

# Acceptance Speech of Newly Elected African Union Commission Chairpersonship

by

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The Chairperson of the African Union President of Benin, Dr Thomas Boni Yayi  
Your Excellencies, African Union Heads of State and Government,  
Honourable Ministers and members of the Executive Council,  
Dr Jean Ping, the outgoing Chairperson,  
Members of the Permanent Representative Council,  
Members and staff of the African Union Commission,  
Distinguished members of delegations present here,  
Representatives of international organisations,  
Friends, Ladies and gentlemen,  
Members of the media.

It is with honour and humility that I today accept my election as the incoming chairperson of the African Union Commission. I am also grateful to the Southern African region for nominating me to serve the people of our continent in this capacity. More importantly I would like to express my gratitude to all the Heads of State and Government for my election and for entrusting me with an enormous responsibility which I commit to fulfilling with total commitment.

My election is not a personal victory but a victory for the African continent in general and for women in particular. I would like to also congratulate the Deputy Chairperson on his reelection and all the other Commissioners who are going to form part of this team.

I would like to thank Dr Jean Ping for all the hard work he has put into the Commission and I would just like to say I have known Dr Ping for some time – when he was still the Foreign Minister of Gabon. I hope that although you have said you have bowed out, if I do knock at your door asking for advice, that the door will be open.

I am aware that I shall only be able to discharge this responsibility by working with all member states and the talent that exists in our continent, for all the regions, to ensure a better life for all our peoples.

Our organisation is now almost 50 years old and it was founded on the principles of unity and it will be important to keep that unity and cohesion amongst ourselves. Our founders, heroes and heroines of Pan-Africanism, held a vision of a united, economically and politically emancipated continent at peace with itself and the world. The challenge we face is to translate this vision into a reality.

Your Excellencies:

The future of our continent is inextricably linked with that of the rest of humanity, the world over. Africa must therefore take its rightful place among nations of the world as an equal reliable partner, and full member of the international community.

We must create the conditions to, amongst others, contribute towards global peace and security, sustainable development, and mediate against the effects of climate change. In pursuance of this objective, as a Commission, we will continue to build on the work of those who came before us and we will continue to work with regional bodies around the world, the UN and all its agencies, including all our co-operating partners to ensure they can contribute in helping us to achieve our collectively defined priorities.

Your Excellencies:

The world unanimously agrees that Africa is a continent with immense possibilities and potential, as evidenced by our natural and human resources. We must use our vast resources including sunshine, wind and biodiversity more effectively to benefit our countries and our peoples. We as member states, working together with the Commission, must drive our developmental agenda.

We must spare neither strength nor effort to ensure we achieve the vision of our forebears and ensure that this century is indeed the African one.

Your Excellencies:

Today, we commemorate two milestones in the history of our organisation. After 49 years, the Southern African region has been afforded an opportunity to chair the African Union Commission but equally a woman has been afforded an opportunity for the first time. It is fitting that this happens during the period declared as the Decade of Women by this very Assembly.

We are grateful as women that our leaders have understood that women have to participate and take their rightful place in society so they can reach their full potential because it is only if men and women reach their full potential, shall we as a continent reach our full potential.

Your Excellencies:

Africa has the youngest population in the world, which is continuing to grow rapidly. We must therefore ensure our young people have access to education, healthcare, nutrition and skills development to enable them to participate in the mainstream of our economies and to become skilled.

Your Excellencies:

As we prepare to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the formation of the OAU, next year, we shall build upon and consolidate the work undertaken by the Commission under the leadership of many sons who have run this organisation, but most importantly former President Alpha Konare and the outgoing Chairperson Dr. Jean Ping who have been at the helm of the African Union itself.

For us to achieve the noble objectives of the African Union and its founding leaders, we require a strong Commission united by the unshakeable commitment to serve all our peoples with humility, professionalism, loyalty and patriotism. I am certain that all the Commissioners and staff of the African Union are steadfast in their commitment to these values.

May I reiterate our conviction that only by working together, as a single and indivisible continent of Africa, under the able leadership of the African Union, can we do more to improve the quality of life of all Africans while discharging our responsibilities on the African continent and globally.

I would like to conclude with a quote from one of our most renowned pan-Africanists, Marcus Garvey, who said, "The history of a movement, the history of a nation, the history of a race is the guidepost of that movement's destiny, that nation's destiny, that race's destiny".

As we emerge from this Summit, let our history guide us to ensure that as we move forward, the Africa we bequeath to our children is better than the one we inherited. Let us commit to working together towards a glorious destiny for all our peoples.

I thank you.



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