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Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

60th Anniversary of ECA Speech

May 14, 2018

we all know, every anniversary involves a critical and reflective engagement with the past, the present and the future. It is with this sense of purpose that we should reflect a mile stone achieved and ensure we apply lessons learned and design a better Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) together.

It was 60 years ago that His Imperial Majesty HaileSELLASIE made a strong appeal at the first session of the ECA on December 1958. He recounted the plight of the African continent plunged in paradox; endowed with valuable natural resources yet mired in the senseless poverty, dependent on others to finance its own development and propel transformation.

In his speech, Emperor HaileSELLASIE urged the support of members states to raise the living standards of people through the promotion and diversification of exports, improved agricultural techniques, establishment of regional common market and the creation of a research hub to inform policy.

Every time I recall these prophetic statements from the Emperor, I ask where we are today on each of the points he raised a long time ago. The answer is simple and straight forward. Each of these issues are as relevant today as they were back then. In some cases, they are even more so today than six decades ago. Food security is far from assured and our regional and continental economic integration programs are far behind where they need to be. I can go on and on, however I am with you today, to not merely recount the past, but to celebrate our collective achievements of which there are many.

Importantly, I am also here to challenge us to learn from history and look into the future by exercising wisdom that comes with maturity.

The Economic Commission for Africa has indeed been at the forefront of cutting-edge policy research, thought leadership and advice since day one. In fact, it has been our very own in-house think tank that helped us champion our continental aspiration with the zeal of a missionary. However, in the spirit of African unity, the ECA did not walk alone. Founded only five years after the ECA, the Organization of the African Union, OAU, has been championing the African cause since the signing of the charter of the organization in 1963. The OAU had met many objectives but



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at its heart was the liberation of the continent from colonial rule, racism, discrimination and exploitation.

Ethiopia may have celebrated the 122nd anniversary of the victory of the battle of Adwa this year. However, freedom was a long time coming in our continent. It was delayed but unstoppable. African independence leaders helped orchestrate and intensify the struggle to bring freedom to the entire continent throughout the decades. The OAU was spectacular in that regard. Unfortunately, despite expelling our colonial oppressors out of the continent, we started turning increasingly against each other.

We dampened our spirits and conflict became the norm. We even became highly valued customers for weapon manufacturing companies around the world until we learned our lesson at a very high cost.

Slowly, and steadily we started developing homegrown means to prevent and to resolve our conflicts by ourselves. The transformation of the Organization of African Unity into the African Union was a turning point in this respect. Today, the African Union is able and ready to intervene in all sorts of government sponsored abuse of human rights than the OAU could. It also does not recognize a new leader who comes to power through non-constitutional means. With such political accomplishments on its record, the African Union is also now accelerating its impact in economic integration of the continent which was already an objective, identified in the 1963 charter, but deprioritized as internal strife and civil war took precedence.

A recent example of the success witnessed in this regard is the historic signing of the Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area in Kigali in March of this year, which was signed by 44 African countries. The Protocol on Free Movement of Persons was another success and signed by more than half the membership. The opening of our skies with a launch of the single African Air Transport market is yet another addition. Equally important the African Union reform process under the able leadership of his excellency Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, and current Chairperson of the AU assembly of Head of States, facilitates economic integration. I applaud the African Union leadership for this hope inspiring initiatives and accomplishments. Needless to say, the ECA has been there with us throughout our efforts to identify our challenges and address them in our own way.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, today our deliberations at this conference are being held under the theme “African Continental Free Trade Area in Physical Space for Job and Economic Diversification.” The theme is timely and considerable value to each of our countries. As policy



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makers, finance ministers and central bank governors will look to you for leadership. Leadership that will insure trade is not an end in itself, but the means to advance the wellbeing of Africans.

I am sure many of you are aware that here in Ethiopia, we have been engaged in an ambitious program of upgrading our infrastructure, building industrial parks and formulating industrial policy and strategies to support the development of our industry. Our efforts have led to meaningful improvement in foreign direct investment to a significant part because we have established an increasingly more business friendly Ethiopia. Our efforts have also yielded tangible results, as evidenced in the growing share of the industrial sector's contribution to our economy.

With the African Continental Free Trade Agreement in place, and once it enters in to force in particular, I am confident that the opportunities for us to attract more investment will only increase. The continental free trade agreement should be shaped and implemented so as to enable Africa to create opportunities for its citizenry; to spur our industrialization agenda, to ensure inclusive development for all Africans, in particular women and the youth. Together we will grow. Together we will give our young people a stake in the future of our continent; we will harness their energy and creativity for the collective wellbeing.

We need to increasingly engage the private sector in ensuring economic integration and introduce aggressive policies to broaden women's access to economic opportunities. Ethiopia is fully aware of the opportunities that the free trade agreement offers and it is ready to follow Rwanda and Ghana for their pioneering role in the ratification of the agreement. I wish to urge all of you to do so to ensure that it can come into force sooner.

Ladies and gentlemen, imagine the progress we could make if we silenced the guns, empowered our communities and build stronger intuitions. Imagine, if you don't radiate a negative energy. Imagine if we don't invest all our resources to kill each other. Imagine if we love each other as the nations and as Africans and nurture our values to transform our citizens.

What should Africa become by 2030? What about 2063? How can the ECA continue to assist the continent to attain this collective vision? How do we enhance the competitiveness of African industries on the global market? How do you foster south-south and north-south economic cooperation?

Ministers, governors, experts, ladies and gentlemen, we must all employ our talent to build a competitive Africa. The African Continental Free Trade Agreement is in fact an important step that has heralded the establishment of the world's largest free trade area. On this anniversary ECA



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shall look back with pride and look forward with hope. ECA shall marshal all its resources to support the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. ECA has been with us for 60 years.

I am confident it will be there for the next phase of African development.

I thank you for your attention and I declare the conference is officially opened.

Thank you very much.