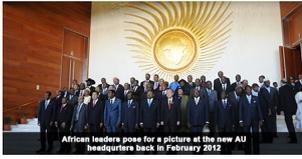


37 leaders participate in AU summit

By Elias Gebreselassie

Monday, 28 January 2013 13:31 -



37 African and Non-African leaders are expected to attend the 20th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) which runs from January 21st to 28th.

The summit of Heads of State and Government and Heads of Delegations is expected to start today January 27 and conclude tomorrow.

The Summit is also expected to be attended by at least 20 first ladies as well as several prime ministers and foreign ministers.

On the sidelines, regional and other organizational meetings are to be held, with special focus on the status of progress of regional and continental integration.

Organizations such as the Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) and the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) will be present at the Summit.

Ambassador Dina Mufti, Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), said the meeting, apart from highlighting Ethiopia's decisive role in the promotion of Africa's welfare, will also be an economic boon.

"We expect hotels, taxis and car rental services to be among the economic beneficiaries," Dina said, adding that during the summit discussions on the myriad conflicts and economic challenges that the continent is facing will be paramount.

He however declined to comment on whether the summit is expected to raise and discuss the rumored failed armed insurrection in Asmara, Eritrea.

Other issues, like the situation in Somalia, the dispute between Sudan and South Sudan, the West African nation of Guinea Bissau which is prone to coups, as well as UN reform and abolition of the death penalty will be major points of deliberation.

President of the UNGA to attend Summit

Among the notable dignitaries expected to attend the summit is the President of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the Serbian Vuk Jeremic, which will be for the first time.

Other high profile dignitaries which have confirmed their attendance are South African President Jacob Zuma, Egyptian President Mohammed Mursi, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan and Rwandese President Paul Kagame.

Also other notable attendees expected are the new Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan, Iran's foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi, China's Deputy Foreign Minister Fu Ying and Mikhail Margelov, current chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the upper house of the Russian Parliament (Duma).

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Senior Delegates from South Korea, India and Japan, as well as Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, who was sent a special invitation of the AU, will also attend and is expected to thank AU member states for the support they provided for the successful Palestinian bid for observer status at the UN.

New foundation for PM Meles

Another possible theme of discussion expected at the summit is a new foundation to be formed in the name of the late Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, under the wings of NEPAD, in light of Ethiopia's longstanding commitment to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). APRM, which celebrated its 10th anniversary yesterday on January 26, has extended its membership portfolio to 31 countries, with fifteen nations, including Ethiopia, having successfully completed the self-assessment.

APRM was founded as a mechanism to review the performance of African nations on issues such as good governance, economic wellbeing and the rule of law.

The formation of the new foundation under the name of the late PM Meles Zenawi is however not the first of its kind, with the Ethiopian parliament recently endorsing a foundation in memory of Ethiopia's revered leader.