

Address of Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias at the Africa Day Celebration (26.05.2021)

Dear Commissioner, dear Ambassadors, distinguished speakers, dear guests,

It is with great pleasure that I am opening Africa Day celebrations here in Athens today. Let me welcome you all and thank you for your participation.

I hope that next year we will be able to host you again physically at the Foreign Ministry.

Please allow me, first, to congratulate the Ambassador of South Africa and the group of African Ambassadors in Athens, for putting together a high-level programme, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I would like to thank all speakers for their valuable contributions that will follow.

Let me, also, extend a warm welcome to Her Excellency, Ms. Amira Elfadil Mohammed Elfadil, Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, representing the great Organization we are honoring today, the African Union; an Organization with great achievements in establishing a prosperous and peaceful Africa; an organization, which is playing an increasingly important role in the Continent's security architecture.

In addition to African Union's achievements, one of the greatest endeavors of the Continent has been the creation of the African Continental Free Trade Area. This landmark development paves the way for Africa, with its 1.2 billion people, to become the world's largest common market, thus creating new opportunities for development and business across the continent.

Africa has the potential to be the Continent of opportunity in the twenty-first century.

Rapid population growth, rich cultural diversity, dynamic societies and economies are all reasons for ambition and optimism. At the same time, there are also challenges for Africa to overcome.

While African countries have been enjoying notable social and economic progress, there is strong potential to improve everyday life for their people and provide effective healthcare systems, education and job opportunities for Africa's youth.

Addressing these challenges is being further complicated by conflicts, state fragility in specific regions of the continent, and climate change, raising serious geopolitical and security risks.

Greece, which never had a colonial past in the region, has a long and valued relationship with African countries. By building on these longstanding relations, we are working towards further deepening our mutually beneficial partnerships. We are, therefore, aiming to strengthen our political, economic and cultural ties with African nations, bilaterally and at the international stage.

Our growing engagement in Africa is being also demonstrated by the opening recently of our new Embassy in Dakar which will cover the biggest part of the Sahel region.

Together with our other Embassies, the General Consulates, Consulates and Honorary Consulates in the Continent, Greece will continue working with our African partners to expand our relations on the ground.

In this vein, we are also working towards the elaboration of our first strategic priorities paper to guide our policies in the coming years for a strengthened partnership with Africa.

The theme of African Union this year emphasizes the role arts, culture and heritage can play as catalysts of socio-economic development and integration of the African continent.

Greece shares strong historic ties with many African nations, as well as a rich cultural legacy and valuable cross-cultural bonds.

Moreover, the Greek dynamic Diaspora in several African countries will continue to be a bridge of friendship and cooperation. Equally, African communities in Greece constitute a solid bridge of cooperation between Greece and the countries of their origin.

Today, Greece works with its African partners in a forward-looking and ambitious spirit. Africa is at Greece's and Europe's immediate neighborhood and the mutual prosperity and security of Europe and Africa are intertwined.

We are working with the Portuguese Presidency of the Council for a Summit that will establish a stronger, more strategic and result oriented partnership between Europe and Africa. A partnership that will reflect the interests of both sides and strengthen the ties between the two continents. A genuine partnership of equals, based on international law, focusing on people's needs, as well as adjusting to the needs of a post-Covid world.

I would like to conclude by assuring you, that Greece will always be an active partner of Africa. A partner that will continue working for the enhancement of our long and strong ties of friendship and cooperation.

Thank you.