

**WELCOMING REMARKS DELIVERED BY  
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I would like to begin by thanking everyone for honouring the invitation.

A special word of thanks to the former Heads of State and Government. The theme of the conference, 'Moving Towards an Integrated Africa' justifies the invitation, and we look forward to their robust participation.

A mighty word of gratitude to President Museveni, a freedom fighter, an experienced President, a committed integrationist, a reviver of the east African Community, an ardent PanAfricanist. His keynote address should help us fathom the obstacles to faster integration and drive us to speed up the process.

A Financial Times reporter, one Tom Burgis, has described Africa as "the world's poorest continent, and arguably, its richest. Although accounting for 2 per cent of global GDP, it's the repository of 15% of the planet's crude oil reserves, 40% of its gold and 80% of its platinum. Beneath its soils lies a third of the mineral resources found on earth. But this treasure trove has proved to be not a salvation but a curse." Natural Resources should make people rich!! Why not Africa? Is financial colonialism a reality? Is that why we do not integrate faster?

Celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OAU/AU two years ago the Heads of State and Government adopted agenda 2063, a Vision and Action Plan to accelerate development and fight the poverty of the continent's people. The realization of the Agenda presupposes, as pillars, functioning regional institutions. Do the institutions already exist? Among them may be cited COMEMSA, EAC, ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD and SADC. Are they functioning? Are they dynamic integrationist institutions? Can they be made to transform into more proactive agents of integration? How?

The Swahili saying goes: When minds are the same, that which is far off will come nigh. Are the Africans of one mind about integration? Are they of one aspiration? Are they of one about sacrificing for the common good?

Political parties are noted for their principles and ideology. How many of them espouse integration in their election manifestos and development plans? At their regular summits, do they take time to receive reports on and review progress in Integration?

In the pursuit of accelerated integration, how much importance is being given to economic cooperation as a major yardstick and driver of change and development, and especially of political union? What can we learn from the history and experience of other continental organisations, such as those in Europe, the Americas and Asia? What impact will evolving economic and trading pacts in other continents – TPP, TATIP, EPAs, the BRICS – have on African continental common market and industrialization agenda?

Africa is a multi-cultural, multi-tribal entity. Are there African values that can accelerate the integration process? Is there an African Renaissance? Are Africans looking at development and projections through their own, African eyes? Or do they look at Africa through European eyes?

I do not want to anticipate your deliberations, but I thought I would ask these questions to set the stage for the discussions.