

Speech by President Paul Kagame at the Opening of the 10th Extraordinary Summit of the African Union

March 21, 2018

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Kigali for the Tenth Extra-Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union.

May I also extend a special welcome to our brother, His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa, attending his first Summit as President of the Republic of South Africa.

I thank the leaders of fellow Member States for once again according Rwanda the honour to serve as your host.

I also thank the Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, and the entire staff of the African Union Commission, for preparing this Summit with diligence and commitment.

Today's agenda is to adopt the Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, as well as the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, and the Kigali Declaration, which expresses our unity in moving our continent forward. Taken together, these are surely to be counted among the most consequential actions that this Assembly has ever taken.

I commend our brother, His Excellency President Mahamadou Issoufou, for so ably leading the Continental Free Trade Area process.

I wish to acknowledge all the leaders, past and present, involved in bringing us to this point. We are reaping the rewards of their foresight.

The Continental Free Trade Area is the culmination of a vision set forth nearly 40 years ago in the Lagos Plan of Action, adopted by Heads of State in 1980. That undertaking led directly to the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community in 1991.

We continue to be guided by the foundational principles and detailed implementation roadmap that were laid down in those instruments. Among the most important guidelines is the pre-eminent role of our Regional Economic Communities. They have been the model and the engine for Africa's economic integration and they will continue to be.

Trade agreements cover many complex details. Behind the scenes, Commission staff, ministers, and technical experts put in countless days and nights of hard work. This effort has paid off and we thank you.

What is at stake is the dignity and well-being of Africa's farmers, workers, and entrepreneurs, particularly women and youth.

The promise of free trade and free movement is prosperity for all Africans, because we are prioritising the production of value-added goods and services that are "Made in Africa".

The advantages we gain by creating one African market will also benefit our trading partners around the world, and that is a good thing.

At the same time, we will be in a better position to leverage our growing strength and unity to secure Africa's rightful interests in the international arena.

This is not just a signing ceremony. Today's deliberations are critically important as we chart the next steps on our journey towards the Africa we want.

Once again, Excellencies, I welcome you and wish you all a very productive Summit. Thank you very much for your kind attention.