

**Your Excellency** Dr. Mokgweetsi E.K. Masisi, President of the Republic of Botswana;

**Honorable** Commissioner Solomon Ayele Dersso, Chairperson of the African Commission on human and Peoples' Rights (African Commission);

**Honorable** members of the African Commission on human and Peoples' Rights;

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I warmly greet you!

On behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commissioner, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, I will be making the following statement:

**(I quote)**

**"Dear Fellow Africans:**

I wish to begin by wishing you all **"a happy 2020 Africa Human Rights Day"**.

On this auspicious Africa Human Rights Day (AHRD), I am pleased to convey to all Africans and friends of our continent the renewed hope and commitment to the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights as enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

This year's Africa Human Rights Day takes place under difficult circumstances. As I said in my remark at the opening session of the 37<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the AU few days ago, this is an unprecedented context characterized by the persistence of COVID-19, but also by the emergence of new issues and challenges, new risks and new opportunities for our Continent'. It is therefore appropriate

that today's commemoration of Africa Human Rights Day dedicated its thematic focus on Human and Peoples' Rights and the COVID19 Pandemic: Protecting Rights for Building Back Better.'

The COVID19 pandemic is not just a health emergency. Its social, economic, humanitarian and security consequences prove to be as much, if not more, challenging than its consequences on health.

From the perspective of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the pandemic also has direct human rights consequences. The 66<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has deliberated in depth on the nature and scope of these human rights issues.

Apart from the fact that it has led to the imposition of restrictions on fundamental rights, the issues that the pandemic has exposed also led to the exacerbation of existing human rights issues and the emergence of new human rights issues. For example, COVID19 has brought to the center of our attention the huge gaps that pervade our societies in access to basic rights including health care, water and sanitation.

In so doing, the pandemic has highlighted that fulfilling social and economic rights is not only a human rights necessity but also an imperative for the safety and wellbeing of all members of society. This means that the pandemic has also presented us with the opportunity to address existing gaps. Indeed, more than any other time, COVID19 has underscored both the necessity and urgency of addressing the pervasive gaps in the delivery of socio-economic rights to our people.

For the African Union, the COVID19 pandemic has also shown the value of our Union in providing all our member states the common platform for collective action in the face of a common enemy. As an emergency that requires enormous financial and medical resources, the pandemic

necessitates that the action of individual member states is strongly backed by robust collective action. In this respect, the role that our Union played through the Chairperson of the Union and the Bureau of the AU Assembly, the African Union Commission, the Africa Centre for Disease Control (Africa CDC) has been instrumental. We established a continental COVID19 response strategy, the COVID19 Response Fund and the continental common platform for the procurement of medical supplies. We also campaigned for and mobilized, including through the special envoys, logistical and resource support to enhance the ability of member states to effectively respond. Various support activities including training of medical personnel and deployment of experts have also been rolled out.

In supporting national level action of our member states, our Union have thus materially contributed to mitigating or limiting the scale of the negative impacts of the pandemic, including on human and peoples' rights. As a result of both the bold national level actions and the collective efforts of our Union, Africa has displayed resilience, thereby avoiding the worst manifestations of the pandemic.

Certainly, as we try to address the impacts of COVID19, we are also mindful of the various other issues and needs of our continent. As we commemorate Africa Human Rights Day with a focus on the pressing issues rightly highlighted in today's theme, we also recall the African Union theme of the year "***Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development***".

Coming back to COVID19, there is a huge room for improvement. This is particularly the case in terms of respect and protection of human rights. The actions taken to deal with the pandemic need not lead to arbitrary deprivation of life or liberty. The resources that are dedicated to fighting the pandemic should not be misused and misappropriated.

Additionally, while we have achieved significant results through the actions taken at national and continental levels, we did this under rather very difficult socio-economic and structural conditions. We could have achieved incredible results had it not been for these conditions.

It has thus become evident that we need to end the fragilities and weaknesses of our societies. This means that our strategy for building back better within the framework of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda should focus on investing in universal access to health care, water, sanitation, social protection, employment focusing on access to those with no access so that no one is left behind.

Today's commemoration of Africa Human Rights Day consequently affords us a unique opportunity for taking stock of the human rights issues arising in the context of COVID19 and for reflecting on how we can translate the human rights standards of the African Charter and other AU instruments into mechanisms, policies and strategies for building back better. I am sure the Keynote Address will provide us the insights that will help us achieve an Africa that is more resilient and better placed both to overcome the multidimensional impacts of COVID19 and to withstand the next emergency.

As I wish all Africans and friends of Africa a happy 2020 Africa Human Rights Day, it gives me great pleasure to launch this year's commemoration and extend warm welcome to H.E. Dr. Mokgweetsi E.K. Masisi, President of the Republic of Botswana to deliver the keynote address. “

(End quote) - Fin de citation

I thank you for your attention.

