

EAST AFRICAN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Kigali, 6 March 2017

Good afternoon, and I wish to start by welcoming you back to Rwanda.

Karibuni sana. Please feel at home.

Honourable Speaker, thank you for the invitation to address this special sitting of the East African Legislative Assembly.

Rwanda's commitment to the East African Community, ten years after we acceded to the treaty, is stronger than ever.

East African Community members have worked together to significantly deepen regional integration. Much of this progress was the result of political will, responding to the needs and aspirations of our citizens.

People move more freely than ever before and communication within the region has become more affordable and convenient. It is easier to trade and do business with each other and we are collaborating to expand energy and transportation infrastructure.

All this has generated a good deal of excitement among our citizens and in the markets as well. East Africa is increasingly perceived as a region on the move.

We have to continue to meet these high expectations. We therefore count on you, in the oversight role of our regional legislature, to help ensure we maintain momentum and stay on course.

The work before you in this sitting reflects issues of concern to all East Africans, such as gender equality, protecting children from abuse, and providing appropriate reproductive healthcare.

I also commend your work on the Polythene Materials Control Bill, among others, currently under consideration. A clean and healthy environment is a priority for all our countries. Prohibiting plastic bags is a policy that has worked well for us in Rwanda.

Collective action and harmonised policies will help us to manage the consequences of economic growth as we work to stimulate the manufacturing sector.

I am happy, as has been mentioned, that Rwanda has adopted Kiswahili as an official language, in line with one of the key resolutions of the East African Legislative Assembly.

This is a logical move which brings Rwandans closer to our brothers and sisters in East Africa. More and more Rwandans are using Kiswahili and the subject is being introduced in our schools.

I would like to take this opportunity to update you on the recently adopted decision to complete the institutional reform of the African Union and ensure that it is sustainably financed from Africa's own resources.

We urgently need an African Union that is fit-for-purpose. Our continent must also have a strong and unified voice that clearly communicates the aspirations and positions of Africa on the global stage.

The reforms agreed upon will bring us much closer to this goal if they are implemented without delay.

Of particular note for the EALA is the decision to direct more responsibility for the implementation of Africa's common development agenda to the Regional Economic Communities.

To that end, the Heads of State decided that the annual July summit of the African Union will be transformed into a coordination meeting with Regional Economic Communities.

This means that greater contributions will be needed from all of you as East Africa's legislators, both as strong advocates for the imperative of reform and as champions for closer cooperation between the East African Community and the African Union Commission.

However, whether at the continental or the regional level, our goals will not be attained if we get lost in counterproductive divisions and prioritise narrow interests over the common good, as we keep seeing in various contexts.

It is really about working together to advance everybody's interests. There are two parts of this to keep in mind.

First, when the good progress made internally by each country is aggregated, the benefits are even better for everybody in our region.

Second, there is no disadvantage from minding each other's business, which simply means taking our respective needs and interests seriously and indeed adopting them as common objectives.

This is because integration is not a zero-sum game. When we work together, we are all better off. When we work against each other, everyone is worse off and a loser.

So let's empower our institutions to do what they are supposed to do in support of our collective prosperity. The East African Legislative Assembly clearly has an important role to play.

Napenda kumalizia kwa kuwakaribisha tena Rwanda, na kuwatakia kila la heri katika majadiliano yenu wakati wote wa kikao hiki cha Bunge la Afrika Mashariki kinachoanza rasmi leo.

Asanteni sana. Nashukuru.