

Statement at the 36th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union

**Your Excellency President Macky Sall, outgoing Chairperson of the African Union,
Your Excellency President Azali Assoumani, incoming Chairperson of the African Union,
Your Excellency, Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission
Your Excellency, Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations
Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Distinguished Ministers, Ambassadors, Diplomats and Invited Guests:**

It is a great honor for me to address you today and welcome you to your second home, Addis Ababa!

I would like to congratulate Excellency Azali Assoumani, President of the Union of Comoros, on his deserved assumption of the Chair of the African Union.

I also wish to congratulate Excellency Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal, for his able leadership, in steering our union at a very difficult time.

Your Excellencies,

This year marks six decades since our mother institution, the Organization of African Unity was established. Sixty years ago, our leaders gathered in this very city to chart a new path for all of us towards sovereign equality, Pan-African unity and economic solidarity. As I stand before you, I pay tribute to those far-sighted Founding Fathers whose vision of African unity we are here to celebrate, nurture and implement. In our efforts to realize that vision, we have accomplished significant victories but also faced setbacks. However, there continue to be critical areas through which we can sustain and multiply our victories.

Excellencies,

When I stood before you last year on this same occasion, Ethiopia was just coming out of a costly conflict. This time, I am here to celebrate the signing on November 2nd 2022, of the Pretoria Peace Accord between the Ethiopian Government and the TPLF, which has led to the silencing of the guns in the Northern part of our country.

Ethiopia is where it is today in no small part because of the tireless efforts of the African Union and the wisdom of its deeply-held belief in the principle of *“African solutions to African problems”*. One of the earliest and most powerful expressions of this principle comes from the opening statement delivered by His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie in his address to the first Summit of the OAU in May 1963.

His Imperial Majesty acknowledged that future disputes among African countries were only natural. But, he also advised that, when disputes arise, the effort to resolve them *“must be confined to this continent and quarantined from the contamination of non-African interference.”*

Today, each time we assert and reassert the principle of *African Solutions to African Problems*, we are only applying the timeless wisdom of our forefathers for the resolution of contemporary challenges.

At the heart of the principle of *African Solutions to African Problems* lies a belief in African solidarity, African agency and the equal dignity of all human beings. Here in Ethiopia, we do not just insist on the principle of African solutions for the resolution of our problems; we also present ourselves at the forefront in helping ourselves and our fellow African countries to resolve challenges.

Our leading role in peacekeeping missions, our peacemaking efforts in Sudan, Somalia, and South Sudan, and our recent successes in resolving our own long-standing no-war no-peace relationship with Eritrea are prominent examples in this respect.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

While the principle of *African Solutions to African Problems* is widely raised in the scope of conflict, it is imperative that we begin to extend this principle to a wide range of peace and security issues. Continental food security and food sovereignty is one such issue. Our continent is not only well able to feed itself, but can become a bread basket of the world. With 65% of the world's remaining uncultivated arable land in our backyards, we need to critically assess why one third of the hungry people in the world are in our continent.

In Ethiopia, we have been working diligently to enhance agricultural productivity in the past four years. We have commenced an initiative that encourages small-holder farmers to farm in clusters that enable them to benefit from irrigation and mechanization. Our laser focus on wheat productivity is bearing fruit. And our ambition to begin exporting wheat this year has already materialized. A great achievement for Ethiopia. An even greater achievement for our continent. Ethiopia is also undertaking a massive campaign to encourage both large- and small-scale poultry, dairy, livestock farming, as well as urban agriculture, through a national initiative we call “የሌማት ትሩፋት” - loosely translated as ‘bounty of the basket’.

These efforts are showing promising results. Not only will Ethiopia feed itself; we are confident that we can strongly contribute to global food supplies through exports and otherwise. The 2023 Dakar Declaration on Food Sovereignty and Resilience rightly acknowledged the continental awakening that **‘it is time for Africa to feed itself and fully unlock its agriculture potential to feed the world.’** I call upon our African Union and development partners to support in unleashing this potential.

Excellencies,

Sadly, the principle of *African Solutions to African Problems* is not a silver bullet to address all our challenges, because not all our problems are the products of our own making.

The challenge of climate change is a case in point. We all know that Africa's contribution to global warming is insignificant. Yet climate change is already affecting Africa more severely than any other part of the world. To this extent, climate change is an African problem, but its roots lie elsewhere.

Global meetings on climate change are rich with the rhetoric of climate justice, the just transition, common but differentiated responsibilities of parties. These talks, however, are hardly ever backed up with action. And Africa cannot wait. Ethiopia is definitely not waiting for solutions to come from outside. Instead, we are doing all we can to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Over the past four years, Ethiopia's contribution through our national *Green Legacy* initiative has mobilized 25 million Ethiopians across the nation. Collectively, we have now planted well over 25 billion trees across the country. The impact could be equated to removing 64 million gasoline-powered cars from the roads for a whole year.

For my country, investment in environmental protection is not a charity; it is driven by enlightened self-interest. For us in Ethiopia, environmental protection is about everything we are as a society. It is about our ability to feed ourselves. It is about our ability to conserve water and other precious resources. It is about our ability to preserve peace between adjoining communities. It is about our survival as a nation.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

While Ethiopia's economy has been challenged by the COVID19 pandemic, a drought, an internal conflict and the impacts of the Russia-Ukraine crisis, we have nevertheless remained resilient as a nation.

Our home-grown economic reform program has also helped us persevere. Through this reform program that has enabled the opening up of the economy to competition, some of the major service sectors that have been closed to foreign investment for several decades, such as telecoms and finance, are being progressively opened.

We know the COVID19 pandemic and the current global commodity shortages hurt public finances everywhere. Forced to spend on tackling the pandemic while tax revenues collapsed, most of our countries piled up unsustainable debts. Now that the pandemic is over, nearly all of us want to put our economies back on a growth trajectory. But this will not happen without sufficient restructuring to make our external debt sustainable.

I therefore want to reaffirm our collective **call for a fast and predictable global framework of debt restructuring that is conducive to accelerating sustainable, inclusive green growth in Africa.**

Excellencies,

Africa today is *a leading voice for a better world* in a lot of ways. Africans are increasingly resolving their differences by peaceful means. The African continent is fast-tracking the establishment and implementation of a rules-based system of trade governance that promises to create the world's largest free trade area. African countries are engaged in environmental conservation, reforestation and massive investment in the generation of clean energy from hydro sources. In short, Africa is leading the world in areas that matter for all humanity and it is time for Africa's leadership role to be recognized and institutionalized.

I would like to use this opportunity to lend my voice yet again for Africa to be represented on the UN Security Council with at least one permanent seat and double non-permanent seats. Moreover, Africa also needs to have proportionate representation at the G7, the G20 and similar global forums.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

On this same occasion last year, I called upon all of us to tackle Africa's typically negative portrayal by the global media. I stressed the need for Africa to tell her own story, and not allow others to tell it in the service of their own interests. In this respect, please allow me to restate yet again the need to establish an African Union Continental Media House.

Until Africa tells her own stories, her image will remain distorted – a distortion that affects not just how others view us but also how we view ourselves. We owe it to ourselves and to our children that Africa's truths need to be told as they are, untainted with external interests and biases.

Excellencies,

Let me conclude by thanking you once again for standing with Ethiopia in our time of need. Ethiopia and Ethiopians are appreciative of the pan-African solidarity that was on display in those difficult moments. Together, we prevailed. God bless Ethiopia. God bless Africa.

I Thank You!

February 18, 2023