“one AFRICA, one VOICE”

REPORT OF THE HIGH LEVEL FORUM OF AFRICAN MINISTERS FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, HEALTH, GENDER AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ON ADVANCING AFRICA’S INTERESTS AT UN AND OTHER MULTILATERAL FORA:

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Acknowledgements

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INTRODUCTION

On 24 September 2016, a high level forum of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and their counterparts in charge of Health, Gender and Social Development was held in the margins of the 71st session of the UN General Assembly under the chairmanship of H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chad and Chair of the Executive Council. The objective of the high level forum was to deliberate on ensuring a united, coherent, coordinated and consistent African voice in the multilateral fora based on the positions of African Heads of State and Government and African Union processes. The Forum was convened by the African Union Commission under the patronage of H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the Commission.

With 54 Member States, Africa forms the largest regional bloc within the United Nations and in any of the UN political groupings including the Non-Aligned Movement States and the Group of 77 and China. A united African voice would strengthen the negotiating power, credibility and effectiveness of Africa in the UN and other multilateral fora including in intergovernmental processes. It is for this reason that African Heads of State and Government have repeatedly emphasized the need for a united African voice, including through their decision [Assembly/AU/12 (XXV)] calling on African Member States to continue to speak as one. Furthermore, in their 2011 Summit under the theme “Towards greater unity and integration through shared values” they emphasized that “shared values are a means of accelerating Africa’s integration agenda through values and principles that are embodied, in the various instruments, decisions and declarations that have been adopted by the Union [Assembly/AU/Decl.1(XVI)].
OBJECTIVE OF THE HIGH LEVEL FORUM

The event was a call to reinforce Africa’s position as a key and influential player in multilateral fora Africa’s Vision 2063.

The Forum highlighted the need to: develop an institutional mechanism that ensures positions are known and maintained even when Ministers change; ensure that the development of common positions involve AU representatives and Member State missions from all multilateral capitals; improve coordination between these multilateral capitals and encourage African Member States to prioritize allegiance to the continent over connections with past colonial masters; strengthen the follow up to various decisions and commitments; promote greater oversight by Ministers participating in UN processes and their delegations in negotiations as well as oversight by Addis Ababa on other multilateral capitals; improved coordination between AUC and Member States and the need to have timely and proper information sharing mechanisms.
ATTENDANCE

There were 100 participants in all. They included 20 Ministers in charge of Foreign Affairs, Health, Gender and Social Development, Permanent Representatives, Ambassadors and Senior Advisors from Addis Ababa, Geneva and New York. The following countries were represented: Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, The Sudan, The Gambia and Zimbabwe

The African Union Commission was represented by the Commissioners for Social Affairs, Peace and Security, and Rural Economy and Agriculture. Also in attendance were AUC Heads of Mission for New York and Geneva, the representative of NEPAD and technical advisors.

Africans within the UN comprising Heads of Agencies and Senior officials from UNFPA, UN Women, ECA and OCHA participated as observers.

The High level Event was moderated by H.E. Dr. Mustapha Sidiki Kaloko, Commissioner for Social Affairs, African Union Commission.
The introductory remarks were delivered by Ambassador Tete Antonio, Head of Mission of the African Union to the United Nations.

Ambassador Tete Antonio, head of the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the UN welcomed participants to the Forum and emphasized the importance of Africa’s unity and speaking with one voice in multilateral processes at the global level.

Subsequently, H.E. Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Chad and President of the Executive Council opened the Session.
H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chad and Chair of the AU Executive Council delivered the opening remarks. He underscored the importance of Africa speaking with one voice and the commitment of H.E. President Idris Deby Itno and the government of Chad, as Chair of the Union, towards addressing this issue. He quoted the June 2015 decision of the Executive Council which emphasized the need for Africa to continue to work together and called on AU Member States and Ambassadors’ groups to “respect and implement AU positions”. He advocated for Africa to take advantage of its numerical strength to exert strong influence in multilateral processes at the global level. He raised some key questions for the consideration of Ministers and said that “when decisions from Addis Ababa take a different form in New York or Geneva, it hurts our credibility and limit
our legitimate ambition to have a strong Africa, united and influential global player and partner”.

Ministers, Ambassadors and High Level Guests took the floor to express their position. On behalf of the Commission, Dr. Mustapha Sidiki Kaloko, Commissioner for Social Affairs delivered a keynote address in which he provided the background to the development of Common African Positions (CAPs) as a response from African Heads of State and Government to address disparities between African Group positions in various multilateral negotiating processes.

He shared examples of its successes and challenges in various processes. During the Post 2015 Intergovernmental negotiations, certain Member States refused to support the inclusion of peace and security in the 2030 Agenda despite the fact that it was an important pillar of
the CAP. He also shared examples of occasions when African Group positions had run contrary to AU positions on issues such as gender and HIV/AIDS and how these affected continental positions and interests in processes such as the Commission for Population and Development (CPD) and Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The Commissioner highlighted how developments like these have impacted Africa including in trade negotiations such as the Economic Partnership for Africa (EPA), Africa’s positioning in the UN, etc. At the end of his presentation he suggested key recommendations on the way forward and warned that “putting forward different continental positions in different processes on the same issue or not adhering to the adopted position presents a severe reputational risk for the AU membership”.

HIGH LEVEL INTERACTIVE SESSION

The high level interactive session, chaired by H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, offered participating Ministers, Ambassadors and other senior officials the opportunity to discuss and make recommendations on the way forward in ensuring ‘One Africa, One Voice’. The discussions were guided by three main questions:

- How to ensure the positions of Africa’s representatives at the multilateral level (Addis Ababa, Geneva, New York…) reflect, respect and are consistent with decisions of AU Assembly, Executive Council and Specialised Technical Committees (STCs);

- How to best ensure effective coordination between continental and global level positions in a way that upholds AU decisions;

- How to strengthen oversight and accountability on Africa’s positions in various multilateral processes.

The session started with interventions by Ministers from countries who had played leading or coordinating roles for Africa in major global multilateral processes held in the recent past namely: Financing for Development (FfD); Common African Position on Post 2015 Development Agenda (CAP 2015); and United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20).
H.E. Tedros Adhanom, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ethiopia (Financing for Development, FfD): The Minister shared his satisfaction with Africa's engagement in FfD which was the result of a united and coherent engagement of Member States. On the other hand, there were challenges with the continent's engagement with the International Criminal Court for which he chaired the open-ended Ministerial Committee. He said he had “seen how strong Africa becomes when we unite and speak with one voice. The only weapon we have is a united voice”. He said that developing countries which lack the economic muscle of other developed nations could remain influential in negotiations if they stayed united. He made a number of recommendations including the need to improve communication between Addis Ababa and representative delegations in other multilateral capitals.
H.E. Marjon Kamara, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Liberia (CAP – Post 2015): She recalled her roles while serving as permanent representative in New York. Given her experiences in various past intergovernmental processes, she remarked that this meeting was long overdue. She said that ‘One Africa, One Voice’ should be seen as a work in progress towards which all Member States must continue to work. She noted that Africa is a diverse continent with diverse philosophies, economic development and many alliances outside of the African Union and that the common positions brought all the countries together. She shared her personal experiences as Permanent Representative of Liberia to the UN in New York during the Post 2015 negotiations where some countries deliberately distorted positions and opposed certain key elements of the Common African Position, including attempts to sometimes present such opposition as representing the entire African Group. She made recommendations on improving information and knowledge sharing, the need for increased participation of government officials and experts from capitals and ensuring that enough time and space is dedicated to discussion of difficult issues to improve understanding, communication and acceptance.
H.E. Jean-Claude Gakosso: Minister of Foreign Affairs, Congo (Rio +20): The Minister shared experiences from Congo’s coordination of Rio+20 and the determination of their President towards ensuring a strong and coordinated African voice in that process. There were disagreements and lack of solidarity within the group that weakened their engagement in the negotiations. Ultimately, as a result of the unity, dedication and commitment of Heads of State and Government, Africa got a strong and positive outcome. He said there is an urgent need to improve relations and coordination between Addis Ababa and New York and ensure enhanced capacity of personnel at the AU Mission to the UN. He encouraged Member States to make use of their assets within the UN system including various high level Africans who can provide guidance and expertise when needed. In conclusion he said “we must work together so we are better heard and respected”.

Other Ministers and Ambassadors then took the floor to intervene and share their perspectives on the issue at hand. These included H.E. Nana Oye Lithur, Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection; H.E. Hanna Tetteh, Foreign Minister, Ghana; H.E. Fatoumatta Habib, Minister of
Social Affairs, Children and Family, Mauritania; H.E. Simbarashe S. Mumbengegwi, Foreign Minister, Zimbabwe; H.E. Mrs. Neneh MacDouall-Gaye, Foreign Minister, Gambia; H.E. Sola Enikan-olaiye, Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nigeria and H.E. Yvette Stevens, Sierra Leonean Ambassador to the UN in Geneva.

They highlighted the need to: develop an institutional mechanism that ensures positions are known and maintained even when Ministers change; ensure that the development of common positions involve AU representatives and Member State missions from all multilateral capitals; improve coordination between these multilateral capitals and encourage African Member States to prioritize allegiance to the continent over connections with past colonial masters; strengthen the follow up to various decisions and commitments; promote greater oversight by Ministers participating in UN processes and their delegations in negotiations as well as oversight by Addis Ababa on other multilateral capitals; improved coordination between AUC and Member States and the need to have timely and proper information sharing mechanisms.
KEY MESSAGES OF THE HIGH LEVEL FORUM

The following were the key messages from the forum:

i. The need to ensure that the positions advanced by and on behalf of the African Group in intergovernmental processes are the same regardless of the venue or process and derive from continental positions and instruments.

ii. The need to promote elaboration and strengthen coordination of the various positions by AU in different processes and on different levels—global and regional.

iii. The need to develop a clear interface, including communication channels, between the African Union headquarters and the different negotiating mechanisms in intergovernmental processes.

iv. The need to communicate and disseminate as early as possible decisions made and positions developed with respect to specific processes or conferences with Foreign Ministries to facilitate their guidance to diplomatic missions as well as the issuance of clear directives from Foreign Ministries to missions abroad on the need to adhere to African common positions.

v. The need to develop mechanisms to facilitate oversight and accountability on the positions taken on behalf of Africa in multilateral fora, including through regular reporting to the Executive Council.
vi. To strengthen the capacity and authority of AUC in ensuring that AU Member States are aware of agreed Common African Positions and that these positions are transmitted to the African negotiating groups. In this regard, AU Permanent Observer Missions should play an active role in guiding negotiating groups.

vii. Encourage the participation of officials from capitals in multilateral negotiations especially in New York and Geneva.

viii. Ministries of Foreign Affairs to strengthen collaboration and proactively engage with various sectoral Ministries who are directly responsible for issues to be addressed in relevant UN negotiations and ensure that the agreed positions are shared with the respective permanent Missions in the various multilateral capitals.

ix. Ensure further discussion of issues raised and recommendations for the consideration of AU Executive Council at their 30th Ordinary Session in January 2017.
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HIGH LEVEL FORUM

The High Level Forum of AU Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Health, Gender and Social Development on Effective Positioning of Africa in UN and Other Multilateral Fora: “One Africa, One Voice” made recommendations for considerations by the Executive Council of the African Union.

1. We, African Ministers of Foreign Affairs, together with our counterparts responsible for social development, health, gender and other related matters, representatives of the African Group from Addis Ababa, New York and Geneva, having met at the AU Ministerial Forum, in the margins of the 71st Session of the UN General Assembly in New York with the objective of strengthening Africa’s voice and facilitating coherence between the positions of the African Union and African negotiating mechanisms positions at multilateral fora, make the following recommendations for consideration by the Executive Council of the AU:

2. We have taken note of the following decisions of the AU Assembly:

   i. [Assembly/AU/12 (XXV)] calling on all Member States to speak with one voice;

   ii. [Assembly/AU/Dec. 503(XXII)] on Common African Position (CAP) on the Post 2015 Development Agenda, requesting Member States to speak with one voice during discussions at the United Nations General Assembly,
iii. The 2011 AU Declaration on the theme of the Summit: “Towards greater unity and integration through shared values” adopted in Addis Ababa (Assembly/AU/Decl.1(XVI)) which acknowledges “that shared values are a means of accelerating Africa’s integration agenda through values and principles that are embodied, in the various instruments, decisions and declarations that have been adopted by the Union.

iv. We also noted the decision of the Executive Council [EX.CL/Dec.894(XXVII)], that emphasizes the need for AU Member States Ambassadors Groups to respect and implement AU positions and decisions.

3. We have agreed to be guided by the aspiration of the AU Agenda 2063 for an Africa that is strong, united and an influential global player and partner in global affairs,

4. We have acknowledged with thanks the important role the African delegations and the coordinating mechanisms played in recent negotiations that secured positive outcomes for the continent using the Common African Positions (CAP) as a tool to facilitate a united African voice, particularly the CAP on Post 2015 Development Agenda, which was crucial in ensuring that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development prioritized Africa’s interests and had significant synergies with the AU Agenda 2063,

5. We have expressed concern that despite guidance by the AU Assembly and other ministerial organs on various matters before United Nations negotiation platforms and processes, there have been several cases where African Groups or individual Member States have taken positions or made reservations that have contradicted and run counter to adopted positions, guidance and continental level resolutions and instruments,
6. We have reaffirmed here the importance of Africa speaking with one voice at multilateral fora in order to take advantage of our strength as the largest regional body of States within the United Nations to influence intergovernmental decision-making in favor of Africa’s transformation agenda and to create the conditions for securing the required partnerships and support that Africa requires to develop high quality human capital; strong and thriving economies, responsive governance and sustainable development,

7. We have agreed on the following points:

i. African Ministers will bring to the attention of their diplomatic missions the adopted positions of the African Union and emphasize the importance of Africa speaking with one voice at multilateral fora, guided by common positions and continental instruments of the Assembly and other ministerial organs;

ii. Common positions and instruments emanating from the AU Assembly and its ministerial organs must constitute the basic reference guide and source of positions of the African Groups in New York, Geneva and elsewhere and that as negotiations evolve in each process the key objectives of such continental positions shall be the guiding source of new proposals;

iii. African negotiators and coordinating mechanisms will ensure that positions advanced by and on behalf of the African Group in intergovernmental processes are the same regardless of the venue or process and derive from continental positions and instruments;

iv. Individual Member States reservations to such con-
tinental positions do not override the will of the Assembly or its ministerial organs;

v. African Union Commission would communicate and disseminate as early as possible decisions made and positions developed with respect to specific processes or conferences with Foreign Ministries to enable them to instruct their diplomatic missions accordingly;

vi. Develop a clear interface, including communication and reporting channels, between the African Union headquarters and the different negotiating mechanisms in intergovernmental processes and institute mechanisms to facilitate oversight and accountability on the positions taken on behalf of Africa in multilateral fora.

vii. Strengthen the capacity and authority of AUC in ensuring that AU Member States are aware of agreed Common African Positions for different processes at all stages of the negotiation process, including actively guiding African negotiating groups on the positions of the AU through Permanent Observer Missions.

viii. Encourage the participation of officials from capitals in multilateral negotiations especially in New York and Geneva.

ix. Ministries of Foreign Affairs to strengthen collaboration and proactively engage with various sectoral Ministries who are directly responsible for issues to be addressed in relevant UN negotiation processes.

x. Ensure further discussion of issues raised and rec-
ommendations for the consideration of AU Executive Council at their 30th Ordinary Session in January 2017.

xi. The Executive Council will provide overall oversight for compliance with AU positions through regular consideration of reports on Africa’s positioning in multilateral negotiations and processes.

xii. The Council will further periodically review the implementation of the various decision points to ensure full adherence.
CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

A draft outcome document reflecting the key issues discussed was circulated to all participants and delegations to share their inputs to ensure that the recommendations reflect all the concrete steps suggested by Ministers and Ambassadors. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs, led by Chad as Chair of the Executive Council, decided to present the recommendations to the Executive Council of Ministers and ensure the necessary action on this important subject and the outcome at the January 2017 AU Summit.