

STATEMENT

BY

THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION (AU)
AND PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE,
HIS EXCELLENCY COMRADE R.G. MUGABE,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL
EBOLA RECOVERY CONFERENCE,
THE UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS,
NEW YORK: 10TH JULY, 2015.

President of the General Assembly, Mr Sam Pahamba Kutesa,
Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki-Moon,
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone,
Chairperson and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Ms Helen Clark,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Comrades and Friends.

Let me, on behalf of the AU, the AU Commission, and on my own behalf, begin by thanking the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki-Moon and his cooperating partners for convening this important Conference to mobilise resources to support the post-Ebola recovery in our sister countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. It is indeed an honour for Zimbabwe, in its capacity as the Chair of the AU, to participate in this noble event.

Allow me, at the onset, to underscore the significance of the Conference, not only in terms of resource mobilisation to safeguard the gains recorded in the fight against the deadly scourge of Ebola, but also it, as a clarion call, to the international collective to up-scale its preparedness and capacity to handle and manage disasters, particularly health epidemics. The imperative to build capacity and preparedness in that regard is too visible to ignore.

Your Excellencies,

While we applaud the international response to Ebola, we, however, should remind ourselves that health epidemics bring with them far-reaching consequences on the economic, social and cultural structures of the affected societies. In that regard, it is important to recognise and emphasise the need to embrace inclusive and complementary Ebola-response mechanisms which should have realistic focus on capacity building to strengthening health delivery systems, improving access to safe water and sanitation, and reviving economic activities which have been disrupted by the outbreak. The need to foster strong and sustainable regional and international partnerships in that endeavour, need no over-elaboration.

Your Excellencies,

Let me take this opportunity to acknowledge and commend the African Union (AU) and the AU Commission (AUC) for their sterling leadership role in the fight against the Ebola scourge, principally through the African Union Support to Ebola Outbreak in West Africa (ASEOWA). Working through ASEOWA, the African Union has overseen the release of funds to the Special Emergency Fund for Drought and Famine in Africa to help the affected countries. It has also mobilised the private sector which has contributed up to US\$32, 600 000 to the Ebola Fund.

In addition to the above initiatives, and in the spirit of Africa taking a leadership role in addressing its own challenges, the African Union will convene an International Conference on Ebola in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea from 20-21, July 2015. We urge you all here present to participate at this critical meeting at the highest possible level.

While taking its leadership role in the Ebola response, the African Union has been gratified by both the scale and magnitude of international cooperation at the Global level. This inclusive purpose has enabled us to reach this milestone where new cases have declined significantly and both the ASEOWA and the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER), have begun to prepare for an eventual draw down.

Your Excellencies,

Even with this general positive outlook in our immediate past, let me sound an alarm bell and warn that we cannot afford to be complacent. We know the underlying issues that drove and exacerbated the outbreak. Those weaknesses still exist, and need to be comprehensively addressed, so that we guarantee and maintain the momentum we have built. Supporting the implementation of the recovery plans will give the three affected countries a head start as we all look forward to implementing a robust post 2015 development agenda.

The narratives we got from the Presidents of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, on the Ebola scourge, have left traumatic memories on the entire international community. We have heard of the 20 000 fatalities and cultural upheavals the epidemic has wrought, including economic haemorrhage of unprecedented proportions, resulting in diminished economic activity in critical sectors. It is against this background, that we welcome this meeting's focus on the transition from emergency interventions to recovery and building resilience.

We reiterate the African Union's call for debt cancellation for Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, as this will free up the countries' resources and allow them to focus on investing in recovery and in building resilience, to ensure that they can effectively address any potential resurgence of the virus. We also call for the increased social responsibility on the part of the private sector, particularly those companies engaged in the extraction of natural resources. As they benefit from their access to these natural resources, they must make investments that will contribute to building economic and social resilience in their host countries.

On this note, allow me to conclude by calling for maximum engagement by all UN Member States in supporting the implementation of the recovery plans drawn by the Governments of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. We must remember that, as long as the Ebola virus is not contained in West Africa, no part of our interconnected world is safe from an outbreak.

Your Excellencies,

We look forward to strengthening the partnership between the United Nations and the AU.

I thank you.

RGM/lmn