2015 Development Agenda and AfDB. All the

organizers and particularly our good friend and colleague Dr. Carlos Lopes deserve to be praised for the efforts exerted to make the retreat a success.

The retreat was indeed well organized and the high level of participation both from the UN and the African Union was unprecedented as indicated in the report. In this regard, I wish to inform you that United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson attended the opening ceremony of the Retreat and addressed the African group.

Excellencies and Colleagues,

Although this retreat has been held annually for the last six years, it was for the first time that myself as Chairperson of the PRC and other members of the Bureau were able to join the African Group in New York upon the kind invitation and support of UNECA. We are indeed very grateful to Dr. Carlos Lopes for taking the initiative to invite us and his staff for facilitating our participation at the retreat. I believe this excellent gesture should be sustained in the years ahead.

Before we travelled to New York, Dr. Carlos Lopes graciously hosted us for a working Luncheon to exchange views on the agenda of the retreat, which I must say was very helpful as part of our preparations for the retreat.

The retreat took place at a time when we were gearing up to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the founding of the OAU/AU and start charting a continental vision for the next 50 years. It was also held at the backdrop of the ongoing multilateral negotiations to formulate a global development framework beyond 2015 and implement the Post Rio+20 Outcomes. Therefore, the objective of the retreat was to share knowledge, information and best practices in order to enhance the capacity of the African Group to effectively advance a unified transformative African agenda in the global development discourse.

I will try to briefly summarize the enriching and insightful discussions that took place during the retreat focusing on eight major thematic issues, which have particular significance in Africa's transformation agenda.

During the first session of the retreat, the African Group deliberated on what is rightly termed as "*the African Moment*" by highlighting Africa's high growth trajectory over the last decade. In this regard, the group reflected on Africa's emerging challenges and opportunities and proposed a way forward. Particularly, the group underscored the need to seize this African moment to bring about the desired structural transformation in our continent. In the words of Dr. Carlos Lopes, "what Africa needs is not structural adjustment but structural transformation".

The second session discussed the key priorities of the African Union Commission as outlined in its Strategic Plan for the years 2014-2017. It also considered the strategic focus of NEPAD in the course of these years particularly in terms of promoting Africa's transformation agenda through the effective implementation of its flagship projects such as CAADP and PIDA.

The third session was dedicated to examining the convergence of the Rio+20 outcome and the Post-2015 development agenda with a view to articulating Africa's common position in these global negotiation processes. As you are aware, the 21st ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union has decided to establish a High Level Committee of Heads of State and Government on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The Committee is tasked with the responsibility of further crystallizing and synthesizing the African Common Position and undertake the necessary consultation to finalize the document. The Committee will work to ensure that Africa's priorities identified in its common position are integrated in the new global development agenda.

The fourth session examined the state of industrialization in Africa and the challenges and opportunities for commodity based manufacturing on the continent. Particularly, the African Group deliberated on how to increase value addition in the utilization of Africa's natural resources with a view to enhancing employment creation, income generation, market integration and a socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable growth based on domestic wealth creation rather than external resource transfers.

The fifth session was focused on how to ensure better African representation within the United Nations System and enable Africa to speak with one voice for better promotion of the African agenda at the UN. The Permanent Representative of Cameroon explained the existing situation at the UN with regard to African representation based on available statistics and data. It was noted regrettably that there are very few Africans at the decision making level within the UN system and, hence, the need for Africa to have a united front in the nomination and presentation of African candidates in order to reverse this unfortunate situation.

During the sixth session, the African Group deliberated on the issue of regional integration and Africa's renaissance by focusing on the financing of regional integration through public-private partnerships and other mechanisms to develop regional infrastructure.

The seventh session was dedicated to the consideration of how Africa should reap the benefits of its demographic dividend by investing in its people. In this regard, the African group stressed that Africa must educate its youth and upgrade their skills. The importance of addressing cultural, traditional and religious barriers to effectively utilize Africa's human capital was also emphasized.

The eighth and last session examined the nexus between peace, security and development and underlined the need to apply a comprehensive and integrated approach that mutually reinforce efforts aimed at eradicating poverty, fighting threats to peace and security, promoting socio-economic development and good governance.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are several key messages that came out of the retreat, which I hope will guide our work as we strive to realize Africa's transformation agenda in the years and decades to come. Let me highlight some of the key messages.

1. ***1. The need to change the narrative on Africa as well as the mindset of Africa's leadership from structural adjustment to structural transformation***
2. ***2. The need to correct Africa's brand***
3. ***3. The need for Africa to define and own its development agenda***
4. ***4. The need for Africa to finance its own development***
5. ***5. The need to increase intra-African trade***
6. ***6. The need for Africa to industrialize***
7. ***7. The need for Africa to invest in its people***
8. ***8. The need to ensure that Africa's priorities are taken into account in the post-2015 development agenda***
9. ***9. The need for Africa to speak with one voice***
10. ***10. The need to fast-track regional integration***

In general, the retreat has achieved its objective in coordinating and intensifying our collective efforts in pushing forward the African cause on the international stage. Particularly, the retreat laid the foundation for better cooperation and coordination between New York and Addis Ababa, which I believe is very critical.

Let me indicate here the experience of my country where colleagues from our Permanent Mission in New York attend the meetings of the AU Policy Organs twice a year, while the Permanent Mission to the AU and UNECA in turn attends the sessions of the UN General Assembly. We also have regular communication and exchange of information between our two missions, which has certainly helped us to better coordinate our work and follow up on issues very closely. I believe this is a valuable experience and I hope others are also doing the same. It would be interesting to share other experiences in this regard.

I wish to conclude by once again thanking Dr. Carlos Lopes and the organizers. The retreat was an eye opener for us and this is how I believe we should work. Finally, I would like to ask my colleagues the Ambassadors of Mozambique and Benin if they could shade more light on the outcome of the retreat. Unfortunately, the Ambassador of Chad could not join us because of logistical constraints.

I thank you