

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA



**MINISTRY OF JUSTICE
P.O. BOX 160 KIGALI**

KEYNOTE SPEECH FOR

**THE SECOND SPECIALISED TECHNICAL COMMITTEE (STC) ON
MIGRATION, REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACE PERSONS OF THE
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

Kigali, 20-Oct-17

Honourable Ministers;

Heads of Delegation;

H.E. Mrs Minata Samate Cessouma, Commissioner for Political Affairs African Union Commission;

H.E. Mrs. Amira Elfadil Mohammed, Commissioner for Social Affairs, African Union Commission;

Chair of the PRC Sub-committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, Republic of Equatorial Guinea.

Outgoing Chair of the STC Bureau, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic;

Chair of the Ministerial Committee on Free Movement of Persons, Federal Republic of Nigeria;

Dear Experts;

Invited Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Let me start by welcoming you all to Rwanda. I hope your travels were safe and I also hope your entry into Rwanda was seamless. We are happy to have you with us and happier if you stay longer and perhaps establish a business here or advise a friend to come and do so.

On behalf of the Government of Rwanda, I take this opportunity to thank the African Union Commission (AUC) for having chosen Kigali to host the meeting of the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Migration, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. I equally thank Members of the STC for attending this meeting.

I also take this opportunity to thank the STC Experts from all Member States here present for the job well done, making the just concluded three day-experts' meeting a success. Allow me to equally extend, on behalf of the Government of Rwanda, our sincere appreciation to all Member states for entrusting Rwanda with chairing the STC on Migration, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons for the next two years.

We accept, with a deep sense of humility and responsibility, the confidence and trust you have bestowed on Rwanda. The Government of Rwanda fully understands the enormous responsibility that lies ahead, but pledges to relentlessly and closely work with all Member states and African Union Commission towards addressing collective challenges on African migration, refugees and IDPs.

Rwanda's tenure comes at a critical time when the Continent is confronted with the rise of irregular migration, reports of fellow Africans facing tremendous hardship including death attempting to cross to Europe. This is a situation that needs our attention; millions of Africans are looking to us, to address the challenge. Silence would not be a good option.

Additionally, and as observed by Mr. Akinwumi Adesina, the ADB President, Africa remains largely closed, with Africans still needing visas to travel to over half of the continent. It is worth recalling that current borders were largely inherited from colonization that balkanized the Continent in total disregard of Africans' interests. But it is equally worth noting that our recovered political independence comes with the responsibility of collectively providing solutions to the various challenges, bequeathed to us by our history and still being faced by our Continent.

As rightly observed by H.E. Paul KAGAME, the President of the Republic of Rwanda, I quote: *“divisions imposed on us by history, have left us relatively more isolated, both from each other and the world as a whole”*. End of quote. One inescapable fact is that statistics on refugees and IDPs in Africa are a clear indication that, apart from hindering Africa's integration, closing borders to our fellow Africans has not made our Continent safer.

This gathering represents, therefore, a historical opportunity for us, to collectively address some of the continental challenges, mostly arising from our shared history and to devise solutions to our common challenges.

Hon. Ministers;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

Despite the challenges, it is also encouraging that a new and positive story of Africa's integration is being written, if I may quote H.E. President KAGAME, again: *“Africa's story has been written by others; we need to own our problems and solutions and write our story”*. End of quote.

In line with the Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) of 1991 (which was signed and ratified by All African countries), the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA), the ongoing protocols on Free Movement of Persons and the Agenda 2063; a growing number of African countries have realised that facilitating the free movement of Africans within their mother continent is essential in our collective journey towards the Africa we want.

According to the 2017 Africa Visa Openness Report produced jointly by the African Development Bank, the African Union Commission and the World Economic Forum Global Agenda Council on Africa, African countries are on average becoming more open to each other whereby 21 of 55 African countries moved upwards in rank on the Index since 2015.

The report further indicates that: *“47 countries have improved or maintained their visa openness scores. 40% of countries in the top 20 most visa-open countries are in East Africa; 35% are in West Africa; 20% are in Southern Africa, and 5% are in North Africa. In the top 20 most visa-open countries, none are in Central Africa”*. However, according to the same report, *“Africa’s Upper Middle Income countries as a group have low visa openness scores. 8 out of 9 of Africa’s Upper Middle Income Countries have low visa openness scores”*, while *“Africa’s small, landlocked and island states are more open, promoting trade links with their neighbors”*.

Hon. Ministers,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

As remarked again by H.E. President Paul KAGAME, during the AfDB meeting held in Marrakech in May 2013: *“The move to issue visas to African nationals demonstrates that, it’s possible and it carries no dangers to anyone who does it ...). We have seen more*

people coming into Rwanda from across the continent and most of them are as good as we would have expected and if there is anyone involved in wrong doing then, the laws of the country will catch up with them.”

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen;

In Rwanda, we consider the free movement of persons as one of the basic rights of citizens that should be promoted, protected and not curtailed. Free movement of persons is equally regarded as one of the key strategies in achieving Pan African ideals.

In this respect, Rwanda has adopted an open visa policy for Africans where all Africans get a visa on arrival at any entry point. The gains are enormous and this policy has not created a major security challenge to Rwanda nor has the level of criminality increased in the country because Africans can get visas on arrival.

Furthermore, Rwanda is a Member of a group of countries that are using National Identity Cards as travel document; with Kenya and Uganda. Rwanda is a Member of The Great Lakes Economic Countries (CPGL) with Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi; where the population living in the border areas are allowed to visit each other using a free of charge travel document known as *jetons* in French (border passes) together with their Identity Cards. We have found all these harmless and not posing any worse challenge than their absence.

Hon. Ministers,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

If well managed, the gains from free movement of people are real and far outweigh the envisaged challenges. I therefore have great hope that Ministers, Heads of Delegation will iron out the remaining issues in the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment such that it can start to be implemented. This will facilitate the creation of a common identity as Africans – thus benefiting the common African people.

I understand this STC meeting, being held for the second time, shall also consider the AU Migration Policy Framework for Africa and its 10- year Plan of Action; pave the way for the implementation of the Protocol and consider the Common African Position on the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Allow me once again to thank the Experts for the work well done and recall that the task ahead of us is to iron out the few issues that were raised, consider and submit the outcome to the STC on Justice and legal affairs to fine tune the legal drafting ready to submit the draft Protocol to the Assembly in January 2018 for endorsement.

I look forward to positive outcome of our discussions.

It is now my honour and privilege to declare this Ministerial STC on Migration, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons officially open.

I thank you for your kind attention.

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