

The Seventy-fifth Ordinary Session of the OAU Council of Ministers and Tenth Ordinary Session of the African Economic Community

Address

**by K. Y. Amoako,
Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa
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Honourable Chairman,
Your Excellency, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi
Your Excellency Secretary-General Amara Essy
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by saying what an honour and privilege it is for me to join you at this august gathering, a forum that I have always valued. I would like to sincerely thank Secretary General Essy for inviting me to speak, and in so doing, for continuing the tradition of his predecessor.

The birth of the African Union marks this gathering as a seminal moment in the history of our beloved continent. The presence of His Excellency Prime Minister Meles Zenawi at this Council of Ministers meeting renders this occasion all the more historic. We stand on the threshold of a new and exciting era, and we must grasp the opportunity with both hands. I am all the more grateful for the opportunity of joining you to explore how we can make the new Union the best one possible for Africa.

ECA's African Development Forum (ADF) is beginning to be well known. In ADF, we manage to merge, in one gathering, officials from all governments and major continental organizations, along with leaders of essential stakeholder groups, such as parliamentarians, the judiciary, civil society, the private sector, women, youth, media and the Diaspora.

The subject of ADF III was "Defining Priorities for Regional Integration in Africa".

We worked on this Forum for two years. During this time, you and our Heads of State and Government have made bold efforts to create the African Union. With the collaboration and encouragement of Secretary-General Essy, we focused ADF III on the African Union. Nearly 1,000 participants came to discuss three major aspects of the Union: economic integration; peace, security and human rights; and the establishment of the Union, by which we mean its architecture, sequencing, and its relations with stakeholders.

We preceded the Forum with a special Symposium on the African Union organized very ably by the Inter Africa Group, led by Abdul Mohammed.

I want to review with you the key results of the Forum, not because we arrived at perfect blueprints and precise guidance. But because I believe we focused on a number of issues which could make the difference between an ineffective African Union, and one which will be well supported around the continent, and which will function with much higher effectiveness.

The summary results of last week's Forum are contained in a paper entitled "Consensus Statement and the Way Ahead". This document, which was adopted by acclamation at the Forum, reflects two years of work, the collected wisdom of many of the continent's brightest minds. Therefore, I believe it deserves your careful study and very serious consideration.

Perhaps the most fundamental of all the issues raised at the Forum goes to the heart of the African Union. It is the issue of sovereignty. As Prime Minister Meles stressed during the Forum, although the Union will be an institution

run by States, there must be broad participation. The African Development Forum demonstrated that there is very a widespread demand from stakeholder groups for an African Union responsible to the People of Africa, not just the States of Africa. And they want a forceful African Union. Thus, many suggested that the new legal functions of the African Union should guarantee rights defined beyond those by an individual state.

We were told, often with stirring words, that ways need to be found to break from the past. To fashion an African Union which only elects chairmen who respect the fundamental rules of good governance. To be able to call by name those whose leadership besmirches the names of democracy, legality and responsibility.

I believe it is truly heartening that the participants in our Forum want an African Union of which they can be proud: an African Union of character, force and effectiveness. They want an African Union that represent the interest of all segments of African society and whose processes are open, transparent and consultative.

Now, how can we create an African Union with these attributes? Let me draw from the recommendations contained in the Consensus Statement.

First, building an African Union will require the commitment of competent and visionary leaders as well as staff appointed purely on the basis of merit, professional qualifications and insulation from political influence;

Second, the establishment of the African Union requires a well thought out sequencing and prioritization, with the establishment of participatory and representative institutions envisaged in the Constitutive Act being given a priority;

Third, the commitment of the African Union to the principle of gender equity is fundamental. Among other measures, the Pan African Parliament should meet the Beijing commitment of a minimum 30 percent representation of women and other African Union structures and institutions should endeavour to replicate this;

Fourth, civil society participation in the African Union should be a priority and annual meetings of civil society should be convened prior to the African Union summit. The African Union should establish an Economic, Social and Cultural Council as a consultation mechanism for liaison with stakeholders;

Fifth, Africa should move towards a common citizenship, through the initial steps of harmonizing citizenship, naturalization, immigration and employment laws, and through progressively removing restrictions on travel;

Sixth, Africa needs to strengthen the basic principle of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, namely the suspension of governments that come to power through unconstitutional means from participation in the activities of the Union, and

Seventh, regional and subregional organizations, governments, the media and other stakeholders have a duty to provide information about all aspects of the African Union to the generality of African people as widely as possible, using all media and all languages.

Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,

As you know, the Constituent Acts did not specify how the African Union is going to resolve the peace and security challenges facing our continent, nor how it was going to coordinate at various levels with other groups also mandated work on peace and security. This is a structural defect that the Forum proposed be solved as follows:

"It is necessary to seek harmonization and coordination between the peace and security functions of the African Union and those of the Regional Economic Communities. The African Union should seek means of clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the different African organizations and create a formal mechanism for cooperation between them. The African Union should also consider establishing an African Council for Security, to coordinate the peace and security functions of the

African Union with inputs from the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), NEPAD and the RECs, as well as providing an interface with the United Nations Security Council."

I have recalled this part of the Forum's recommendations, as the peace function is so critical to our progress, including our economic development.

Now, let me turn to the economic dimensions of creating the African Union. At the ADF, we presented the preliminary results of a major two-year effort by ECA to assess Africa's performance in regional integration. The main conclusion of the study is that Africa's integration is generally on course with the most visible efforts in trade and market integration.

The regional economic communities (RECs) that were created as stepping-stones to regional integration, have played a significant role in the success of our regional integration efforts. Now, there are 14 RECs covering a range of functions and intentions. In addition, there are a whole host of regional policy and training centres that bear on regional integration.

Experience in Africa and elsewhere clearly shows that both subregional and regional organizations are needed and useful, if there are complementary divisions of labour. In ECA's assessment, Africa's current system of integration is too complex, too duplicative, and requires too much political energy and money for what is being produced. Currently almost all of our countries belong to more than one of these RECs. Twenty-seven countries belong to two, 18 belong to three and one country belongs to four.

We, therefore, recommend that the system should be rationalized. We can all recognize that efforts to rationalize the current plethora of integration institutions will not succeed, unless there is solid political backing. How can we assure that there is political understanding of the fact that creating an ambitious African Union should go hand-in-hand, with decisions to rationalize and economize elsewhere?

Clearly, choices will have to be made, and they should be choices, which sequence actions. The next major actions to implement the African Union might well be selected both because they are urgent and because they can be solidly achieved. Each achievement will build confidence to take on the next needed tasks.

In this regard, creating numerous commissions all at once, plus a lot of new structures, could be over-ambitious. The tasks of prioritizing and sequencing the essential institutions is one of the key challenges before you in the coming days. If you decide to proceed on all fronts at once, I believe the quality and perhaps the viability of African Union could suffer in ways that will set back regionalization by weakening our confidence in moving ahead even more.

As stated earlier, the ADF consensus statement recommended that the establishment of participatory and representative institutions envisaged in the constitutive Act should be given a priority. These are the Pan-African Parliament, the structures and institutions for peace and security and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOC).

Prudently sequencing implementation of the African Union will also allow us to deal with the problem of finance. New regional institutions will have payrolls and operating costs to fund. Even now, many of our existing regional institutions have difficulty financing what they are supposed to do. Their budgets are modest compared with their mandates. Even so, collecting funds against modest budgets has become difficult. One result has been a turn to and dependence upon external funders.

The financial demands of a smaller start up would be more manageable. There would be added time to do better financial planning and fundraising for the next stages. And solid performance in the early stages of implementation will encourage more forthcoming finance for the later stages.

Before I close, let me briefly return to the African Development Forum. More than 1,000 stakeholders from across the board came to Addis Ababa to participate in what was an event of the highest substantive quality. In putting their views on the table, they demonstrated passion, desire and belief in a united Africa. They also expressed their determination to make the dream a reality. It is with this spirit of candour that I have sought to address you today.

Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by pledging ECA's continued support in fostering regional economic integration. We would like nothing better than to have a strong African Union to work with on these and many other matters. You have my very best wishes and hopes for productive deliberations.
