

Ethiopia chairs AU at its 50th anniversary

By Elias Gebreselassie

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The 20th Ordinary session of the African Union (AU) held from January 21-28 saw the handing over of the chairperson position

of the AU to Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn from President of Benin Dr. Boni Yayi. Hailemariam assumed the AU chairperson's position on January 27 which will run for a year, and that coincides with the celebration of the OAU/AU's 50th founding anniversary in May. The golden jubilee of the OAU/AU will be celebrated in Addis Ababa on May 25, 2013. Hailemariam during his speech at the assembly gave a salute to the Late PM Meles Zeanwi who he said was an ardent panafricanist who earned a well deserved acclaim for his prominent role in advocating for Africa's common interests.

"It is fitting on the 50th anniversary of the organization that the theme of the summit be entitled Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance," the PM said adding that it comes at a time where African economies have shown a remarkable resilience despite the economic crisis that rocked the western world.

He also mentioned several international summits to be held this year as a testament to the growing clout of Africa's development agenda based on win-win cooperation.

These include the 5th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V), the 3rd Africa- South America Summit, the 2nd Africa-Turkey Summit, the 3rd Afro-Arab Summit and the 4th Africa-EU Summit.

Agriculture and Industrial Development top the agenda

One area where Hailemariam says he hopes to promote in his current position is to bring about the continent's structural transformation, with a view to achieving an integrated, prosperous, people centered and peaceful continent.

Other areas of emphasis the PM elaborated on were the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as well as climate change negotiations as part of the post-2015 development agenda. Conflicts between Sudan and South Sudan, the crisis in Mali, the situation in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the civil conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) are also expected to be points of attention during Hailemariam's one year term.

Hailemariam imparts his thoughts

PM Hailemaraim however did not enjoy a grace period, as on the next day, January 28, he held his first press conference with local and international journalists.

He said that Africa has six of the world's fastest economies, but that the growth can only be expedited by taking care of peace and security issues in member countries such as Mali and Guinea Bissau.

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“There has to be critical issues that I have to address with AUC chairwoman Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma,” the PM stated, adding that Africa is taking its problems into its own hands without waiting for others to help.

But he acknowledged that Africa needs support from the international community even though it has to take responsibility on its own first, and then ask support from the international community.

“It’s been 50 years since the founding of the OAU, but we have a strategic plan for the coming 50 years that will see how Africa can move forward during this time as part of the celebration,” Hailemariam said.

“Strategy 2063” paper due for next summit

The African Union (AU) will unveil a strategy for the coming 50 years. Ramatane Lamamra Commissioner of the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) said the strategy paper will focus on the theme of “AU agenda for Unity”.

“The strategy paper will focus on African people owning their destiny and focusing on reaching the maximum potential of African integration,” said Lamamra adding that between today and the next AU summit in May, African leaders and elites should focus on this important area.

The AU says currently it only achieved the minimum areas of integration in the continent with regional economic commissions leading the way. He also said a report on Africa’s prospects could be unveiled in May, with experiences and advices by experts and professionals.

Referring to the myriad crises affecting the continent, Lamamra said political solutions and issues of good governance will be focus areas beyond military solutions. He said the AUPSC will not neglect conflict areas like Somalia, in favour of new crises that have arisen in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) or in Northern Mali.

“We’re helping the new government of Mali in parallel with the international community to achieve a peaceful nation,” said Lamamra adding that the AU, in addition to dealing with conventional terrorism, is tasked with ridding the continent of organized crime and Narco-terrorism.

The AU also said that it has proposed several priority areas when it comes to the continent. Priority areas included making the continent’s second largest country peaceful and achieve its potential, enhanced peace efforts, institutional building and enhancement of defense and peace security.

The summit also saw the adoption of the statutes of the Pan-African University, which became operational last year. Other decisions adopted were the appointment of one judge of the African Court on Human and People’s Rights, five members of the Peace and Security Council and eleven members of the Advisory Board on Corruption.

One of those chosen at the latter post was Ali Suleiman, Director General of the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (FEACC).

The five countries chosen for a seat at the Peace and Security Council were Equatorial Guinea, Uganda, Algeria, Mozambique and Nigeria for a three year term starting as of March 2013.