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The AFRICA We Want

AUC Chairperson's E-mail from the Future



Addis Ababa, 26 January 2014:

During the Ministerial retreat of the African Union's Executive Council being held in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, from 24th to 26 January 2014, the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma outlined her vision of Africa in 50 years' time, through "an email from the future".

Written to a hypothetical Kwame in the year 2063, the full email is attached below:

Date : 24 January 2063
To : Kwame@iamafrikan.com
From : Nkosazana@cas.gov
Subject : African Unity

AU Anthem

Let us all unite and celebrate together
The victories won for our liberation
Let us dedicate ourselves to rise together
To defend our liberty and unity

O Sons and Daughters of Africa
Flesh of the Sun and Flesh of the Sky
Let us make Africa the Tree of Life

Let us all unite and sing together
To uphold the bonds that frame our destiny
Let us dedicate ourselves to fight together
For lasting peace and justice on earth

O Sons and Daughters of Africa
Flesh of the Sun and Flesh of the Sky
Let us make Africa the Tree of Life

Let us all unite and toil together
To give the best we have to Africa
The cradle of mankind and fount of culture
Our pride and hope at break of dawn.

O Sons and Daughters of Africa
Flesh of the Sun and Flesh of the Sky
Let us make Africa the Tree of Life

Greetings to the family and friends, and good health and best wishes for 2063.

I write to you from the beautiful Ethiopian city of Bahir Dar, located on Lake Tana, as we finalize preparations for the Centenary celebrations of the Organisation of African Unity, which became the African Union in 2002 and laid the foundations for what is now our Confederation of African States (CAS).

Yes, who would have thought that the dream of Kwame Nkrumah and his generations, when they called in 1963 on Africans to unite or perish, would one day become a reality. And what a grand reality.

At the beginning of the twenty first century, we used to get irritated with foreigners when they treated Africa as one country: as if we were not a continent of over a billion people and 55 sovereign states! But, the advancing global trend towards regional blocks, reminded us that integration and unity is the only way for Africa to leverage its competitive advantage.

In fact, if Africa was one country in 2006, we would have been the 10th largest economy in the world! However, instead of acting as one, with virtually every resource in the world (land, oceans, minerals, energy) and over a billion people, we acted as fifty-five small and fragmented individual countries. The bigger countries that should have been the locomotives of African integration, failed to play their role at that time, and that is part of the reasons it took us so long. We did not realize our power, but instead relied on donors, that we euphemistically called partners.

That was the case in 2013, but reality finally dawned and we had long debates about the form that our unity should take: confederation, a united states, a federation or a union.

As you can see, my friend, those debates are over and the Confederation of African States is now twelve years old, launched in 2051.

What was interesting was the role played by successive generations of African youth. Already in 2013 during the Golden Jubilee celebrations, it was the youth that loudly questioned the slow progress towards integration. They formed

African Union Clubs in schools and universities across the continent, and linked with each other on social media. We thus saw the grand push for integration, for the free movement of people, for harmonization of education and professional qualifications, with the Pan African University and indeed the university sector and intelligentsia playing an instrumental role.

We were a youthful continent at the start of the 21st century, but as our youth bulge grew, young men and women became even more active, creative, impatient and assertive, often telling us oldies that they are the future, and that they (together with women) form the largest part of the electorates in all our countries!

Of course this was but one of the drivers towards unity. The accelerated implementation of the Abuja Treaty and the creation of the African Economic Community by 2034 saw economic integration moved to unexpected levels.

Economic integration, coupled with infrastructure development, saw intra-Africa trade mushrooming, from less than 12% in 2013 to approaching 50% by 2045. This integration was further consolidated with the growth of commodity exchanges and continental commercial giants. Starting with the African pharmaceutical company, Pan African companies now not only dominate our domestic market of over two billion people, but they have overtaken multi-nationals from the rest of the world in their own markets.

Even more significant than this, was the growth of regional manufacturing hubs, around the beneficiation of our minerals and natural resources, such as in the Eastern Congo, north-eastern Angola and Zambia's copper belt and at major Silicon valleys in Kigali, Alexandria, Brazzaville, Maseru, Lagos and Mombasa, to mention but a few such hubs.

My friend, Africa has indeed transformed herself from an exporter of raw materials with a declining manufacturing sector in 2013, to become a major food exporter, a global manufacturing hub, a knowledge centre, beneficiating our natural resources and agricultural products as drivers to industrialization.

Pan African companies, from mining to finance, food and beverages, hospitality and tourism, pharmaceuticals, fashion, fisheries and ICT are driving integration, and are amongst the global leaders in their sectors.

We are now the third largest economy in the world. As the Foreign Minister's retreat in Bahir Dar in January 2014 emphasised, we did this by finding the balance between market forces and strong and accountable developmental states and RECS to drive infrastructure, the provision of social services, industrialization and economic integration.

Let me recall what our mutual friend recently wrote:

“The (African) agrarian revolution had small beginnings. Successful business persons (and local governments) with roots in the rural areas started massive irrigation schemes to harness the waters of the continent's huge river systems. The pan-African river projects - on the Congo, the Nile, Niger, Gambia, Zambezi, Kunene, Limpopo and many others – financed by PPPs that involved African and BRIC investors, as well as the African Diaspora, released the continent's untapped agricultural potential.

By the intelligent application of centuries-old indigenous knowledge, acquired and conserved by African women who have tended crops in all seasons, within the first few years bumper harvests were being reported. Agronomists consulted women about the qualities of various grains – which ones survived low rainfalls and which thrived in wet weather; what pests threatened crops and how could they be combated without undermining delicate ecological systems.

The social impact of the agrarian revolution was perhaps the most enduring change it brought about. The status of women, the tillers of the soil by tradition, rose exponentially. The girl child, condemned to a future in the kitchen or the fields in our not too distant past, now has an equal chance of acquiring a modern education (and owning a farm or an agribusiness). African mothers today have access to tractors and irrigation systems that can be easily assembled.

The producers' cooperatives, (agribusinesses) and marketing boards these women established help move their produce and became the giant food companies we see today.’

We refused to bear the brunt of climate change and aggressively moved to promote the Green economy and to claim the Blue economy as ours. We lit up Africa, the formerly dark continent, using hydro, solar, wind, geo-thermal energy, in addition to fossil fuels.

And, whilst I'm on the Blue economy, the decision to form Africa-wide shipping companies, and encourage mining houses to ship their goods in vessels flying under African flags, meant a major growth spurt. Of course the decision taken in Dakar to form an African Naval Command to provide for the collective security of our long coastlines, certainly also helped.

Let me quote from our mutual friend again:

'Africa's river system, lakes and coast lines abound with tons of fish. With funding from the different states and the Diaspora, young entrepreneurs discovered... that the mouths of virtually all the rivers along the east coast are rich in a species of eel considered a delicacy across the continent and the world.

Clever marketing also created a growing market for Nile perch, a species whose uncontrolled proliferation had at one time threatened the survival of others in Lake Victoria and the Nile.

Today Namibia and Angola exploit the Benguela current, teeming with marine life, through the joint ventures funded by sovereign funds and the African Development Bank."

On the east coast, former island states of Seychelles, Comoros, Madagascar and Mauritius are leading lights of the Blue economy and their universities and research institutes attract marine scientists and students from all over the world.

Dear friend, you reminded me in your last e-mail how some magazine once called us 'The hopeless continent', citing conflicts, hunger and malnutrition, disease and poverty as if it was a permanent African condition. Few believed that our pledge in the 50th Anniversary Declaration to silence the guns by 2020 was possible. Because of our firsthand experience of the devastation of conflicts, we tackled the root causes, including diversity, inclusion and the management of our resources.

If I have to single out one issue that made peace happened, it was our commitment to invest in our people, especially the empowerment of young people and women. By 2013 we said Africa needed a skills revolution and that we must change our education systems to produce young people that are innovative and entrepreneurial and with strong Pan African values.

From early childhood education, to primary, secondary, technical, vocational and higher education – we experienced a true renaissance, through the investments we made, as governments and the private sector in education and in technology, science, research and innovation.

Coupled with our concerted campaigns to eradicate the major diseases, to provide access to health services, good nutrition, energy and shelter, our people indeed became and are our most important resource. Can you believe it my friend, even the dreaded malaria is a thing of the past.

Of course this shift could not happen without Africa taking charge of its transformation, including the financing of our development. As one esteemed Foreign minister said in 2014: Africa is rich, but Africans are poor.

With concerted political determination and solidarity, and sometimes one step back and two steps forward, we made financing our development and taking charge of our resources a priority, starting with financing the African Union, our democratic elections and our peacekeeping missions.

The Golden Jubilee celebrations were the start of a major paradigm shift, about taking charge of our narrative.

Agenda 2063, its implementation and the milestones it set, was part of what brought about this shift. We developed Agenda 2063 to galvanize and unite in action all Africans and the Diaspora around the common vision of a peaceful, integrated and prosperous Africa. As an overarching framework, Agenda 2063 provided internal coherence to our various sectoral frameworks and plans adopted under the OAU and AU. It linked and coordinated our many national and regional frameworks into a common continental transformation drive.

Planning fifty years ahead, allowed us to dream, think creatively, and sometimes crazy as one of the Ministers who hosted the 2014 Ministerial retreat said, to see us leapfrog beyond the immediate challenges.

Anchored in Pan Africanism and the African renaissance, Agenda 2063 promoted the values of solidarity, self-belief, non-sexism, self-reliance and celebration of our diversity.

As our societies developed, as our working and middle classes grew, as women took their rightful place in our societies, our recreational, heritage and leisure industries grew: arts and culture, literature, media, languages, music and film. WEB du Bois grand project of Encyclopedia Africana finally saw the light and Kinshasha is now the fashion capital of the world.

From the onset, the Diaspora in the traditions of Pan Africanism, played its part, through investments, returning to the continent with their skills and contributing not only to their place of origin, but where the opportunities and needs were found.

Let me conclude this e-mail, with some family news. The twins, after completing their space studies at Bahir Dar university, decided to take the month before they start work at the African Space Agency to travel the continent. My old friend, in our days, trying to do that in one month would have been impossible!

But, the African Express Rail now connects all the capitals of our former states, and indeed they will be able to crisscross and see the beauty, culture and diversity of this cradle of humankind. The marvel of the African Express Rail is that it is not only a high speed-train, with adjacent highways, but also contains pipelines for gas, oil and water, as well as ICT broadband cables: African ownership, integrated planning and execution at its best!

The continental rail and road network that now crisscross Africa, along with our vibrant airlines, our spectacular landscapes and seductive sunsets, the cultural vibes of our cities, make tourism one of our largest economic sectors.

Our eldest daughter, the linguist, still lectures in KiSwahili in Cabo Verde, at the headquarters of the Pan African Virtual University. KiSwahili is now a major African working language, and a global language taught at most faculties across the world. Our grand children still find it very funny how we used to struggle at AU meetings with English, French and Portuguese interpretations, how we used to fight the English version not in line with the French or Arabic. Now we have a lingua franca, and multi-lingualism is the order of the day.

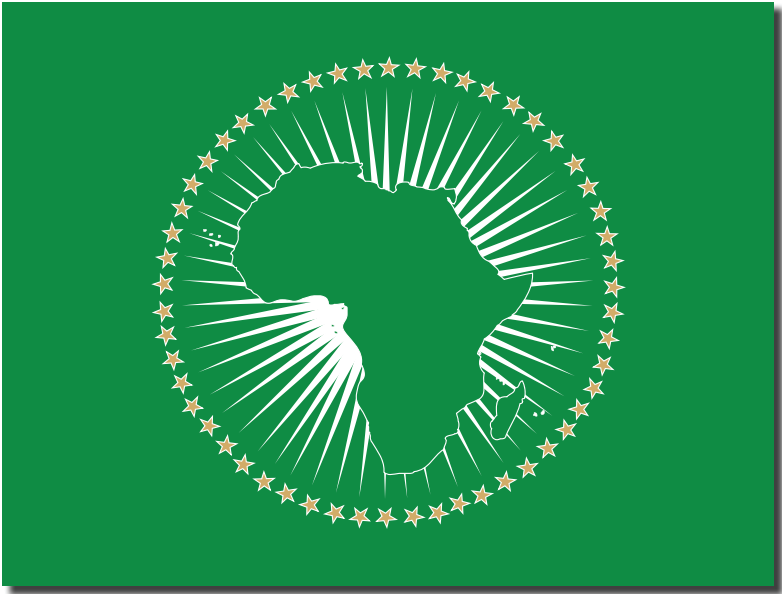
Remember how we used to complain about our voice not being heard in trade negotiations and the Security Council, how disorganized, sometimes divided and nationalistic we used to be in those forums, how we used to be summoned by various countries to their capitals to discuss their policies on Africa?

How things have changed. The Confederation last year celebrated twenty years since we took our seat as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and we are a major force for global stability, peace, human rights, progress, tolerance and justice.

My dear friend, I hope to see you next month in Haiti, for the second round of unity talks between the Confederation of African States and the Caribbean states. This is a logical step, since Pan Africanism had its roots amongst those early generations, as a movement of Africans from the mother continent and the Diaspora for liberation, self-determination and our common progress.

I end this e-mail, and look forward to seeing you in February. I will bring along some of the chocolates from Accra that you so love, which our children can now afford.

Till we meet again, Nkosazana.





Africa United in Action!

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