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**INTRODUCTORY NOTE OF THE CHAIRPERSON
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE OF THE CHAIRPERSON

A. INTRODUCTION

1. This Introductory Note is a supplement to the Annual Report on the Activities of the Union and its Organs for the year 2018. It is a follow up to the Note presented at the Nouakchott Summit and covers the period from July 2018 to January 2019.

2. Three aspects were salient in my Note in Nouakchott: first, the need to redouble efforts to ensure our financial autonomy and to give a new impetus to self-reliance, as well as the resolute pursuit of the institutional reform process of our Union; second, the importance of implementing the Decisions taken and the legal instruments adopted, including the necessity to diligently sign and ratify them; third, the imperative need for Africa to speak with one voice on the world stage, more especially given the very difficult current international context, characterized by the rise of unilateralism and the concomitant weakening of multilateralism. In this Note, I shall take stock of the progress made and the challenges faced on these and other issues.

3. The present ordinary sessions of our Union are convened in a particular historical context. 19 February will mark the centenary of the first Pan-African Congress, held in Paris in 1919. This event was the starting point of the long march that led to the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in May 1963, before its transformation into the African Union (AU) in July 2002.

4. The celebration of this anniversary should be an opportunity for all of our Member States and our citizens to renew their commitment to the ideals of our Union and to provide a greater dynamism to the implementation of Agenda 2063. It is gratifying to point out that the centenary anniversary of the first Pan-African Congress also coincides with the erection, in the AU compound, of a statue in honor of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia, which will be unveiled during this Summit. The role played by the Emperor in the resistance of Ethiopia to the invasion of the fascist regime that was then ruling Italy and in the inception of the OAU is immense. In the same vein, the Note highlights other initiatives that can be important vehicles to promote Pan-Africanism, particularly cinema and culture in general.

5. Since the Nouakchott session, I have endeavored, with my colleagues in the Commission, to speed up the implementation of key aspects of Agenda 2063. Within this framework, I have undertaken a number of visits to Member States and participated in international meetings dealing with issues of importance to our Continent. I have also received here at the AU headquarters several emissaries and other officials from both Africa and outside.

6. The Introductory Note gives a prominent place to the efforts to pursue the process of integration and development. The aim is to move forward the aspects relating to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the Single African Air

Transport Market (SAATM) and the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence and the Right of Establishment. These three instruments are inseparable elements of the ongoing integration process.

7. The Note also reflects the efforts made by the Commission in specific areas linked to the development of the Continent. The objective is not only to facilitate the mobilization of the necessary political and financial support for the continuation and amplification of these initiatives, but also to enhance the tangible contribution of our Union to the socio-economic progress of the Continent. The legitimacy of our Union and the degree of the support it receives at the Continental level are, needless to say, intimately linked to the perception of the impact it has on the ground. It is with this in mind that the ongoing Institutional Reform process calls for the establishment of a more symbiotic relationship between the Union and the African citizens, particularly through the identification of the public goods it generates.

8. The Note also takes stock of the evolution of efforts to implement successfully the aspects of our Agenda related to governance, democracy and peace. Significant progress has been made in this area, including sensitization about the imperative need to fight the scourge of corruption within the ambit of the theme of the 2018 Summit. However, there is still a long way to go.

9. With regard, particularly, to the objective of “Silencing the Guns by 2020”, it is important to significantly increase the mobilization of all the stakeholders concerned so that the commitment made by the Heads of State and Government in 2013 becomes a reality. Admittedly, the challenges to be overcome are daunting and the deadlines set very tight. The task, however, is not insurmountable once the necessary political will exists, as the reconciliation between Eritrea and Ethiopia and the subsequent developments in the Horn of Africa have so eloquently shown. It is clear that tangible progress in this area will go a long way towards finding a lasting solution to the issue of forced displacement of people on the Continent. By dedicating the theme of 2019 to Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons, our Heads of State and Government sent a strong signal of their determination to tackle this issue with renewed vigor.

10. Furthermore, the Introductory Note addresses a number of cross-cutting issues related to gender and youth. I note with satisfaction the progress that continues to be made to ensure gender equality. Needless to stress the importance of intensifying ongoing efforts to translate into reality the commitments made in this respect within the framework of Agenda 2063. The AU Gender Strategy, which will be launched at this Summit, provides an appropriate framework in this regard. The pursuit of efforts to effectively harness the demographic dividend is just as essential. It is in this perspective that I have appointed, following an open and transparent process, a Youth Envoy and set up an Advisory Council on Youth.

11. This Note also gives an account of the state of implementation of a number of AU Decisions. These relate to the International Criminal Court (ICC), the decolonization of the Chagos Archipelago and the follow up of the Hissène Habré trial.

12. In view of the importance of accountability in the Commission and the establishment of an environment conducive to enhanced performance, the Note reports on the actions taken in this regard.

13. Finally, the Note concludes with a brief overview of the main developments in the area of international partnerships of Africa. The efforts made in this field focused on ensuring that these partnerships are effective tools for the implementation of Agenda 2063.

14. Throughout the past six months, the Commission continued to benefit from the support of the Member States in carrying out the heavy responsibilities entrusted to it. I point out, in particular, the unfailing support of President Paul Kagame of Rwanda. As his term as Chairman of our Union draws to a close, I would like to express my profound gratitude and appreciation to him and to commend the tremendous work done over the past twelve months. I wish full success to President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt, who will take over the mantle for 2019, and wish to assure him of my full cooperation and that of the Commission as a whole.

B. FURTHERING PAN-AFRICANISM

i) Centennial of the 1st Pan African Congress and Honouring Haile Selassie

15. As I indicated in my Introductory Note to the Nouakchott Summit, the year 2019 will mark the centenary of the First Pan-African Congress that was organized in Paris by people of African descent from 19 to 21 February 1919. This event will coincide with the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Sirte Declaration on 9 September 1999, which transformed the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU) and gave a renewed impetus to Africa's unity and socio-economic integration.

16. I argued then that the centenary of the First Pan-African Congress in 1919 should be another momentous opportunity to reflect on our past and honor our unity and dignity as Africans, on the motherland and her Diaspora. The centenary should also be an opportunity to renew the AU's respect to those women and men who initiated the Pan-African movement, starting from the 19th century, and sustained it up to the establishment of the OAU and its successor, the African Union.

17. The Commission will actively contribute to the commemoration of the centenary of the Pan-African movement in a tribute to the memory of our worthy forebears, an acknowledgment of the work of contemporary Pan-Africanists, and an affirmation of our readiness and that of our youth, male and female, to lead us into a more peaceful, prosperous, and proud future. I look forward to Member States, as well as to other stakeholders, taking steps and initiatives to mark this event,

18. The February 2019 Summit will be marked by the unveiling of a statue in honor of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia. Emperor Haile Selassie was one of the founding fathers of the OAU. Through his statesmanship and pragmatism, he bridged the gap that existed at the time between the two contending views – the Casablanca and Monrovia blocs – and helped in bringing of the African leaders together to Addis Ababa in 1963 to achieve the goal of all Pan-Africanists – the creation of the Organization of African Unity in May 1963.

19. Emperor Haile Selassie’s prioritization of the unity of Africans cannot be better described than in the following quote from the historic speech he made on 25 May 1963:

“What we require is a single African organization through which Africa’s single voice may be heard, within which Africa’s problems may be studied and resolved. We need an organization which will facilitate acceptable solutions to disputes among Africans and promote the study and adoption of measures for common defense and programs for co-operation in the economic and social fields. Let us, at this Conference, create a single institution to which we will all belong, based on principles to which we all subscribe...”

20. African leaders of Emperor Haile Selassie’s generation did their best to hand over to us the ideal of African unity. As the Union unveils Haile Selassie’s statue, we should all be mindful of our obligation to contribute to the completion of the journey that those founders began - a journey which will continue to be complex and full of pitfalls, particularly in the current global context of uncertainties and challenges to multilateralism. It is therefore imperative for us, as Africans, to rededicate ourselves and strengthen our commitment to the realization of African unity and socioeconomic integration, in keeping with the aspirations of Agenda 2063 and the spirit of Pan-Africanism and African renaissance.

ii) *Commemoration of the Mandela Centenary*

21. At the Nouakchott Summit, the Assembly reaffirmed its full support for the holding of the Mandela Peace Summit under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, in commemoration of former President Nelson Mandela’s centenary. The commemorative event took place in New York on 24 September 2018. The major highlights of the events were the unveiling of a life-like statue of Madiba and the holding of the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit with the participation of all UN members.

22. In my statement at the opening plenary of the Mandela Peace Summit, I recalled that it was in remembrance of the values embodied by former President Mandela that the AU had declared the period 2014 –2024 as the Nelson Mandela Decade of Reconciliation in Africa.

23. The Mandela Peace Summit concluded with the unanimous adoption by the UN General Assembly of a Political Declaration, which recognized the period 2019-2028 as

the Nelson Mandela Decade of Peace. The Declaration saluted Madiba's humility, forgiveness and compassion and his dedication to the service of humanity. It also acknowledged his contribution to the struggle for democracy internationally and the promotion of the culture of peace throughout the world. Furthermore, the Declaration committed the General Assembly to redouble its efforts to build a just, peaceful, prosperous, inclusive and fair world, and revive the values for which Nelson Mandela stood, by placing human dignity at the center of its actions.

24. I would like to express my appreciation to the African Heads of State and Government whose physical presence at the ceremony contributed to making the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit a successful event. I also wish to express deep appreciation to the UN General Assembly and the Secretary General for their support and actions taken in this regard.

iii) *Encyclopaedia Africana*

25. The Encyclopaedia Africana project was first introduced by Dr. W.E.B Du Bois in the early 1900s. Subsequently, in 1960, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, then President of the Republic of Ghana, invited Dr. Du Bois to serve as the editor in chief of *The Encyclopaedia Africana*. Like the Encyclopedia Britannica, the Encyclopaedia Africana Project is expected to "set the records straight" regarding the history, culture, social institutions of people of African descent, including Africans in the Old World, African-Americans in the New World, and persons of African descent who had risen to prominence in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

26. Efforts towards the realization of the Encyclopaedia Africana Project culminated in the establishment of the Secretariat for the Encyclopaedia Africana Project (EAP) in Accra, in 1962. Until 1967, the Secretariat was funded mainly by contributions from some participating African countries and UNESCO. The Secretariat currently functions under the National Council for Tertiary Education of Ghana's Ministry of Education.

27. The Encyclopaedia Africana Project was granted an Observer Status by the OAU in 1975, which made it possible for the Secretariat to receive subventions from the OAU. However, the OAU's subventions ceased due to the organization's own financial constraints.

28. The Project achieved some initial success in the decades following its launch, with political and financial support from some Member States, which enabled the Secretariat to initiate, coordinate and produce a number of volumes. Within this first phase of operation, the Secretariat successfully published three (3) volumes – the last one in 1995 – under the title *Dictionary of African Biography*. Thereafter, the implementation of the project stalled for the reasons earlier stated.

29. At the January 2014 AU Summit, the Encyclopaedia Africana Project was tabled as a country item by Ghana, which requested the AU to adopt the project as its own. In its decision Assembly/AU/Dec.500 (XXII), the Assembly requested Ghana to avail itself

to work with the Commission and to facilitate consultations with the aim of reviving awareness among all Member States about the Project. The Assembly further requested the Commission to facilitate the formation of National Cooperating Committees in each Member State, to be financed nationally, and to enlist the assistance of scholars in various universities and research centers to contribute to the Encyclopedia. A year later, in January 2015, the Assembly, through decision Assembly/AU/Dec.565(XXIV), adopted the Agenda 2063 Framework Document. Aspiration 5 of that Document – “An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics” – lists the completion of Encyclopaedia Africana as one of its expected targets.

30. Since 2016, the Commission has taken steps to revitalize the Encyclopaedia Africana Project, organizing, to that end, technical consultative meetings in partnership with its Secretariat in Accra. The Commission has also developed a technical framework for the publication of the 4th edition of *Encyclopaedia Africana*, which will include African contributions and influences on the outside world in medicine, architecture and education, among others. The compilation and the editing of the 4th edition required the reconstitution of the Scientific Committee for the Project, which received support from the AU Centre for Linguistic and Historical Studies (CELHTO) based in Niamey, Niger, and UNESCO’s General History of Africa team. The Commission also undertook to rebuild awareness and visibility around the Encyclopedia Africana Project among Member States. The launch of the 4th edition is scheduled in 2023.

31. In the spirit of Pan-Africanism in which this project was borne, I urge Member States to renew their support to the Encyclopaedia Africana Project. I also propose the inclusion of this initiative in the list of flagship projects of Agenda 2063, to give it greater visibility and facilitate the mobilization of the support required for its successful implementation.

iv) *African Film Industry as Agent of Cultural Integration and Charter for African Renaissance*

32. 2019 will mark the golden jubilee of the founding of the festival that later became known as the Pan African Film Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO), the most important film and cultural event on the African continent. FESPACO was launched in 1969 as a private initiative but it later became a state-funded biennial event. Local audience’s infatuation with African film and the progressive cultural policy of the Government of Burkina Faso served as an impetus for its inception.

33. Over the years, FESPACO has become a genuinely indispensable biennial exhibition space and an inspiring lighthouse for cinema and audio visual in Africa. The trail blazed by FESPACO has also been emulated by other African countries to the extent that there are currently twenty-one (21) International Film Festivals hosted by AU Member States, including the Sahara International Film Festival established in 2003 (the only film festival in a refugee camp).

34. I wish to call Member States' attention to the multiplying effect that an investment in culture and the power of the image in defining identities can have on the Union's imperative to effectively contribute to shaping narratives about Africa. If ever an economic justification is necessary, Nollywood's commercial successes – now a multi-billion dollar industry –, or the Moroccan film studios in Ouarzazate, which create jobs and revenue by hosting big-budget foreign productions, are illustrative of the potential gains from enhancing Africa's cinema and audio visual industry.

35. Nollywood has attracted the most recent positive international attention to its home country and the continent as a whole. It is the second largest film producer in the world behind India's Bollywood, and ahead of Hollywood. This \$11 billion film industry, which began in 1992, now employs an estimated one million people, making it the second-largest employer in Nigeria. An important aspect of Nollywood is that it has become the most visible cultural vehicle on the African continent. The industry deals with the diverse and complex mosaic of modern African urban and rural lives and has inspired film production in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa, among others.

36. During my visit to Nigeria, from 25 to 27 October 2018, I held an interactive stakeholders' meeting with Nollywood. I took the opportunity to express appreciation for their talent, creativity and dynamism, as a demonstration of the continent's resourcefulness. I stressed that Nollywood actors were shaping the image of the continent for the better, while at the same time serving as role models for the African youth to encourage them to discover themselves and realize their talent. As a way forward, it was agreed that the AU and Nollywood will partner to further popularize Agenda 2063 and related AU activities.

37. It is in the same spirit that I responded positively to the invitation from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Tourism of Burkina Faso, on 5 November 2018, to attend the 26th edition of FESPACO, scheduled to take place from 23 February to 2 March 2019 on the theme "*Confronter notre mémoire et forger l'avenir d'un cinéma panafricain dans son essence, son économie et sa diversité*". This will also mark the 50th anniversary of FESPACO. I look forward to participating at this event and interacting with all concerned stakeholders.

38. In January 2006, the Assembly adopted the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance with the aim to promote African arts, heritage and culture and ensure that they play a full part in the political, economic and social development of the continent, as well as in the rehabilitation and unification efforts of African people. Regrettably, more than twelve years after its adoption, the Charter has yet to enter into force. Only twelve (12) Member States have signed and ratified it. These are Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa. Thirty-three (33) Member States have signed the Charter. The latest Member State to sign the Charter is the Republic of Malawi in April 2018.

39. The Commission will continue its pro-active advocacy and sensitization campaign for the signature and ratification of the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance. I am pleased to note that, in collaboration with the Champions of the Charter – that is, the twelve countries that have ratified it – the Commission developed a draft Implementation Guide to assist Member States in the implementation process. Furthermore, the 4th Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, which was held in Addis Ababa from 23 to 30 November 2018, adopted an amendment to Article 35 of the Charter on entry into force. Once endorsed by the Assembly, this amendment will make it possible for the Charter to enter into force thirty days after the receipt by the Commission of the fifteenth instrument of ratifications. Given the relevance of the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance as a unique continental instrument that encapsulates all aspects of arts, culture and heritage on the continent, its entry into force will foster cultural understanding among African people and the preservation and conservation of Africa's world heritage sites. The Charter is also a potential platform to showcase the artistic creativity of Africa and its Diaspora, notably in the African audio visual and cinema industry.

40. In a related development, I am also pleased to note that the Treaty of the African Audio-Visual and Cinema Commission, which was established in July 2016 as an AU Specialized Agency by Executive Council's decision EX.CL/Dec. 921(XXIX), has now been adopted by the 4th Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. The establishment of the African Audio Visual and Cinema Commission's Temporary Secretariat in Kenya is under way, and its launch will take place in early 2019.

C. OVERALL IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 2063

41. Since the last Ordinary Session of the Assembly in Nouakchott in July 2018, efforts towards the execution of Agenda 2063's First Ten-Year Implementation Plan have continued apace. Significant progress has been registered in the domestication of Agenda 2063 and its First Ten-Year Implementation Plan, the Flagship Projects, as well as in the development of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Partnership Frameworks, and in the revitalization of the Ministerial Committee on Agenda 2063.

42. With the support of the Commission, Member States convened in Nairobi, Kenya, from 17 to 21 September 2018 for a consolidation workshop on the domestication of the Agenda 2063 First Ten-Year Implementation Plan into national and regional planning frameworks. This was the second workshop of its kind since the adoption of Agenda 2063. The participants reviewed progress, shared experiences, both successes and challenges, in the domestication of not only Agenda 2063 but also 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They identified the technical assistance needed from the Commission; and discussed the Monitoring and Evaluation Core Indicators Handbook introduced to them and how it should be rolled out. They also exchanged views on the preparation of Member States' *Progress Reports on Agenda 2063*, to be submitted to AU Summits. Regarding the Flagship Projects, as Member States would recall, significant achievements have been made in the AfCFTA and the

SAATM. Steps are also being taken on the free movement of persons and the African passport, and to expedite the implementation of the other flagship projects.

43. Meanwhile, the Ministerial Committee on Agenda 2063 has continued with its revitalization process. After a brief meeting on the margins of the Summit in Nouakchott, the Committee is scheduled to meet again in Addis Ababa on 6 February 2019, to deliberate on the AU theme of the year 2020. A more consolidated meeting of the Committee is expected to take place in Gaborone, Botswana, in the first week of March 2019, to deliberate more extensively on its revitalization. The session's agenda is expected to cover the Committee's Rules of Procedure, structure and other proposals regarding the involvement of all stakeholders in the implementation and harmonization of execution plans for Agenda 2063 and 2030 Agenda.

44. Some AU Organs, which have not been fully taking part in the Committees meetings, particularly the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), should be more involved in order to play their crucial roles. The PAP is instrumental in getting national and regional Parliaments to facilitate the ratification and implementation of AU decisions and legal instruments, while ECOSOCC is significant in sensitizing the civil society, the private sector and African citizenry in general, by enhancing awareness and domestication of both Agenda 2063 and 2030 in Member States.

45. It is also necessary to equip the Ministerial Committee on Agenda 2063 with capacity to be more effective and efficient in fulfilling its mandate. Owing to its mandate, structure, and reporting lines, it feeds into the deliberations of the Executive Council to which it reports. It should also have an important role to play in the preparation of the July Coordination Summit. Equally important is the role of the Champion for Agenda 2063, President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire. In this context, it will be appropriate to bring together, for consultation, all Champions of various Agenda 2063 projects, in order to draw up a more coherent strategy for the realization of the objectives being pursued.

46. In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the Commission's commitment to continue to avail all the support required to the efforts of the Champions, the Ministerial Committee on Agenda 2063, AU organs and all stakeholders in their drive to ensure the successful execution of Agenda 2063.

D. REFORMING THE UNION

47. Driving forward the reform agenda remains one of the core priorities of our Union. I am pleased to report that significant progress has been made since the Nouakchott Summit, which adopted an improved budget process. The Union's 2019 budget was reduced by 12% in comparison to the 2018 budget, as a result of a more rigorous budget preparation and oversight process.

48. At the time of finalizing this Note, twenty-six (26) Member States were at various stages of implementing the 0.2% levy to ensure predictable and self-autonomous financing of the Union. Forty-eight (48) Member States have, to date, contributed to the Peace Fund, bringing the total contributions to approximately US\$80.6m. The payment of outstanding contributions for 2017 and 2018 from Tier 1 countries, alone, would bring the Peace Fund financing level to \$102.2m. The Board of Trustees for the Peace Fund is now in place; it held its inaugural meeting on 16 November at AU Headquarters.

49. The Nouakchott Summit witnessed progress on other aspects of the reform agenda. The Assembly agreed on the governance structure for the new AU Development Agency. It also reviewed proposals on how to strengthen the African Peer Review Mechanism, focusing on securing predictable financing by integrating the APRM into the AU budget.

50. The period under review was also marked by efforts to take forward the review of AU Organs. In this respect, work is underway to develop detailed recommendations on how to strengthen the effectiveness of these Organs, building on the initial review of the Pan-African Parliament and the judicial organs that I presented to the July 2018 Nouakchott Summit, as part of my overall report on AU Reforms. On its part, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) held a retreat in Cairo from 29 to 30 October 2018, on how to strengthen its working methods and its role in conflict prevention and management. Detailed proposals and recommendations will be developed in 2019.

51. The Assembly's 11th Extraordinary Summit on the reform, held in Addis Ababa from 17 to 19 November 2018, deliberated on the reform of the Commission. I submitted proposals on how to: (i) streamline the structure and portfolios of the senior leadership of the Commission, in order to remove overlaps and duplication; (ii) improve meritocracy and transparency in the selection of the senior leadership; and (iii) strengthen performance management and clarify termination procedures at the senior leadership level.

52. The Assembly decided to reduce the size of the Commission from 10 to 8, including the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, in order to rationalize the Commission's portfolios and improve its overall efficiency. From 2021, the senior leadership will now be comprised of six (6) Commissioners, a Deputy Chairperson and a Chairperson. The Assembly also decided to strengthen the selection process for the senior leadership by introducing a new competency-based assessment that will be overseen by a Panel of Eminent Africans, assisted by an independent African consultancy firm. I will present a new departmental structure for the Commission for the consideration of the Executive Council in June 2019.

53. It is also worth mentioning that the Assembly adopted a new and enhanced sanctions regime for the non-payment of Member State contributions to improve their predictability and Member States' compliance with their financial obligations. Other decisions, include the adoption of: (i) the new mandate of the AU Development Agency, whose Statutes are being prepared; (ii) a roadmap for the establishment of an effective

division of labor between the AU, the RECs, Member States and continental organizations, with a view to delivering a report to the inaugural mid-year Co-ordination Meeting to be held in Niamey, Niger, in June/July 2019; and (iii) the integration of the APRM budget into the statutory Union budget funded by Member States.

54. During this period and within the framework of this wider reform process, I also initiated, with the technical support of the African Capacity Building Foundation, two studies on policy coherence and division of labour in the Union. The first study reviewed the functional roles of all the AU Organs with a human rights and governance mandate. The aim was to identify entry-points for the introduction of processes, systems and mechanisms for the improvement of policy alignment, harmonised budgeting, results-based programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation, knowledge management, and reporting across these Organs.

55. The second study examined the relationship between the Commission and Specialised Agencies. The objective was to: (i) undertake a comprehensive inventory of all Specialised Agencies; (ii) elaborate a coherent legal definition of a Specialised Agency; (iii) review a standard set of criteria for the awarding of specialised agency status to autonomous institutions; (iv) propose a consistent process for the operationalization of these Agencies; (v) construct a mapping of division of labour between Specialised Agencies and relevant departments of the Commission; and (vi) consider possible funding models to ensure the sustainability of these Agencies.

56. In addition, recognising the need to enhance the functional relationship with its Permanent Representational Offices (PROs), the Commission undertook another study to assess the strategic and capacity of PROs with a view to designing effective mechanisms for improved institutional coherence. I believe these three studies will make a key contribution to the ongoing reform process. Consultations with stakeholders will continue in 2019 towards the review and finalization of the issues and options articulated in the three studies.

E. DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRATION AGENDA

i) Africa's Economic Performance in 2018 and Outlook for 2019

57. Africa's growth is expected to pick up in 2019, after a sluggish performance in 2018. Africa grew by 3.2% in 2018, down slightly from 3.4% in 2017. Some of Africa's largest economies are rebounding, thanks to rising private consumption, but growth remains low. Growth in non-resource-rich countries remains strong, driven by heavy public investments in infrastructure.

58. However, Africa's current growth rate is not enough for the continent to achieve either Agenda 2063 or the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Hence the need to boost growth through increased investments, which now stands at 25% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a figure that is much lower than that of East Asian and the Pacific economies. Africa needs, therefore, to speed up growth to double-digit

figures between now and 2030 by increasing the level of investment and substantially improving productivity. Productivity growth remains low relative to the rest of the world and the levels needed for African economies to speed up economic diversification and enhance their competitiveness in the world market. Member States need also to embark on reforms that would help build resilience, raise potential growth and inclusiveness, and move towards the achievement of Agenda 2063.

59. Africa's fiscal deficit, on its part, is estimated to have narrowed from 5.3% of GDP in 2017 to 5.0% in 2018. This is mainly due to on-going fiscal consolidation efforts in many countries, the recovery in oil prices as well as the widening of tax base and the automation of tax administration.

60. Largely driven by upswings in commodity prices, fiscal deficits are observed to be on a converging trend towards a 5% level among all economic groups. The fiscal position is forecast to remain stable at around 5% in 2019, supported by improving global economic conditions, particularly among commodity exporters.

61. As fiscal deficits narrow down, both public and foreign debts have experienced marginal increases, rising by 2.6% (from 48.4% of GDP in 2017) and 1.9% (from 26.5 per cent in 2017), respectively. It is, therefore, crucial to emphasize the need for Member States to improve their debt management, so that their debts remain within sustainability levels without strangling the desired economic growth.

62. Africa's inflation remained on a downward trend over the period, despite remaining relatively high in some countries. It declined from an average of 14.4% in 2017 to 11.1% in 2018, reflecting relatively stable exchange rates and falling food prices, which have, to a greater extent, outweighed the effects of increased global oil prices.

63. Current account deficits continue to narrow down from 3.9% of GDP in 2017 to 3.1% in 2018, underpinned by the narrowing of current account deficits in oil-exporting and mineral-rich countries. These countries have benefited from the increase in oil and commodity prices, as well as oil production. However, some countries experienced widened current account deficits due to increased demand for capital imports, high fuel prices (especially in oil-importing countries), high price of food imports, and higher interest payments on Government debts.

64. Africa's merchandise exports picked up in 2017, after four slow consecutive years, as world exports increased by 10.6%, making it the largest growth since 2012. All main world regions expanded their exports in 2017, with Africa registering the highest increase of 18.3% compared to the Americas, Asia and Europe. The expansion in African exports has mainly been driven by increase in commodity prices, investment and consumption expenditure, raising Africa's share in total world exports from 2.2% in 2016 to 2.4% in 2017.

65. Primary commodities and raw materials still represent the lion's share of Africa's merchandise exports, with fuels alone accounting for 39.4% of the value of Africa's total exports in 2017. The share of manufacturing exports in Africa's total exports has remained relatively stable overtime, from 24.3% in 1996 to 26.2% in 2016, though with a slight decrease to 23.9% in 2017. This is a reflection of Africa's comparatively low technology base and productivity, as well as its continued dependence on external partners to satisfy the continent's industrial needs.

66. In terms of intra-African trade, three-quarters of Africa's exports to African partners are concentrated in just thirteen (13) African countries. Intra-African exports are mainly dominated by machinery and transport equipment. In light of the above intra-African trade characteristics and the current uncertain global context, deepening regional integration in Africa is becoming an urgent necessity. Hence, the need for the Union to accelerate the establishment of the AfCFTA, so as to boost intra-African trade and its industrial content, thereby offering meaningful impetus to Africa's transformation and socioeconomic development.

67. Africa's real GDP growth is expected to increase marginally from 3.2% in 2018 to 3.4% in 2019. These forecasts will be driven mainly by continued increase in private consumption, rising and sustained public investment, higher commodity prices, the on-going exploration and production of oil and expected favorable weather conditions. However, a number of African economies are expected to face downside risks to growth due to a host of factors.

68. With most African countries importing more manufactured and agricultural products from outside the continent, and with a greater percentage of intra-African trade concentrated in machinery and transport equipment, there is a need for further diversification and structural transformation to better support Africa's industrialization.

ii) African Continental Free Trade Area

69. There have been several positive developments in the Union's drive to establish the AfCFTA, since the signing of the AfCFTA Agreement in Kigali in March 2018. I am pleased to report that, so far, forty-nine (49) Member States have signed the AfCFTA Agreement. Sixteen (16) Member States have ratified the Agreement, although only nine (9) – Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Niger, Rwanda, and Uganda – have formally deposited their instruments of ratification. I urge the remaining six countries that have still to sign the AfCFTA Agreement, namely Benin, Botswana, Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria and Zambia, to do so as soon as possible, to advance the implementation of this flagship project. I also urge all Member States that have sign but are yet to ratify this instrument to do so as soon as possible. I am hopeful that the requisite number of twenty-two (22) ratifications can be reached early in 2019 if Member States keep the pace with signatures and ratifications.

70. As we move towards the entry into force of the Agreement, I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the Leader of the AfCFTA, President Issoufou Mahamadou of

Niger, with the support of the Ministers of Trade as well as the Commission's Department of Trade and Industry, for his outstanding contribution. I call on all Member States to continue to actively engage in the process towards the completion of the entire set of negotiations within the appropriate timelines and move forward with processes to domesticate and implement the AfCFTA. As the AfCFTA Agreement stands, it is expected that all aspects of the negotiations will be concluded in 2020.

71. To ensure a beneficial AfCFTA, concerted efforts are being made to dismantle non-tariff barriers, building on the best practices from the Tripartite and other Free Trade Agreements supported by the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). In partnership with African Export Import Bank (Afreximbank), steps are also underway to develop a pan-African payment and settlement system, in order to reduce the cost of trading amongst each other.

72. In the meantime, the Union can already start to reap the benefits of the AfCFTA, as exemplified by the strong interest shown by the African private sector. Notably, the First Intra-African Trade Fair hosted in Cairo, in December 2018, demonstrated the huge potential in the continent to build our prosperity together. This was a successful event wherein more than 1,000 exhibitors from 44 Member States gathered and forged deals in excess of US\$30 billion. I commend Egypt for all the arrangements made for the success of this event and congratulate Rwanda for winning the competitive bid to host the next Intra-African Trade Fair.

iii) Single African Air Transport Market

73. Progress continues to be made in the implementation of the Roadmap of the Ministerial Working Group for the establishment of the SAATM. This includes: (i) advocacy for more States to join the SAATM; (ii) implementation of immediate measures by the parties to the SAATM to concretize their Solemn Commitment; (iii) finalisation and adoption of the Yamoussoukro Decision Regulatory Texts; (iv) resource mobilisation for the Executing Agency, the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC); (v) development of a Memorandum of Cooperation between the RECs and AFCAC on the operation of the SAATM; (vi) mobilisation of technical assistance to Member States for the implementation of the Abuja Safety Targets; and (vii) elaboration of an External Policy Guidelines and Binding Clauses on the negotiation of air service agreements with non-African countries and regions.

74. At the launch of the SAATM in Addis Ababa in January 2018, twenty-three (23) Member States had signed the Solemn Commitment. The Commission has, since then, reached out to a number of countries and, based on the feedback received, it is expected that several other Member States are likely to join the SAATM in the months ahead. Currently, twenty-seven (27) Member States are yet to join the SAATM. These are: Algeria, Angola, Burundi, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia.

75. One of the main challenges encountered at the launch of the SAATM related to the capacity of AFCAC as the Executing Agency, which, at the time, did not have a Secretary-General. The Commission facilitated and funded the process that led to the election of Mr. Teferra Mekonnen of Ethiopia as the new Secretary-General by the 29th extraordinary plenary session of AFCAC. A new Bureau was also set up, headed by Zambia.

76. Furthermore, in accordance with the decision establishing the SAATM, the Commission undertook consultations with a number of stakeholders, including financial institutions, aimed at mobilising resources to strengthen the capacity of AFCAC. The results have been positive, with the African Development Bank agreeing to provide US\$4.5 million over the coming three years as financial support to the Executing Agency of the Yamoussoukro Decision, to enable it to perform its responsibilities effectively. The World Bank has also indicated its readiness to extend support towards the operationalization of the SAATM. To start with, the Bank has provided US\$ 1.0 million and will consider additional support. The aviation industry and partners, including the African Airlines Association (AFRAA), the International Air Transport Association (IATA-Africa), the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and the European Union (EU), have equally expressed willingness to provide funds and technical support in the implementation of specific activities in the SAATM Roadmap.

77. In order to operationalise the SAATM, it is important that all concerned countries remove any restrictions in their Bilateral Air Services Agreement (BASAs) and/or ensure that any new agreement is compliant with the provisions of the Yamoussoukro Decision on the Liberalisation of Air Transport Markets in Africa. In this regard, I am pleased to note that, to-date, sixteen countries have signed the Memorandum of Implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision adopted during the 5th Ministerial Working Group meeting on SAATM in Lomé, Togo, in May 2018. Several SAATM Member States have also revised their Bilateral Air Services Agreement during the 11th edition of the International Civil Aviation Air Services Negotiation Meeting (ICAN2018), held in Nairobi, Kenya, in December 2018. Furthermore, the Commission is developing the Dispute Settlement Mechanism of the SAATM and its institutions. It has also published the Yamoussoukro Regulatory Texts adopted by the AU Assembly at its 30th Ordinary Session in January 2018 and plans to undertake dissemination workshops in 2019 with the first scheduled in February 2019, in Addis Ababa.

78. As I underlined in my December 2017 correspondence to the Heads of State and Government, Africa stands to gain significant economic benefits by liberalizing and unifying its internal air transport market. This is, indeed, a quick-win project, which does not require huge investment in financial or technical resources. Simple, progressive policy and regulatory reforms are all that is needed to stimulate momentous growth in Africa's aviation industry. Opening up air transport markets will lead to quick increase in routes and number of flights, which will spur more opportunities for cross-border investments in the production and service industries, including tourism. This will result in the creation of more direct and indirect jobs, leading to higher economic growth.

Furthermore, air transport connectivity has a major logistic role in the operationalization of the AfCFTA. It is, therefore, critical that Member States pursue this high-value project for the prosperity and unity of the people of our continent.

79. I, once again, urge the Member States that have not yet done so to join forces with those that have already embarked on this important project, for the benefit of the entire continent. The Commission will always be available to work with the relevant authorities to facilitate this undertaking.

iv) *Free Movement of Persons and the African Passport*

80. Efforts continue to be made on the free movement of Africans inside the continent. To date, thirty-two (32) Member States have signed the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment. Regrettably, only one – Rwanda – has so far ratified it. As part of the ratification campaign, the Commission initiated consultations with two of the RECs that are most advanced in this area – the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), encouraging them to sensitize their members about the need to ratify and implement this Protocol. While efforts will continue to reach out to the other RECs, it is important to note that ratifications by all twenty-one (21) EAC and ECOWAS members will ensure the Protocol's entry into force, which requires only fifteen (15) ratifications.

81. I must, on the other hand, welcome an encouraging trend among Member States to relax their visa regimes for visiting Africans. Benin and Seychelles no longer require visa for Africans. Seventeen (17) other Member States grant visas on arrival. While this move is welcome, it is important to emphasize that abolition of visas requirements is necessary for the right of entry, which is the Protocol's first phase.

82. Similar progress has been made on the African passport. Member States' chiefs of immigration finalized the guidelines for the design, production and issuance of the African passport, during a meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya, in March 2018. The guidelines were adopted by the Specialized Technical Committee on Migration, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons and Returnees, held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, in October/November 2018. They will be submitted for consideration by the Policy Organs at this Summit. Once adopted, the guidelines will pave the way for the issuance of the African passport by Member States.

83. I urge the Policy Organs to endorse these guidelines and Member States to implement them so that Africans enjoy greater freedom of movement in their own continent. Free movement will also open job opportunities for young Africans across the continent and, therefore, possibly reduce the incidence of irregular migration – and its tragedy – in and outside Africa.

v) *Digital Economy*

84. The rapid rise of digital economy in the last decade and the application of internet-based technologies to the production and trade of goods and services have considerably reshaped businesses, trade and consumer behavior. Agenda 2063 envisions Africa as a continent on equal footing with the rest of the world, where every Government, business and citizen has access to reliable and affordable Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) services, by increasing broadband penetration and providing venture capital to young ICT entrepreneurs and innovators. While some Member States have made progress in developing Digital Identity (ID) systems as a basis for legal ID and participation in the digital economy, the vast majority has not. As a result, Africa, as a whole, still lags behind the rest of the world in harnessing the benefits of digital identity.

85. In this respect, and noting with concern that less than 20% of Africans are online, that the majority of those not connected are in the rural areas, notably women and the poor, and that the average cost of fixed line and mobile internet exceeds 50% of average per capita income, the Assembly of the Union, at its January 2018 Ordinary Session, adopted Declaration Assembly/AU/Decl.3 (XXX) on Internet Governance and Development of Africa's Digital Economy. The aim is to ensure that legal and regulatory environments that will enable growth of Africa's digital economy through innovative applications and services are in place, making the internet central to Africa's development agenda.

86. Furthermore, by its decision EX.CL/Dec. 987(XXXII) of January 2018, the Executive Council requested the Commission to implement cybersecurity as a flagship of Agenda 2063. More recently, in January 2019, the Specialized Technical Committee on Trade, Industry and Minerals mandated the Commission, in collaboration with Member States, UNECA and other relevant stakeholders, to prepare a comprehensive AU Digital Trade and Digital Economy Development Strategy, to enable African countries to fully benefit from the fourth industrial revolution and, thus, facilitate the implementation of the Agreement on the AfCFTA and, ultimately, Africa's economic transformation.

87. On 18 November 2018, I took part in a High-Level AU-UN Breakfast meeting on the margins of the Assembly's Extraordinary Session, in Addis Ababa, on the theme "Digital Identity for the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063." The purpose was to foster dialogue among Member States, UN Agencies and the World Bank about the importance of digital issues in the context of Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030.

88. Given the aforementioned developments, and in recognition of the efforts of the continent's leadership to prioritize and accelerate digital economy and the continental single digital market and building on the work conducted by continental and regional institutions, I urge Member States to put greater focus on digitalization and digital transformation. This is a core development issue for Africa and its citizens.

89. At the continental level, there is a need to harmonize the roles and responsibilities of Member States, the RECs and different AU Organs and Specialized

Agencies in the development of the digital trade and digital economy strategy. This is important to ensure coherence in policy development and the reforms that are needed to harness the benefits for all Member States and mitigate the risks of cyber threats and data security breaches.

90. As a way forward, and a first step in establishing a digital ID for the Union, I encourage Member States to accelerate the implementation of Declaration Assembly/AU/Decl.3 (XXX), as well as the signing and ratification process of the AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, which the Assembly adopted in Malabo in June 2014. Since its adoption, this Convention has been signed by only eleven (11) countries, namely: Benin, Chad, the Comoros, the Republic of Congo, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Sao Tome & Principe, and Zambia. Only four countries – Guinea, Mauritius, Namibia and Senegal – have ratified it.

91. Beyond the Digital ID initiative, which can contribute to boosting intra-African e-commerce, there is also a need to focus on the other aspects of the digital economy, including an re-evaluation of Africa's digital agenda and AU digital governance, while working on the comprehensive AU Digital Trade and Digital Economy Development Strategy that will articulate a vision and serve as a primary consolidated document on digitalization interventions in Africa. These initiatives will enable Africa to take advantage of technological breakthroughs in such fields as robotics, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, quantum computing, biotechnology, The Internet of Things (IoT), Blockchain, 3D printing, among others.

92. Africa is ready for a digital transformation that could change the trajectory of the continent and provide much-needed jobs to the millions of young people who enter the workforce each year. The digital economy is experiencing high growth, rapid innovation, and broad application to other economic sectors. It is increasingly becoming an important driver of global economic growth and plays a significant role in accelerating economic development, enhancing productivity, creating new markets and industries, and achieving inclusive and sustainable growth. To support this trend, and as a follow up to the above declarations and decisions, I intend to take a number of steps to ensure that the Commission fully plays the role expected of it, in particular by supporting dialogue and raising awareness among Member States with the goal of facilitating the implementation of the commitments made by the Policy Organs on digital and cybersecurity issues.

vi) *Food Safety and Hosting of the First AU/FAO/WHO International Food Safety Conference*

93. At the January 2018 Summit held in Addis Ababa, I drew the attention of the Policy Organs to the challenges facing Africa in the areas of food safety and highlighted the Commission's work towards ensuring safe foods for African consumers. It should be recalled that unsafe food is prevalent in the majority of the world and causes many illnesses and deaths each year. However, the African continent is disproportionately

affected by food safety challenges. The number of food borne diseases and deaths are among the highest in the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 91 million people in Africa fall ill each year due to food-borne diseases and 137,000 die of the same cause, representing one third of the global death toll for foodborne diseases.

94. In addition to the health impacts, there are also significant economic losses due to food safety challenges, especially in low-and middle income countries. In 2018, the World Bank estimated the cost of unsafe foods to these aforementioned economies at about \$110 billion in lost productivity and medical expenses each year, particularly in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, which have the highest incidence of foodborne diseases. This estimate does not take into account losses of farms, company sales, foregone trade income and many others.

95. As the Union moves forward with our integration agenda within the framework of the AfCFTA, non-tariff barriers, particularly technical barriers related to food safety/sanitary and phytosanitary standards, if not addressed proactively, will be obstacles to the implementation of this ambitious undertaking and to increased intra-African trade. Furthermore, without adequately addressing food safety issues, Africa will not be able to effectively attain the objectives set in the Malabo Declaration of June 2014 on Accelerated Agricultural Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods, including tripling intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services by 2025.

96. It is against this background that the Commission continued, during the reporting period, to provide support to Member States and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in their efforts to enhance food safety, food security and nutrition, as well as improve trade and competitiveness of African foodstuffs globally. Emphasis was laid on harmonization of food safety standards, as well as on the development and implementation of regional and national plans for aflatoxin control. It is worth mentioning here, among other examples, the support extended to countries like Tanzania and Malawi to generate financing for the implementation of their national plans. 33 million dollars and one million Euro, respectively, were mobilized to support the Tanzania Initiative for Preventing Aflatoxin Contamination and the Integrated Aflatoxin Management for Improved Competitiveness of the Groundnuts Values Chain of Malawi. These projects were launched in 2018.

97. Since my last update on this issue, I have continued to engage Member States and AU partners on the need to further food safety in Africa. In October 2018, the Commission organized the 3rd Partnership Platform Meeting (PPM) of the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA) in Dakar, Senegal, which I opened with the Prime Minister of Senegal. This PPM was a learning and experience sharing platform on the PACA Country-Led Approach for Aflatoxin Mitigation, identifying best practices and developing a roadmap for implementation of the aforementioned approach across Africa. The PPM, therefore, focused on scaling out this effective aflatoxin control approach and exploring feasible ways of implementation.

98. At the PPM, the Commission, with the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation for Africa and the Caribbean (CTA), also launched the Africa Food Safety Index (AFSI), a project that will institutionalize food safety tracking and capacity building in Africa through the Malabo Biennial Review Mechanism. Through this project, the Commission will strengthen preparedness and functionality of food safety systems at national level, for increased performance in each AU Member State in protecting the health of consumers and the environment, and in offering quality foods to national and international markets through competitive trade.

99. Furthermore, the AU will be hosting an International Food Safety Conference in Addis Ababa, on 12 and 13 February 2019, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). This Conference is expected to raise food safety prioritization and come up with recommendations that will inform policies and strategies to advance food safety globally, continentally and at grassroots level. I encourage Member States and relevant stakeholders to take an active part in this event. On its part, the Commission will redouble its efforts. In this respect, it intends to transform PACA into an Africa Food Safety Partnership Platform as of 2020. This is in line with the AU efforts to establish mechanisms to coordinate regional harmonization of standards, as well as independent audits of national food safety systems, with the view to building their capacity, in collaboration with RECs and relevant partners.

100. Food safety will continue to play an important role in achieving continental commitments and strategies such as Agenda 2063, as it has become an important precondition for advancing health, ensuring food security and facilitating access to global food markets and, increasingly, high-value domestic markets in developing countries. Raising food safety and quality standards at par with the rest of the world is not a luxury. It is foundational to achieving the goals set in the Malabo Declaration and making African agriculture a competitive and vibrant sector that promotes trade and agribusiness.

vii) Eradication of tsetse flies in Africa

101. Pursuant to decision AHG/Dec.156(XXXVI) of July 2000 of the Assembly of the Union on the eradication of tsetse flies in Africa, the Commission has intensified its efforts to initiate, organize and coordinate activities that are designed to reduce the scourge of tsetse and trypanosomiasis (T&T) on the continent. Notable achievements have been registered with respect to, among others, strengthening Member States' capacity in the fight against T&T, accelerating the creation of tsetse free areas, deepening engagements with the RECs to promote regional integration in the fight against T&T, and collaborating with WHO within the framework of the strategy to eliminate human sleeping sickness as a public health problem by 2020.

102. Following training by the AU-Pan-African Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis Eradication Campaign (PATTEC), Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe have developed adequate technical capacity

to sustain the gains registered in areas where tsetse and trypanosomiasis burden has been reduced and initiate projects in new areas. In addition, Tanzania (March 2018), Mozambique (April 2018), as well as ECOWAS (May 2018), the East Africa region (August 2018) and SADC Member States (December 2018), received training on the application of open source geographical information system, a modern technology that facilitates identification, planning, executing and monitoring of tsetse and trypanosomiasis eradication programmes.

103. Recognizing the special needs of some Members States to revive T&T control activities following periods of past interruptions, the Commission supported Rwanda (March 2018) and Côte d'Ivoire (October 2018) to identify capacity building needs which are currently being addressed.

104. The Commission deepened its engagements with all T&T affected RECs (COMESA, EAC, ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD and SADC), with a view to enhancing ownership, effective coordination and sustainability of T&T programmes at regional level. The RECs have subsequently endorsed the T&T challenge as a priority in their normative agricultural development programmes. ECOWAS, on its part, started to mobilize the requisite resources under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) facility.

105. The Commission, through the AU-PATTEC, coordinated the contributions of international partners, notably FAO, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), to the fight against T&T. Working through the African delegates to the General Session of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), an Ad Hoc Group on tsetse transmitted animal African trypanosomiasis has been established by the OIE and started the development of internationally recognized standards for the declaration of tsetse freedom. In addition, WHO has endorsed the Commission's role of advocating tsetse eradication as a key contribution to the organization's strategy of eliminating human sleeping sickness as a public health problem by 2020.

106. I am encouraged by the advances made by Member States and the RECs, with the support of the AU-PATTEC, in the eradication of the tsetse and trypanosomiasis. During the year 2019, the Commission will continue to assist the ongoing efforts towards the elimination of human sleeping sickness.

viii) Lake Chad Basin Initiative

107. Lake Chad was once the 6th largest lake in the world and a major source of livelihoods for millions of people living throughout its basin. However, as of recently, Lake Chad's water level has shrunk 90% compared with the 1960s, and its surface area has significantly decreased. These developments are mainly due to a changing climate and anthropogenic factors that led to the reduction of inflow by the major rivers that feed the lake. The sharp decline took place during the period of 1973 to 1984. Spatial analysis has demonstrated that, from 1973, 14,695 sq km surface water has reduced to

1,641 sq km in 1984. The decline has reached 1,389 sq km in 2001 and recovered modestly in 2018 at 1,691 sq km.

108. Lake Chad is a section of the Conventional Basin, which consists of the four countries in direct contact with Lake Chad, namely Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Niger and Nigeria. It covers a total land area of 427,500 square kilometers.

109. The diminishing volume of Lake Chad has serious effects on the political, social, environmental and economic stability of the Lake Chad region. It has heavily and negatively impacted on the over 40 million people who depend on it for their livelihoods and sustenance, particularly in terms of drinking water, sanitation, agriculture, as well as industrial development and trade. More than 10 million people living around it currently require humanitarian assistance, including 2.3 million who have been displaced by continued insecurity and violence.

110. Several initiatives have been taken over the years by the countries most affected by the diminishing size of Lake Chad. The International Conference on Saving the Lake Chad, held in Abuja, Nigeria, in February 2018, concluded that the Transaqua project, which would take water from the right tributary of inter-lacustrine region in Central Africa to replenish the Lake was the best and most feasible option. The idea is to transfer about 100 million cubic meters of water per year from the Congo River basin to the Lake Chad and Sahel district along a 2,400 km canal and water transfer system. This represents three to four percent of the water that currently flows from the Congo River into the Atlantic Ocean.

111. The replenishment project, which was originally mooted over 30 years ago, involves building several dams along the length of the canal which will potentially generate 15 to 25,000 million KWh of hydro-electricity and irrigate 50,000 to 70,000 square kilometers of land in the Sahel zone. It is estimated that this will stimulate development in agriculture, industry, transport and electricity for as many as twelve (12) African countries.

112. The Commission and the AU Development Agency/NEPAD have undertaken geo spatial analysis to monitor the lake's surface water, weather patterns, land use change, demographics and other factors, in order to decipher policy tools for the rehabilitation process and reduce further loss. The Commission is fully engaged with the countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission in addressing this major challenge.

113. In this respect, I propose that the replenishment of Lake Chad be included among the flagship projects of Agenda 2063, to give it the required visibility and facilitate the mobilization of the resources required towards its implementation. I call on the Governments of the countries of the Lake Chad area, other African countries and the international community at large to take decisive action to save Lake Chad, simultaneously with other on-going initiatives, to address the security, humanitarian and development challenges in the region. It is imperative to have a comprehensive and coordinated action to help restore the livelihood of millions of people in this area, foster

regional integration and development, and offer a durable solution to the Lake Chad Basin crisis in its entirety.

ix) Illicit financial flows

114. At the Assembly's Ordinary Session of January 2018, I provided an update on the issue of illicit financial flows. I indicated that, in order to improve domestic resource mobilization, African leaders agreed to urgently address the critical challenge of illicit financial flows (IFFs) from Africa. Illicit financial flows are indeed a drain on African resources, including tax revenues, and hinder the level of savings required to address development needs. They derive from proceeds of tax evasion and laundered commercial transactions, criminal activities and theft of public resources, bribery and other forms of corruption.

115. The work of the AU and UNECA High Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows, chaired by former President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, helped gain a better insight into the nature and magnitude of this scourge, and its negative impact on socio-economic development. The Panel's Report was presented to the January 2015 Summit, which adopted a Special Declaration on Illicit Financial Flows [Assembly/AU/Decl.5(XXIII)].

116. Given the numerous actors called upon by the Special Declaration, a coalition of willing African stakeholders developed a systematic and coherent framework (Anti-IFF Project) based on the recommendations of the High Level Panel. I am pleased to note that the Consortium of Stakeholders to stem IFFs from Africa has since been established since June 2015. It comprises the Commission and other AU Organs, as well as a number of partner institutions. Its objective is to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the High-Level Panel and, ultimately, stem the growth of IFFs from the continent, including by leveraging partnerships and providing overall strategic direction. The Commission officially launched the Secretariat of the Consortium within the offices of the Coalition for Dialogue on Africa (CoDA) at the AU headquarters in January 2018.

117. With the necessary coalition in place and the anti-IFF Project now completed and endorsed by the Consortium, Phase 2 of the Consortium's work started towards the end of 2018. It entails a plan for implementation of the recommendations, a framework for the monitoring and evaluation of this plan, as well as the engagement of Member States.

118. In 2019, the Consortium will deliver several training sessions to law enforcement and regulatory agencies, as well as capacity assistance to tax administrations and other national financial regulatory institutions. It will also develop an IFF Knowledge Hub to serve as a repository of all relevant studies and data on illicit financial flows to strengthen support for ongoing technical and advocacy efforts. Additionally, as part of his activities, the Chair of the High-Level Panel plans to visit nine more Member States

in 2019 to receive reports of various anti-IFF activities at the national level and agree on future collaborative work.

119. There is need for renewed efforts by Member States to implement the recommendations of the High-Level Panel. At the continental level, Member States need to strengthen their co-operation and join efforts against illicit financial flows. The African Continental Free Trade Area could be one vehicle to do so, especially given that the second phase of the negotiations will cover competition issues. It is against this backdrop that I wrote, on 8 November 2018, to the Ministers of Member States in charge of issues relating to illicit financial flows to encourage them to provide reports on what they have done to implement the January 2015 Special Declaration. At the time of finalizing this report, three (3) Member States – Algeria, Egypt and Ethiopia - had submitted their reports.

120. Illicit financial flows from the continent are an African problem with a global solution. This issue cannot truly be addressed unless there is more of a coordinated response by Member States. I count on the continued engagement of the Policy Organs and enhanced cooperation from the larger international community.

F. GOVERNANCE, DEMOCRACY AND PEACE AGENDA

i) Streamlining the judicial organs of the Union

121. There is an intrinsic relationship between respect for human rights, peace, stability and development. Therefore, the effective realization of the Union's agenda in these areas requires a firm foundation in human rights, the rule of law and good governance. Two Organs – the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights – are mandated to promote and protect human rights on the continent. However, several challenges continue to hinder their ability to make a meaningful contribution to the realization of the Union's human rights agenda.

122. The AU Constitutive Act provides for the establishment of a Court of Justice. The Court is intended to be the Union's "principal judicial organ", with authority to, among others, rule on disputes over the interpretation of AU treaties. A Protocol on the Court of Justice was adopted on 11 July 2003, and entered into force on 11 February 2009. It currently has eighteen (18) ratifications.

123. The AU Court of Justice has, however, never been operational as, on 1 July 2008, the Assembly adopted the Protocol on the Statute of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights – commonly referred to as the Sharm-el-Sheikh Protocol – which merged the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the AU Court of Justice to form the African Court of Justice and Human Rights [Assembly/AU/Dec.196(XI)]. Under Article 2 of the Statute, the African Court of Justice and Human Rights "shall be the main judicial organ of the African Union". As at the end of 2018, the Protocol on the

Statute of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights had been ratified by only six (6) Member States.

124. In the meantime, on 27 June 2014, the Assembly adopted the Protocol on Amendments to the Protocol on the Statute of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights – commonly referred to as the Malabo Protocol – granting criminal jurisdiction to the African Court of Justice and Human Rights. The Malabo Protocol thus brings together all the previous Protocols under one single instrument. As at December 2018, this Protocol had been signed by eleven (11) Member States, but with no ratification so far.

125. In essence, the Assembly has adopted four (4) Protocols relating to the establishment of a judicial organ on the continent, and each needs to be ratified at some point. This multiplicity of Protocols has created some confusion on which Protocol should be ratified as a matter of priority. This confusion was noted by the Reform Unit and expressed to the Executive Council during the November 2018 Extraordinary Summit.

126. Efforts are underway to streamline the Union’s judicial architecture. At the same time, I will continue to work with the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the basis of the decisions of the Policy Organs to review its statute with a view to granting it full autonomy in recruitment and budgetary matters.

ii) *Entrenching democratic values and elections in Africa*

127. Ensuring credible electoral processes is necessary to anchor lasting peace and stability. It is precisely in this perspective that efforts are being made to deepen the democratization processes, promote respect for human rights and combat corruption, which was the theme of the Summit for the year 2018, and, more generally, foster good governance.

128. The Commission observed thirteen presidential and legislative elections in 2018, including the recent elections in Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), to assess their compliance with the relevant continental instruments. Most of these polls benefited from technical assistance from the AU to national elections management bodies.

129. Overall, in light of elections conducted during the year, Africa’s democratization trajectory has witnessed some noteworthy progress, with a renewed commitment by all Member States to ensure changes of Government through the ballot box. This is a commendable development that I will, on my part, continue to encourage. Despite occasional disputes and contestations, the outcome of the various elections conducted in 2018 showed much resilience and maturity on the part of election management bodies to organize and manage elections, as well as willingness and acceptance of electoral outcomes/processes by competing parties, thus upholding the tenets of democracy as enshrined in continental legal frameworks for elections.

130. The Commission continued its advocacy for the ratification and implementation of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. On 21 March 2018, Zimbabwe became the latest Member State to sign it, bringing the total number of signatories to forty-six (46). To date, thirty-two (32) Member States have ratified this instrument. I take this opportunity to encourage those Member States that have not yet done so to sign, ratify, domesticate and implement the Charter as a demonstration of the Union's collective determination to entrench a culture of democracy, constitutionalism and rule of law for sustainable peace and development on the continent.

131. Also noteworthy is progress made in the exercise of the right to vote and to be elected, as demonstrated by the general increase in the number of political parties, candidates and popular participation across age and gender. Voters showed much patience waiting for their turns in long queues in front of polling stations.

132. While security and public health challenges constrained voting in parts of some countries, all the 2018 elections were generally peaceful and devoid of major violent incidents. The level of election-related violence and deaths has also been considerably reduced, especially in the post electoral phase. The widespread recourse to the prescribed judicial mechanisms for the resolution of electoral disputes is a further proof that democracy is taking root. These are achievements Africa should take pride of, while redoubling our efforts towards the full implementation of the commitments entered into as part of the relevant continental and regional instruments.

iii) Leveraging Former African Heads of State and Government

133. Former African Heads of State and Government are a major resource which is readily available to assist in the realization of Agenda 2063. Given their enormous wealth of experience, expertise and global pedigree, it is my conviction that their individual and collective wisdom should be more systematically put to the service of the Union, in support of its transformation agenda. I am also aware that the majority of former Heads of State and Government are willing to contribute and complement ongoing efforts at the regional and continental levels. It is encouraging that they have also organized themselves through the 2008 African Forum of Heads of State and Government, with its headquarters in Pretoria, South Africa. I am equally pleased that some former Heads of State and Government are actively involved in the AU's peace efforts through the Panel of the Wise, as one of the five pillars of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), and in other capacities. Additionally, former Heads of State and Government have become a major asset providing leadership to our election observation missions. They are usually deployed as Heads of the AU Election Observer Missions. I will continue engaging former Heads of State and Government to seek their support in taking forward various aspects of our continental agenda.

134. In light of the above, it will be opportune to elaborate continental guidelines on the status of former Heads of States and Government on the basis of which Member

States may wish to draw to develop their own instruments. Such guidelines will build on existing best practices on the continent and beyond. I intend to submit specific proposals in this respect to the January 2020 Summit in Addis Ababa.

iv) *Silencing the Guns*

135. As I indicated in my report to the Policy Organs in Nouakchott, last July, while there have been significant developments in implementing the flagship project on Silencing the Guns by 2020, there is still much work to be done. This is so because armed conflicts and crises persist in parts of the continent, some peace processes have remained stalled or in abeyance for decades, and new threats are emerging in different parts of Africa. Meanwhile, countries that were at once seen – with great hope – to have emerged from conflicts have relapsed back into the abyss of violence. Overall, developments in the field of peace and security on the continent remain daunting, as evidenced by the bi-annual reports of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) to the Assembly of the Union on its Activities and the State of Peace and Security in Africa.

136. In recent months, visionary leadership has made a major difference in some of the continent's protracted conflicts in the Horn of Africa, following the reconciliation between Ethiopia and Eritrea. There is also renewed hope with the signing of the Final Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan during the 33rd Extra-Ordinary Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Assembly, held in September 2018 in Addis Ababa, as well as reinvigorated efforts to foster reconciliation in the Central African Republic (CAR).

137. Despite all efforts at Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020, old conflicts persist and fresh ones have broken out. There is a continued proliferation of threats, especially terrorism and violent extremism, to peace and security in Africa. Other issues of concern include the persistent upsurge and spate of various forms and occurrences of inter-communal violence; conflicts over access to, and control of, natural resources, such as land, water and mining; and governance deficits. Mention should also be made of the risk of urban violence. Between 2017 and 2050, the populations of 26 Member States are projected to expand to at least double their current size, and the continent's total population will reach 2.53 billion by mid-century. In addition, in some of these countries, the rapid growth of youth populations, combined with high levels of unemployment and rapid and uncontrolled urbanization, are generally considered to be major triggers of conflict, if not contained, including by effectively harnessing the demographic dividend.

138. Given the precarious and challenging scenarios described above, it is urgent to fast-track the measures and mechanisms for the implementation of the Silencing the Guns by 2020. Currently, there are solid legal and institutional frameworks in place, including at the level of the RECs, as well as cooperation and collaboration platforms, to facilitate consultations and harmonisation of policies and strategies among the different concerned actors. With the formal establishment of the Peace Fund, there is an

unprecedented opportunity to accelerate the current pace and fast track our efforts towards Silencing the Guns.

139. During the last sixteen years, the AU has operationalised key provisions of the PSC Protocol and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance in relation to structural prevention, preventative diplomacy and mediation of conflicts and disputes. Indeed, in addition to regularly discharging our role in the area of direct/operational conflict prevention, successive Chairpersons have appointed Special Envoys and High-Level Representatives, either with regard to mediating conflicts or addressing cross-cutting issues such as women, youth and children. To these efforts, a complex system of operational and strategic support to preventive diplomacy and mediation has been developed around the Panel of the Wise and its subsidiaries, namely the Pan-African Network of the Wise (PanWise) and the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa).

140. The other pillars of the APSA are equally almost fully operational, including the African Standby Force (ASF) and the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS). Furthermore, the Union has developed a post-conflict reconstruction policy that has gained traction in many areas. The ongoing financial reform of the AU will increase the sustainability of these efforts and reduce significantly our dependence on the international partners, particularly in the area of peace support operations.

141. Beyond the operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the Union and its Member States have also established platforms to harmonize and coordinate policy responses of Member States to regional conflict complexes in the Sahel-Sahara region, through the Nouakchott Process, in the Horn of Africa, through the Djibouti Process, and with regard to piracy, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea.

142. It should also be borne in mind that the promotion of peace in Africa is not the preserve of Governments and international institutions alone. All actors, from all walks of life also have a role to play. Action by development actors, both public and private, and civil society at large to independently implement projects and initiatives, within their specific sectors of activity is critical to mobilize the African citizenry, so that they become aware of their potential contribution to the promotion of peace in Africa, take ownership of the campaign to Silence the Guns, and initiate new activities and enhance the existing ones. I must also add that if we are to address structural root causes of conflict adequately, we also need to address governance deficit that generate crises on the continent. To this end, we should redouble our efforts to operationalize the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and ensure its complementarity and synergy with APSA. Citizen engagement features prominently in this regard. The Pan African Parliament (PAP), the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and ECOSOCC are instrumental in the efforts to mobilize the citizenry. I intend to call on them to play a more significant role in mobilizing regional and national actors around the Silencing the Guns objectives.

143. While galvanizing peace processes and enhancing the involvement of non-state actors in supporting these efforts, it is essential to develop a continental awareness raising, communication and visibility campaign, in order to mobilize stakeholders and to call them to action. Accordingly, I am pleased to note that my High Representative for Silencing the Guns, Ramtane Lamamra, in partnership with other institutions, is planning to coordinate a continental campaign with the fundamental objective of reaching out to the African citizenry, both to call for action and to promote a culture of peace, particularly in vulnerable communities. The campaign will be localized as much as possible to overcome the challenges of communicating messages in local languages, as well as use mainstream means of communication such as TV, local Radio and social media.

144. RECs and Member States have a fundamental role to play in supporting the localisation of the campaign at regional and national levels. Indeed, in addition to facilitating free advertising and broadcasting on national media, Member States are encouraged to initiate national Silencing the Guns campaigns.

145. It should also be highlighted that, since the adoption of agenda 2063 in 2013, several initiatives have been undertaken by many stakeholders, in pursuance of the objective of Silencing the Guns by 2020. Efforts have been deployed in the areas of governance, peace and security, as well as in socio economic development in the midst of complex, dynamic and ever evolving security situations in Africa. These developments are taking place in a difficult global context in which the principles of multilateralism are being challenged.

146. As the target date of December 2020 gets closer, there is a sense of urgency to accelerate the efforts to meet the objectives of Silencing the Guns. In this respect, I note with satisfaction the progress made over the past months. Reconciliation between Eritrea and Ethiopia and other subsequent positive developments in the Horn of Africa have, if need be, proved that peace is within reach when the required political will exists.

147. I look forward to similar advances elsewhere on the continent, be it Burundi, as part of the region's action with the support of the AU and the larger international community; the Central African Republic, where sustained efforts are underway within the framework of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation; and Libya, with the intensification of efforts to convene, under the auspices of the AU and the United Nations, an all-inclusive national reconciliation conference. It is imperative to end the stalemate in the Western Sahara conflict, which has lasted for far too long. I renew the AU's determination to actively contribute to the search for a lasting solution to the conflict in line with relevant AU and UN pronouncements on the matter, with reinvigorated support to the UN-led efforts through the African Mechanism established in Nouakchott in July 2018. I urge the South Sudanese stakeholders to definitively close the sad chapter of the abject violence they inflicted on their own people and to resolutely move from the rhetoric of peace and reconciliation to their actual practice. I call for restraint and dialogue in Sudan, where the incidents that have occurred in recent weeks and the regrettable loss of life that has accompanied them are a source of

concern. I renew the AU's willingness to accompany the Comoros to preserve the hard-won gains in the stabilization of the archipelago, in parallel with the search for a lasting solution to the issue of the Comorian island of Mayotte on the basis of international legality and relevant AU decisions.

148. I welcome the successful conclusion of the electoral processes in Madagascar and the DRC. I reiterate the AU's commitment to continue accompanying these two countries and working closely with their new leaders in the pursuit of our continental agenda.

149. I urge Member States to demonstrate increased and sustained political commitment and engagement to ensure the creation of requisite conditions for Silencing the Guns in Africa, which will facilitate the realization of a conflict-free continent in line with Agenda 2063. It is equally important that Member States that have not yet done so sign and ratify the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, as well as other instruments relating to governance, peace and security on the continent. I remain optimistic that we are on the right track. With renewed dedicated focus and increased political will demonstrated through provision of adequate funding for this critical Agenda 2063's flagship project, the goal towards Silencing the Guns in Africa is achievable

v) *Winning the Fight against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa's Transformation*

150. The challenge of corruption and illicit financial flows on the Union's transformative agenda is monumental. Without rooting out corruption and illicit financial flows, the execution of Agenda 2063 First Ten Year Implementation Plan will not be achieved. It was this reality that compelled African leaders to dedicate 2018 as the anti-corruption year under the theme: Winning the Fight against Corruption - a Sustainable Path for Africa's Transformation.

151. The year 2018 was historical in the fight against corruption for two reasons. Firstly, it was the first time that our Union dedicated a year to the fight against corruption. Secondly, the year 2018 marked a significant turning point in the campaign against corruption in Africa, as demonstrated by the Assembly's landmark decision dedicating 11 July of every year as African Anti-Corruption Day. The reason for choosing this date was not accidental: it was on 11 July 2003 in Maputo, Mozambique, that the Assembly adopted the African Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption. I am pleased to report that the maiden commemoration of the African Anti-Corruption Day kicked off successfully across the continent on 11 July 2018, creating a platform for the observation of the International Anti-corruption Day on 9 December 2018.

152. Working under the stewardship of President Muhamadu Buhari of Nigeria in his capacity as the Champion for the 2018 Theme, the Commission convened a high-level debate on combatting corruption and illicit financial flows in July on the margins of the

Summit in Nouakchott. Another high-level dialogue took place in New York in September 2018, on the margins of the UN General Assembly. These high-level debates served to galvanize continental and global political commitments to eradicate corruption.

153. Within the framework of the African Governance Architecture (AGA), the Commission also convened regional consultations throughout the year, aimed at mobilizing the youth across the AU's five regions to join the fight against corruption. These initiatives culminated with the convening by President Buhari of the African Youth Congress on Anti-Corruption in Abuja in December 2018. In his address on the occasion, President Buhari challenged the African youth to lead the fight against corruption, noting that it is a fight that is theirs to win, in order to achieve Africa's long-term structural transformation and, in the process, improve the livelihoods of African peoples. He enjoined the youth to pool their energy to effectively ensure that Africa's natural and mineral resources remain on the continent for value-addition, job and wealth creation, as well as to create affordable health-care and quality education for African peoples. As a major outcome of the youth engagements, an African Youth Community of Practice on Anti-Corruption has been established as a lesson-learning and capacity building platform to enhance youth participation in the fight against corruption in Africa.

154. In addition, an AGA Gender Pre-Forum was organised to assess the intersection between corruption and women's rights in Africa. The Pre-Forum emphasised the need to ensure adequate attention is given to addressing the adverse impact of corruption on Africa's women and girls. Particularly, the Pre-Forum highlighted the need to ensure political, socio-and economic participation of women as key to elevating the role of women and young girls in the fight against corruption.

155. The AGA Annual High Level Dialogue was also dedicated to the AU theme of the year. Speaking at the opening of the Dialogue in Gaborone, President Mokgweetsi Masisi of Botswana reiterated the importance of collective effort in the fight against corruption. He committed to supporting efforts at continental levels aimed at ridding the continent of this scourge. As an outcome, the Dialogue committed to enhance institutional capacities of key national, regional and continental stakeholders so that we redouble our efforts in the fight against corruption.

156. I wish to commend President Muhamadu Buhari, the Champion for the 2018 Anti-Corruption Year, for his leadership and perseverance in combatting the scourge of corruption in his own country and for steering the continental efforts. I am also encouraged by similar anti-corruption actions in an increasing number of Member States. Such actions enhance the Union's collective resolve to fight this scourge that hinders the continent's socio-economic development and undermines democratic governance, peace, security and political stability.

G. HUMANITARIAN AGENDA

i) Theme of 2019: Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement

157. It will be recalled that, during the Nouakchott Summit, the Assembly decided to declare 2019 as the ‘Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa.’ [Assembly/AU/Dec.707 (XXXI)]. Earlier, in January 2016, the Assembly adopted the Common African Position on Humanitarian Effectiveness – Assembly/AU/Dec.604(XXVI) – as the consolidation of the aspirations of Member States and the African people on the desired reforms they want in the global humanitarian architecture to make it more effective and relevant for the future.

158. I urge all Member States to make every effort to promote the Common African Position on Humanitarian Effectiveness as its implementation will go a long way in alleviating the enormous humanitarian crisis facing Africa, which is home to over a third of the global forcibly displaced persons – i.e. 6.3 million refugees and 14.5 million Internally Displaced Persons, as well as 509,900 asylum seekers and 712,000 stateless persons. The year 2019 also marks the 10th anniversary of the 2009 AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. I urge all Member States to redouble their efforts in providing necessary support to IDPs by implementing fully the Kampala Convention and its Action Plan.

159. I am optimistic that the Assembly’s decision to dedicate the year 2019 to forced displacement will revitalize Member States’ commitment to address the plight of displaced persons in the spirit of African solidarity and Pan-Africanism. I salute those Member States that are shouldering the burden of hosting refugees. I encourage our partners to support countries and communities hosting refugees to ensure sufficient burden-sharing.

ii) African Humanitarian Agency

160. It would be recalled that the Assembly, in decision Assembly/AU/Dec.604 (XXVI) of January 2016, decided to establish an African Humanitarian Agency (AHA), with the need for the new architecture to be “...anchored on regional and national mechanisms and funded with Africa’s own resources and founded on principles of pan-Africanism and African shared values...” The African Humanitarian Agency will place greater emphasis on addressing root causes and durable solutions, as well as building strong state and non-state institutions to tackle the challenges of forced displacement on the continent, in line with its long-term vision as encapsulated in Agenda 2063.

161. As a follow up to the Assembly’s decision, the Commission identified the following as the overall functions and objectives of the Agency: (i) strengthen the capacity of Member States through training and related initiatives, including on issues of preparedness and response; (ii) develop and disseminate regular and comprehensive data and information on displacement and humanitarian crisis that may emerge in the continent; (iii) establish strong coordination mechanisms on humanitarian issues, by

developing partnership and coordination with Member States, the RECs, international partners, local communities and affected populations; and (iv) build, manage and deploy flexible surge capacity for response, taking into account existing regional mechanisms.

162. Between 2017 and 2018, the Commission carried out a feasibility study which recommended a roadmap for the operationalization of the Agency. In particular, the study recommended the identification of lessons learnt and best practices at the national, regional and global levels; and an assessment of existing structural and institutional mechanisms for humanitarian response.

163. Member States are expected to establish national disaster management agencies which will assess and declare disasters, as well as call for the release of funds for emergency response to deal with immediate needs and rehabilitation. In addition, part of the commitment made at the global level which has been adopted on the continental level, is the dedication of 1.5% of national budgets to disaster management both in terms of response and mitigation. However, many Member States have not yet fulfilled that commitment, either by committing the agreed percentage of national budgets or establishing the requisite agency, or even both.

164. In recognition of the above, it is imperative to establish the African Humanitarian Agency as soon as possible. The Agency will assist in identifying and mapping humanitarian challenges on the continent and how to deal with them. It will also be the main partner of the global humanitarian community on the continent and engage with external partners, working closely with Member States and the RECs, to alleviate the suffering of Africans from the various types of humanitarian disasters that afflict the continent.

165. The Commission will submit the financial implications of the establishment of the Agency to the Special Technical Committee on Migration, Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons during its ordinary session scheduled to take place in Banjul, The Gambia, in the second quarter of this year. In the meantime, the Agency's organogram will be taken to the PRC's Sub-Committee on Structures for consideration and approval. The Commission also plans to call on Member States to indicate their interest in hosting the Agency.

iii) African Risk Capacity

166. During its July 2012 Ordinary Session, the Assembly decided to establish the African Risk Capacity (ARC), as a Specialized Agency of the AU. The ARC Agency was established to help Member States to improve their capacities to better plan, prepare and respond to extreme weather events and natural disasters.

167. To date, nineteen (19) Member States have active Memoranda of Understanding in place with ARC Agency to undertake ARC's capacity-building programme to build national drought risk management capacities, in order to ensure an informed engagement in the risk insurance pool managed by the ARC Insurance Company Ltd,

an affiliate of the ARC Agency. The ARC Insurance Company Ltd has since made insurance pay-outs to Senegal, Mauritania, Niger and Malawi, totalling about USD 38 million. The pay-outs supported, inter alia, food distribution and subsidized sales of animal feed, repositioning of food commodities in food insecure areas, cash transfers and replenishing depleted strategic grain reserves.

168. However, the ARC insurance mechanism faces a number of challenges. One of the major challenges that Member States face to participate in the ARC Ltd risk pool is the mobilisation of premium funds and ensuring consistent participation in the insurance pool. Premium payment is often not prioritised by Governments who are facing, in most instances, serious fiscal constraints. Consequently, although Member States recognize the value and benefits of ARC insurance, they have to make difficult trade-offs and often are unable to pay their premiums given other pressing national needs. This difficulty is reflected in limited growth of the insurance pool to date.

169. In this regard, the ARC and its partners have been considering initiatives to support Member States in their payment of premiums. One of such initiatives is the Africa Disaster Risk Financing (ADRFi) program approved by the African Development Bank (AfDB) in October 2018. In an effort to scale up the protection of the most vulnerable against extreme weather events and the recognition of the critical need to unlock financing for disaster management and response on the continent, the AfDB has taken the leadership in designing ADRFi, a premium financing support program that will expand access to ARC's risk transfer facilities to Member States with fiscal constraints. Nine (9) Member States have already expressed interest in participating in the program.

170. I would like to request our partners, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and other relevant institutions, to provide additional financial resources in support of the initiative. I thank all partner countries and organizations that have extended support thus far.

171. Just like any AU institution, ARC needs political will to succeed. Currently, there is lack of championship for ARC's activities at the highest level. In this regard, I will undertake appropriate consultations with the Chairperson of the Union on the possibility of appointing a Champion/Leader for ARC/Disaster Risk. I reiterate my call to Member States to reaffirm their commitments to the original vision that led to the establishment of ARC as a pan African-owned solution structured to help Member States to better finance and respond to natural disasters. Member States should, therefore, accelerate the pace of signature and ratification of the ARC Treaty, which has so far been signed by thirty-three (33) Member States and ratified by only eight (8).

H. MIGRATION

172. The year 2018 has been eventful for our efforts on migration and mobility, with the Commission having taken a number of steps and initiatives to strengthen AU policy approaches and frameworks. In that regard, the Commission revised the Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA), initially adopted in Banjul in 2006. The revised

MPFA was adopted by Assembly of the Union in January 2018, and its implementation began in the same year under the action plan (2018-2030).

173. Furthermore, the Commission facilitated the development of the African Common Position that guided the African Group during the negotiations on the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The final text was adopted in December 2018, by an Intergovernmental Conference held in Marrakech, Morocco. I attended the Conference. Despite the wide support in Marrakech by 165 countries to the Compact, few countries decided to withdraw from the process. The AU continued to advocate for support to the Global Compact with strategic partners, including at the AU-EU follow-up ministerial meeting in Brussels on 22 January 2019.

174. The principles embodied in the AU migration related policies and the Global Compact are facilitation of mobility, including labor mobility. They also contain provisions on border governance and prevention of irregular migration, to be implemented in strict respect of human rights of migrants according to international standards.

175. In 2015 there were an estimated 21 million migrants in Africa, of which 18 million originated from Africa and the rest from Europe, Asia and North America. As Africa continues to make significant strides on regional integration and development on the Continent, which stands to create more opportunities for Africans, the Commission will pursue its advocacy for a sound global multilateral order that opens up opportunities for legal mobility.

I. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES: YOUTH AND GENDER

i) Promoting Youth Empowerment

176. Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 envisions “an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.” The African Youth Charter, adopted in 2006, provides a framework for countries and the continent as a whole to develop and implement tangible youth policies and programmes. The burgeoning youth population in Africa and its potential to spur the continent towards achieving the exponential economic gains of a demographic dividend have further propelled African Governments and the Commission to focus on policies, strategies and plans of action in the area of youth development.

177. It is against this backdrop, and considering the spotlight on African youth and their centrality in the vision of Africa’s renaissance through Agenda 2063, that the Commission has focused its work on three key delivery areas: amplifying youth voices, strengthening policy and providing concrete action on youth empowerment.

178. On amplifying youth voices, in November 2018, I appointed a Youth Envoy, in line with the Decision of the 2nd Specialized Technical Committee on Youth, Culture and Sports which “called for the appointment of an AU Youth Envoy to assist in championing

youth development issues in Africa and requested the Commission, to develop Terms of Reference for the same.” The AU Youth Envoy and the Advisory Board were inaugurated on 1 November 2018, during the Africa Youth Day celebration. Ms. Aya Chebbi, a Tunisian, is the first person to hold this office. A former Mo Ibrahim Scholar with a Master’s degree in African Politics from the School of Oriental and African Studies, Ms. Chebbi has founded and served on multiple youth development platforms, with a special focus on pan-Africanism, youth, peace and security.

179. The duties of the Envoy include partnership building for youth development, advocacy on youth issues, increasing access for youth to the work of the Commission, support and promote youth volunteerism, as well as evidence generation on the state of African youth. The Youth Advisory Council is set up to support the work of the AU Envoy, and is made of nine young people from all regions of the continent. The composition of the Council reflects the principles of gender equality and regional representation, which underpin the Commission’s work.

180. Cognizant of the challenges faced by young people in Africa, as well as the urgency of realizing Africa’s Demographic Dividend through investments in youth, I seek to launch the 1 Million by 2021 project for meaningful engagement and impact of young people. The project will provide opportunities in four key areas – employment, entrepreneurship, education and engagement, with the aim of directly reaching one million young Africans by 2021. The project will be launched in April 2019 through an intensive 4-day Pan-African Youth Forum comprising of a youth congress, a solutions Summit by young Africans, and a commitment Summit by stakeholders, including development partners and the private sector.

181. The African Youth Charter Decade Plan of Action mandates the Commission to produce a biennial report on the Status of African Youth, with accounts of good practices highlighting innovation, creativity and Pan-Africanism, as a means to broaden the information-sharing base on youth development in Africa. This mandate is further underscored by the call by the AU Demographic Dividend roadmap to create an index based on a set of indicators, specific to each pillar of the demographic dividend, with the aim to measuring, monitoring and reporting on investments in youth at the country level. In this regard, the Commission is in the process of producing the 2018 Status of African Youth Report with support from National Statistical Offices of Member States. The report is billed to be released on the sidelines of the Pan-African Youth Forum in April 2019.

182. The AU Youth Volunteers Corps (AU-YVC) is a flagship program of the AU which recruits, trains and deploys young African professionals to serve as professional volunteers for a period of 12 months across the continent. The AU-YVC promotes volunteerism to deepen the status of young people in Africa as key actors in Africa’s development targets and goals, enhancing their participation in policy development, as well as in the design and implementation of relevant interventions towards the AU Agenda 2063 – ‘The Africa We Want’. Since its inception in 2010, the AUYVC programme has trained and deployed 406 young Africans in top-tier development

organizations across the continent. In 2019, the AU-YVC targets to deploy 300 young African professionals across the continent and recruit and train a new set of 200 volunteers.

183. The July 2017 Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union decided to establish the African Youth Fund to serve as an implementation support vehicle for critical development visions and plans. Following a multi-stakeholder consultative engagement, the Commission is currently defining the structure of the Fund. The related instruments will be validated and presented to the relevant AU structures for approval in 2019.

ii) Advancing Gender Parity and Women Empowerment

a) Implementation of the Maputo Protocol on Women's rights

184. Gender related issues have continued to engage the attention of the Commission and other Organs of the Union, in pursuance of the relevant AU instruments. One of the major activities undertaken during this period relates to the holding, in Addis Ababa, from 12 to 13 December 2018, of a High-Level Consultation to accelerate the ratification, domestication and implementation of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol).

185. The Consultation provided an opportunity for Member States to share experiences on the ratification process and implementation of the Maputo Protocol. It concluded with the adoption of an "All for Maputo Protocol Roadmap". The aim is to make the Maputo Protocol a reality for all women on the continent by involving all relevant stakeholders. It will be followed by in-country missions, with the aim of accelerating ratification by all Member States by the 2020 deadline. It should be noted that, since its adoption, the Maputo Protocol has been signed by forty-nine (49) Member States and ratified by forty one (41).

b) Gender parity in governance structures in Africa

186. Ensuring women's full and effective participation in leadership positions at all levels of decision-making institutions is one of the targets of Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063. In addition to its intrinsic value, women's participation is essential to the formulation of effective policies that respond to the differential needs of men and women. I am pleased to note that Africa has made significant strides on women's participation in decision-making spheres, surpassing Asia and the Pacific and the Middle East. However, important regional variations persist.

187. As of November 2018, 2,591 parliamentarians out of 11,037 in total were women, bringing the African average for the share of women in parliament to 23%, from 8% in 1997. Out of 35 countries with more than 33% female representation in national parliaments across the world, there are 9 African countries, including Rwanda (61%), Namibia (46%), South Africa (42%), Senegal (42%), Mozambique (40%), Ethiopia

(39%), Tanzania (37%), Burundi (36%) and Uganda (34%). While this is a commendable progress, a lot still needs to be done to hasten achievement of full gender parity in our legislatures.

188. Against this backdrop, it is critical to address regional variations. While Southern Africa is close to attaining the 33% representation threshold, West Africa, on average, lag far behind other regions. Out of 15 countries in West Africa, only five (5) have over 15% female representation in parliament. In Southern Africa, Namibia and South Africa are within reach of gender parity in their parliaments. In Eastern Africa, Rwanda leads with 61%, ranking first globally. Ethiopia, Tanzania, Burundi and Uganda follow with over 33%. In North Africa, Tunisia and Sudan are close to reaching the 33% threshold. Central Africa has a slightly higher average women's share than West Africa, with Cameroon at 31% female representation.

189. It should also be noted that there has been recently an increase in the proportion of women in cabinets in some Member States. Notably, the achievement of gender parity in the cabinets of Ethiopia, Rwanda and Seychelles offers a unique opportunity for African women to demonstrate how gender parity can improve quality of governance and accelerate socioeconomic development, while inspiring the rest of the continent and the world. As of October 2018, there were 302 women ministers in Africa out of a total of about 1,400. Women's representation in African cabinets is, on average, at 22%.

190. Progress made recently by Member States have scaled up the number of African countries that have reached over 33% women's representation in their cabinets. Worldwide, there are currently seven (7) African countries among those with over 33% of women's representation in cabinet. As a result, Africa leads the developing world, surpassing Latin America and the Caribbean. Such unprecedented stride is a result of Member States' high commitment and greater efforts to move the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda forward. I commend this laudable development and encourage all Member States to take more determined action to achieve full parity in Cabinet-level appointments

c) *African Union Gender Strategy*

191. The AU has recently adopted its first Gender Strategy, after a review of existing gender and various sectoral policies. This Strategy, which will be launched during the Summit, is aligned with AU vision for the Africa We Want. The new Strategy is transformational in its outcomes, with the aim of challenging major constraints on gender equality and women's empowerment and leap frogging the AU into seizing the new global momentum in this agenda. It will serve many purposes: define a clear actionable roadmap and communication instrument for the entire AU, an investment plan for partners, an advocacy tool for state and non-state actors, an organizing lense for practitioners, a bridge for policy coherence and harmonization towards regional integration, and an accountability mechanism for women and girls on the continent

192. This Strategy is built on the principles of maximizing results, leveraging opportunities, promoting and protecting women's rights, strengthening institutional capabilities and accountability, and giving women and girls an influential voice in all spheres of life. The Commission will actively follow up its implementation and coordinate all related efforts with the relevant stakeholders.

d) AU Gender Scorecard

193. The African Gender Scorecard is a user-friendly action tool whose main goal is to provide the Commission and Member States with an easy-to use monitoring and accountability way of assessing progress made in implementing their regional and global gender equality and women's empowerment commitments. The African Gender Scorecard also serves to reward and recognize progress in Member States for making significant strides in achieving the AU commitments towards reducing social, economic and political inequalities between men and women. The Scorecard is the result of an ongoing collaboration between the Commission and a number of multilateral framework.

194. The year 2018 marks the 4th edition of the African Gender Scorecard and follows the theme "Winning the fight against corruption: a sustainable path to Africa's transformation". This edition is organized in close collaboration with the AU Board on Corruption.

J. IMPLEMENTATION OF SPECIFIC AU DECISIONS AND POLICIES

i) Implementation of Decisions on the International Criminal Court

195. The AU has, for several years, expressed concern at the opinions advanced by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on the question of immunities of Heads of State and Government and other senior officials, in particular as it relates to Non-State Parties to the Rome Statute and to the obligation of State Parties to cooperate with the Court in the arrest and surrender of a person against whom it has issued an arrest warrant. This issue was further heightened by the decision of the ICC Pre-trial Chamber II that the Republic of South Africa had failed to comply with its legal obligation to arrest President Omar al-Bashir of the Sudan while he was attending the AU Summit in Johannesburg in June 2015.

196. In January 2018, the Assembly adopted decision Assembly/AU/Dec.672 (XXX) on the ICC, urging Member States to oppose the ICC's reasoning as it is fundamentally at variance with the AU's position on the matter. The Assembly also requested the African Group in New York to immediately place on the agenda of the UN General Assembly a request for an advisory opinion from the International Criminal Court (ICC) on the question of immunities of Heads of States and Government, as it relates to the conflicting obligations of States under different sources of international law, such as international law on immunities, the Rome Statute of the ICC and UN Security Council resolutions.

197. In implementing the above decision, the Commission convened in New York in May and June 2018, respectively, two meetings of the African Group of Ambassadors and the Legal Advisers/African Members of the Sixth (Legal) Committee of the UN General Assembly, to draft the question to be put to the ICJ and develop a strategy for placing the request on the agenda of the General Assembly and obtaining the support of UN Member States on the referral to the ICJ. The request was submitted on behalf of the African Group of Ambassadors in New York by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kenya, in his capacity as Chairperson for the month, and was subsequently included in the Provisional Agenda of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly for consideration in September 2018.

198. The Commission addressed the weekly meeting of the African Group in New York on 20 September 2018 and convened a meeting of the Open-ended Ministerial Committee on the ICC, on the margins of the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly in September 2018, in order to brief the Committee on the implementation of the Decision of the Assembly on the question to be put to the ICJ. The Open-ended Committee requested the Commission, in collaboration with the African Group, to finalize the framing of the question for consideration by the General Assembly in May 2019.

199. Subsequently, the Commission convened the first technical working group of international law experts to frame the question. The technical working group met from 13 to 14 December 2018 in The Hague. On the proposal of the Open-ended Ministerial Committee, the experts were drawn from Africa and elsewhere, to ensure that the AU considers all possible arguments, both for and against the opinion.

200. In coordination with the African Group in New York, the Commission will convene a number of other technical meetings with both African and global experts for the finalization of the draft question. The African Group and the Commission will also continue to engage with non-African Members of the UN in order to garner support for approval of the AU's request for an advisory opinion during the consideration of the agenda item by the General Assembly in May 2019. I urge all Member States to begin engagement with and lobbying for the support of Non-African States in order to secure the requisite votes for the referral to the ICJ.

201. In further implementation of the Assembly's decision on the ICC, the Commission made its written Amicus Curiae Submission before the Appeals Chamber of the ICC on 13 July 2018, following an order of the Appeals Chamber inviting international organizations, including the AU, to submit observations on the appeal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan against the decision of the ICC Pre-trial Chamber II for Jordan's non-compliance with the request of the Court to arrest and surrender President Omar Hassan al-Bashir of The Sudan. The Commission made its oral presentation on behalf of the Union in The Hague from 10 to 14 September 2018. The AU's participation in the proceedings focused on clarifying the legal obligations of States under the Rome Statute and customary international law in respect of the immunities of Heads of State

and other senior officials, which has resulted in conflicting interpretations by the ICC's Pre-Trial Chambers. The Commission reiterated its long-standing position that there are no exceptions to the fundamental rule of international law on the immunity of Heads of State and requested the Appeals Chamber to hold to its decision that the UN Security Council resolution 1593 does not waive the immunity of President Al-Bashir. The judgment of the Appeals Chamber in this case is still pending.

ii) *Update of Submissions to the International Court of Justice ongoing Advisory Opinion on the Chagos Archipelago*

202. It would be recalled that the oral proceedings on submissions to the ICJ on this matter was rescheduled for 3 September 2018. In preparation for the oral proceedings, the Commission sent a communication to Member States encouraging them to inform the Registrar of the ICJ about their intention to take part in the hearings on the Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius before 15 June 2018. In collaboration with the Government of Mauritius, the Commission continued to engage with Member States in order to ensure the presence of a larger number of AU Member States in the oral proceedings before the ICJ.

203. The ICJ heard oral pleadings from twenty-two (22) States and the AU. From the twenty-two (22), six (6) were African, namely Botswana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia. In addition, Argentina, Australia, Belize, Brazil, Cyprus, Germany, Guatemala, India, Israel, the Marshall Islands, Nicaragua, Serbia, Thailand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, and Vanuatu participated in the oral proceeding. The majority of these states opposed Britain's assertion that it has sovereignty over the island, but the United States, Australia and Israel supported the UK claim.

204. The Commission made its oral pleading on 6 September 2018. Its legal team pointed out the mandate of the Union in establishing African territorial integrity and self-determination as stemming from its legal instruments and the AU's contribution to the resolution taken by the UN General Assembly. Furthermore, the AU Legal Team highlighted the fact that the Court has jurisdiction to give an advisory opinion on the request of General Assembly's Resolution A/RES/71/292, in accordance with the Statute of the Court, and called upon the Court to assume its responsibility, as the supreme body for international justice, to give an answer to the questions of law and to continue its historic legacy in supporting self-determination and decolonization. The AU Legal team affirmed that it represented the collective voice of the African Continent.

205. I wish to congratulate all the AU Member States which contributed in these legal proceedings. I look forward to a favorable and timely conclusion of this matter by the ICJ.

iii) *Follow-Up Actions on the Hissène Habré Trial*

206. The fight against impunity is one of the key principles of the AU. Based on this principle, Senegal has been entrusted by the Assembly to host the proceedings to prosecute Hissène Habré, former President of Chad, and others for crimes committed in Chad between 1982 and 1990. The Agreement to establish the Extraordinary African Chambers (EAC) within the Senegalese judiciary was signed on 22 August 2012, and it was inaugurated in February 2013.

207. The Hissène Habré trial commenced on 20 July 2015, and was concluded on 11 February 2016. On 30 May 2016, the EAC convicted Hissène Habré of crimes against humanity of rape, sexual slavery, murder, summary execution, kidnapping followed by enforced disappearance, torture, inhumane acts and others. Hence, he was sentenced to life imprisonment. The judgment in the first instance retained 4,866 victims to be compensated according to the principle of full reparation. The overall budget was determined at CFA francs 50,920,000,000. The Appeals Chamber's ruling partially overturned the previous decisions by recognizing 7,396 victims as civil plaintiffs, to whom the amount of CFA francs 82,290,000,000 was allocated as compensation.

208. At its Kigali Session in July 2016, the Assembly welcomed the verdict of the Hissène Habré trial and urged the Commission, in partnership with the Government of Chad, to take all necessary measures to establish a Trust Fund for Victims and to ensure that the Court-ordered reparations are efficiently and appropriately disbursed to the victims. Its Statute was adopted by the Assembly in January 2018.

209. In pursuance of the decision of the Executive Council of June-July 2017, requesting the Commission, in consultation with the Chadian Government, to take all necessary measures to operationalize the Trust Fund for Victims, I dispatched a mission to N'Djamena in December 2018. The Chadian authorities, including the Ministers of Justice and Human Rights, and Foreign Affairs, expressed their commitment to speeding up the appointment of a representative of the Government of Chad to the Board of Directors of the Trust Fund, and facilitating the operationalization of the Fund, particularly with regard to the signing of the Headquarters Agreement to host the Fund Secretariat.

210. The Commission's delegation also met with the Collective of Victims Associations to inform them about the various steps required for the operationalization of the Trust Fund. It should be recalled that just as the Government of Chad is expected to appoint its representative, so too is the Collective, to allow the Board of Directors to hold its inaugural session.

211. I would like to urge all Member States and partners to generously contribute to the Trust Fund, in order to facilitate the implementation of the Decision of the EAC and address the plight of the victims. Such contributions will be a further illustration of the AU's commitment to effectively address the issue of impunity. The Commission will vigorously pursue its efforts to that end.

K. ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN THE COMMISSION

212. The Ethics Office was established in August 2016 pursuant to the relevant provisions of the AU Staff Regulations and Rules. A key mandate of the Ethics Office is to ensure that all elected officials and staff members observe and perform their functions consistent with the highest standards of integrity required by the Code and other relevant AU rules and regulations. The Office covers all administrative activities of the AU Organs, representational offices and peace support operations.

213. In 2018, the Ethics Office reviewed the Code of Ethics and Conduct and the Harassment Policy. It drafted policies on gifts, dress code, financial and asset declarations, conflict of interest management, and whistle-blower protection, in order to strengthen institutional governance. All these policies are at various stages of the approval process.

214. Since its establishment, staff members have been demonstrating increased confidence in the Ethics Office. Over 100 staff have contacted the Office for verification or clarification of their rights and protection as provided for by the Code of Ethics and Conduct, and the Harassment Policy. There was also a notable increase in the number of correspondences, directed at various AU administrative and adjudication structures that were copied to the Office, seeking administrative guidance and facilitation of speedy redress.

215. On my part, following allegations of harassment against women levelled through an anonymous letter, which was widely published in the media, I instituted a High-Level Committee (HLC) on 24 May 2018 to fully investigate these allegations. I also mandated the Committee to investigate all alleged and inferred institutional malpractices within the Commission, in order to independently establish the facts in the light of the commitment I made to the Staff on assumption of duty on 15 March 2017, to ensure good internal governance throughout the entire Commission. The HLC submitted its final Report on 9 November 2018.

216. The Committee made a number of recommendations, including: (i) the need for the Commission to develop an updated Human Resource policy with time-bound implementation; (ii) a review of the AU organizational structure; (iii) the rationalization of the award of short-term contracts, taking into account operational exigencies and the acceleration of recruitment of regular employees, to fill in all positions provided for in the budget; (iv) the strengthening of oversight and adjudication mechanisms; (v) the need to strengthen leadership and management capacity; (v) the urgent need to review and approve the sexual harassment policy; and (v) implementation of a gender audit to ensure comprehensive gender mainstreaming and total parity by 2025, as prescribed in Decision 635 of the Assembly on the institutional reform.

217. I wish to express my deep appreciation to the members of the High-Level Committee for their forward-looking recommendations. On the basis of these recommendations, I appointed of an internal committee to look into all the recommendations, including those pertaining to 44 concrete cases compiled by the High

Level Commission for further investigation and redress. Necessary feedback on action taken will be communicated to the concerned staff members in due course, I have also taken action on other urgent issues, such as the acting appointments and other relevant policy issues within the mandate of the Commission.

L. AU STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

218. In 2018, the Commission has been engaged in implementing Executive Council Decision EX.CL/Dec.397 (XII) on the evaluation of Africa strategic partnerships. In May 2018, the Commission organized a retreat of the Sub-Committee on Multilateral Cooperation in Mauritius, to review and update the draft evaluation. The final draft report of the evaluation was discussed and adopted with comments by the Sub-Committee in December 2018, and the PRC in January 2019, for presentation to the Executive Council in February 2020, to decide on the way forward.

219. It is important to note some of the key findings of the evaluation, such as re-defining the strategic partnerships as those partnerships that help Africa achieve higher-level results on a broad range of priority issues under Agenda 2063. As such, some of the existing partnerships were found to be strategic, while others were deemed to be potentially strategic if their scope, delivery mechanisms, and impacts were enhanced. The evaluation recommended additional potential partnerships of importance to Africa. It also recommended that the Commission and other organs enhance their internal capacity towards better management of Africa's partnerships and promotion of Africa's voice in the global arena.

220. Throughout the reporting period, the Commission entered into a number of new institutional partnerships in the form of strategic dialogue and cooperation with other organizations and countries. In this context, cooperation instruments were signed with France on 8 June 2018; Norway on 6 December 2018; and the United Arab Emirates on 16 January 2019. Collectively, they span a broad range of priorities under Agenda 2063 and leverage the comparative advantage of those partners to add value to the AU efforts in implementing Agenda 2063.

221. At the same time, the Commission continued to move forward on a number of strategic partnerships, including TICAD, FOCAC, and the AU-EU. In that context, the Commission co-organized with Japan, the United Nations, and other partners, the TICAD Ministerial meeting in Tokyo in October 2018. This preparatory meeting for the TICAD Summit in Yokohama, in August 2019, reviewed progress since the last Summit, and identified ways of enhancing TICAD performance, particularly as it relates to the mobilization of investments to Africa, an area that the evaluation of TICAD has found to be still work-in-progress, despite the development assistance component being on track.

222. The Commission also participated in the FOCAC Summit in Beijing in September 2018. The Beijing Action Plan reflected the priorities of regional integration in its eight major initiatives, and spelled out the role of the AU, where appropriate. I took the

opportunity of the Summit to meet with President Xi Jinping, and exchanged with him on the priorities of China-Africa cooperation. The Chinese President pledged expanded support to AU programmes, particularly in the areas of common priority under the Beijing Action Plan. During the same visit, I signed an MoU with the National Development and Reform Commission to capitalize on the Belt and Road Initiative, in order to promote the objectives of Agenda 2063, particularly in areas of infrastructure investment, agriculture, industry, and trade, where the AU plays a coordinating, support and facilitation role for its Member States. The FOCAC Beijing Summit has significantly expanded the scope of cooperation between China and the AU, as further illustrated by the operationalization of the AU representational mission to China. The Office was inaugurated on the margins of the FOCAC ministerial meeting.

223. Numerous activities under the AU-EU partnership led to significant progress in the implementation of the Abidjan Summit outcomes. The first follow-up ministerial meeting was held in Brussels on 21 and 22 January 2019. It reviewed progress on the Abidjan Action Plan, and charted the way forward in its priority areas, namely trade and investment; peace, security and governance; and cooperation on the global scene. It confirmed that the AU and EU would continue to work towards enhancing the continent-to-continent partnership, post 2020, backed by commitments on both sides and appropriate instruments and frameworks. The meeting concluded that the second ministerial follow up meeting on Abidjan outcomes should be held towards the end of the 2019, focusing mainly on the deliverables of the upcoming Summit, scheduled for 2020, subject to approval by the African and European Heads of State. The Summit is planned to launch an enhanced version of the partnership post-2020, reflecting Africa's priorities in terms of development and regional integration.

224. The Commission will continue to forge and manage partnerships that enable Africa's voice to be heard and allow the continent to assume its rightful place on the global stage. This is all the more important in view of the current global context marked by uncertainty and a rise of unilateralism.

M. CONCLUSION

225. This Introductory Note highlights some of the significant progress the Union made in 2018 and for which the continent can take a legitimate pride. These achievements have a tangible impact on the continent's development and the livelihoods of its people. Their reinforcement and the need for better outreach to make them known will continue to engage the attention of the Commission.

226. Many challenges still persist. Conflicts and violence remain a reality that affects the lives of large segments of the African population. The democratization processes and the promotion of good governance are still fraught with difficulties. Poverty and misery are the daily lot of hundreds of millions of people even though the continent is endowed with wealth and talent. The voice of Africa on the international stage is still insufficiently taken into account, even though the continent represents more than a quarter of the membership of the United Nations. As I observed at the Nouakchott

Summit last July, our Union is now at a critical juncture at which we need to enhance the timely, effective and speedy implementation of all the decisions taken so far on the various issues and challenges.

227. In conclusion, I wish to express sincere gratitude to President Paul Kagame of Rwanda for the dedicated leadership and dynamism with which he chaired the Union in 2018 and for his constant support to the Commission. I look forward to working with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt, the incoming Chair of the Union for 2019.

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