

**WELCOMING REMARKS BY**  
**MS SUSAN SIKANETA, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**  
**OF THE AFRICAN UNION – SOUTHERN AFRICA REGIONAL**  
**OFFICE AT THE CELEBRATIONS TO COMMEMORATE**  
**AFRICA DAY, 25<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2003**  
**AT LE MERIDIEN CAPITAL GARDENS**

- **Honourable Mr. Thengo Maloya, Minister of Lands, Physical Planning and Surveys**
- **Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers**
- **The Dean of Diplomatic Corps, His Excellency Mr. Seleka**
- **The Head of the European Union, Mr. W. Van der Goot**
- **Your Excellencies Heads of Missions and International organisations**
- **Distinguished Guests**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

I wish at the outset to thank you Honourable Minister for gracing the celebrations as our Guest of Honour. We are honoured and humbled by your presence, together with that of honourable ministers and all the distinguished Excellencies and distinguished guests.

This is indeed a great day for Africa. Exactly 40 years ago on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1963, our forefathers, Africa's first statesmen who had the beautiful vision of a free, strong and united Africa, took the first bold, courageous and wise step of founding the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Today, 40 years later, that decision has translated into a free Africa, an Africa free from colonial bondage and apartheid. Today a conducive environment exists in which Africa will surely awake from her economic slumber and become the economic giant that she should be. It is for this reason that we are all gathered here to celebrate our freedom and to look ahead to the future with hope and determination to succeed.

The launch of the African Union last year marked the beginning of a new era of opportunities for Africa's tangible development. The decision by the Heads of State and

Government to establish the African Union, Southern Africa Regional Office is a unique challenge for our region to accelerate development in areas that will translate into tangible change in the standards of living of the people. We must move forward with the necessary speed and determination. We are talking about elimination of hunger and poverty, defeat of endemic diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, doing away with and managing conflict, improving on good governance and strengthening relations with our cooperating partners for accelerated and sustained development. Since the beginning of the millennium, the winds of Africa have been blowing and echoing the same message that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century belongs to Africa. We all have a stake to ensure that Africa, and Southern Africa in particular, which has the lowest average income, leap frogs into a future of assured development.

We at the Southern Africa Regional Office are ready and more than determined to contribute to making the region move out of its trap of poverty and underdevelopment. We have the hope and confidence in a brighter future of our beautiful Africa.

Of course, we cannot achieve on our own. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. We are enjoying tremendous support from the Ministry. Our relations seem to have been cast in concrete from the beginning. I wish Honourable Minister, through you to thank the President, His Excellency Dr. Bakili Muluzi and the Government of Malawi for your unflinching support and commitment to the cause of the African Union.

Equally our sincere gratitude go to their Excellencies, the Heads of African Missions here in Lilongwe with whom we share the vision of a progressive Africa and who have demonstrated a true spirit of Pan Africanism in our collaborate efforts so far.

To all the Heads of International organisations, I wish to say thank you for your readiness to work with the African Union as has been clearly demonstrated in your contributions to the special supplement on Africa Day. Allow me to mention the European Union in particular who have demonstrated their willingness to enter into Joint Collaborative Programmes for

tangible improvement in the living standards of the people. **“EUROPE FOR AFRICA”** is not a slogan but a reality that is being translated into meaningful and effective instrument for change in many areas of human endeavour.

I wish to thank the African Diplomatic Women’s Association for their hard work and contribution of food which has added a colourful and exciting dimension to the celebrations. You are all invited to sample the tantalising African delicacies.

To our lovely children, the choirs, dancers and all groups and individuals present, we say God bless you for your participation and presence. We applaud the spirit of cooperation moving around us. Welcome one and all and enjoy the celebrations.

**LONG LIVE THE AFRICAN REVOLUTION, GOD BLESS AFRICA AND GOD BLESS US ALL, I THANK YOU.**

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Welcoming remarks by Ms. Susan Sikaneta, Executive Secretary of the African Union – Southern Africa Regional Office at the celebrations to commemorate Africa Day, 25th May 2003 at Le Meridien capital gardens

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