

**VOTE OF THANKS DELIVERED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF GHANA, NANA ADDO DANKWA AKUFO-ADDO, AT
THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE 28TH ORDINARY SESSION OF
THE ASSEMBLY OF THE AFRICAN UNION, ON JANUARY 31, 2017,
IN ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA.**

Ghana and my modest person are honoured by the invitation of the newly installed Chairperson of the Assembly, His Excellency Alpha Condé, to move the vote of thanks to all who have contributed in their various ways to the outstanding success of this landmark Summit. It may, somehow, be appropriate that, at a time when we are attempting to renew our organization and its values, a Guinean should be in the chair and a Ghanaian at the podium, for this may recall the early days of Africa's independence, when the strategic alliance of Ghana-Guinea-Mali was one of the seminal events that paved the way for the establishment of our predecessor body, the Organisation of African Unity, in this historic, ancient city of Addis Ababa, in 1963, some 54 years ago.

We salute the election to the leadership of our Union of the Guinean President, His Excellency Alpha Condé, a renowned fighter for democracy and human rights in his native Guinea. Sir, 'ayekoo', as they say in Ghana. The Assembly has conferred on you a new Bureau, composed of some of the most redoubtable figures of contemporary African politics – their Excellencies Yoweri Museveni, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, King Mswati III, and Idriss Déby Itno – and a new Commission led by the accomplished Foreign Minister of Chad, with an equally accomplished Ghanaian diplomat as his Deputy and a new set of apparently solid Commissioners. The elements are in place for the successful tenure of office of President Alpha Condé, and we wish him well.

We thank the people and government of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia for their traditional, warm hospitality for our meeting. Addis Ababa continues to cement its reputation as the diplomatic capital of Africa. Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, thank you.

The Commission of our Union, together with all the other organs, be they policy or advisory, deserve our commendation for the dedication and professionalism with which they have mobilised the facilities placed at our disposal throughout the period of the 28th Ordinary Session of the Assembly, including the working documents and the transportation, interpretation and protocol services. Every human organization can always be improved, but we remain, nonetheless, sincerely grateful for their efforts.

I have called this Summit a landmark one, because of the far reaching decisions that we have taken here. We have made the bold decision to admit one of new Africa's founding states, the Kingdom of Morocco, into our fold and extend the reach of our organization, finally, to all parts of our continent, with all its implications. We have adopted the comprehensive proposals for the reform of our institutions prepared by the

respected leader of Rwanda, His Excellency President Paul Kagame, and his advisory council of experts. If vigorously implemented, these proposals will give a significant and enhanced impetus to the operations of our Union. We owe President Kagame and his team a profound debt of gratitude for their excellent work. We have taken the equally bold decision to finance our operations from our own resources and wean ourselves off foreign dependence and charity. The implementation of that decision is necessary for our self-respect. We have also met our deadline of putting into place a programme for the establishment of a Continental Free Trade Area to boost our chances for self-reliant economic development, which will, hopefully, help realise the enormous potential of our continent and help bring prosperity and dignity, at long last, to the long-suffering peoples of Africa. If these and other measures are carried out in their letter and spirit, they will, indeed, mean that this has been a landmark Summit, one which will have succeeded in rekindling the values of "unity, solidarity and cohesion" that have been the founding values of our continental organization. It will mean that the decision we made, in establishing this Union 15 years ago in 2002, to build our Union "brick by brick", in His Excellency President Robert Mugabe's eloquent phrase, is paying off, and that, sooner rather than later, we will arrive at the goal of realizing our vision of an integrated, peaceful and prosperous Africa, speaking with one voice, that has been the dream of successive generations of pan-Africanists.

I acknowledge the outgoing Deputy Chairperson of the Commission, Mr. Erastus Mwencha, and all the outgoing Commissioners for their sacrifices and contributions to this Union and, indeed, the overall progress of our continent.

I cannot conclude this vote of thanks without making special mention of two persons, one a woman, the other a man. The woman is Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, outgoing Chairperson of the Commission. A former colleague as Foreign Minister, her vision of freedom and prosperity with its bold initiatives for all our peoples, in particular women, who constitute the very backbone of our survival and progress, means that millions of women and men around the continent are, today, holding the torch of women's social, economic and political empowerment. Nkosazana, 'wenze kahle'. We wish you well in your future endeavours. There were many in this room who could not have missed the symbolism of that other outstanding African woman, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia and ECOWAS' current leader, standing by your side on the podium at yesterday's opening ceremony. Who knows, you may next year be the second elected female leader on our continent if the South African people and your party so consent. In Twi, we say 'nante yie' – go well, fare thee well.

The other is a man, the Chadian statesman, Idriss Déby Itno. Excellency, your calm, sterling leadership has brought new dynamism into our Union, characterized by the strategic policies during your tenure that have enlarged immeasurably the horizons of our continental body. We are deeply indebted to you for the sacrifices you and the Chadian people have made to inspire the success of your mandate. M. le Président Idriss Déby, chef renommée de l'état Chadien, on vous remercie vivement pour tout votre oeuvre au sein de notre organisation pour le progrès et bien-être du peuple

africain, qui restera toujours très reconnaissant de vos efforts. Goodbye and even greater success in the future, both in Chad and in Africa.

We need to remind ourselves regularly that, in launching the theme for 2017 “Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in the Youth”, we have made essentially a pact with both present and future generations to leave them a better legacy than we inherited from our forebears. Let our generation be at the measure of our history.

In conclusion, on behalf of all Ghanaians, I thank the Union for its assistance in helping to make Ghana’s recent electoral contest credible and its outcome acceptable, thereby enhancing our principles of democratic accountability, which have reinforced the peace, stability and unity of the Ghanaian nation. I also thank your Excellencies for the big vote of confidence you gave to my country Ghana, not just by the massive endorsement of Ghana’s candidate for Deputy Chair of our Commission, but also for the selection of my compatriot, Prof. Dakoure, as one of the two awardees of this year’s Kwame Nkrumah Scientific Award.

Thank you and may God bless the African Union and Mother Africa.