STATEMENT
BY

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AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

AT

Fourth Africa Business and Human Rights Forum

Venue: Lusaka, Zambia

Dates: 7-9 October 2025

Honourable Minister of Justice of the Republic of Zambia,

Distinguished Representatives of the United Nations and Development Partners,

Esteemed Delegates from AU Member States, National Human Rights Institutions, Civil Society, and the Private Sector,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All protocols observed.

Good morning!!

I bring you warms greetings from H.E. Amb. Bankole Adeoye, the Commissioner for political Affairs, Peace, and Security of the African Union who could not join you as presently engaging in the AU-EU High Level Dialogue on Human Rights in Bruxelles.

On his behalf I wish to thank you all for joining this Fourth Africa Business and Human Rights Forum, a continental platform translating Africa's collective vision of inclusive, sustainable, and rights-based development into action. I also would like to convey the appreciation of the African Union to the Government and People of Zambia for their hospitality and for hosting this Forum at such a decisive juncture for our continent.

I would like to commend UN OHCHR and UNDP regional for the successful collaboration that led to the well organization of this forum .

The African Union's approach to Business and Human Rights is not an imported framework; it is grounded firmly in **Africa's own normative foundation — the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights**. The Charter, adopted in 1981, provides a robust legal and moral compass for responsible and equitable business conduct across the continent.

Our collective work is squarely anchored in specific provisions of the Charter that define Africa's human rights obligations and their intersection with economic life:

- **Article 21** asserts the **right of peoples to freely dispose of their wealth and natural resources**, underscoring that Africa's resources must serve the interests of its citizens and communities, not external exploitation.
- **Article 22** enshrines the **right to development**, affirming that economic progress must be human-centered, equitable, and participatory.

- **Article 24** recognizes the **right to a general satisfactory environment**, ensuring that corporate and industrial activities respect ecological balance and sustainability.
- **Article 26** imposes a **duty on States to guarantee the rights and freedoms** enshrined in the Charter, including through the establishment of competent institutions and frameworks for accountability.
- **Article 62** requires **periodic State reporting**, through which Member States must demonstrate their progress in implementing human rights obligations—including those related to business conduct, environmental protection, and social justice.

These articles affirm that economic growth and investment must advance, not erode, human dignity. This vision is further articulated in the AU Human and Peoples' Rights Decade Action Plan and the **African Union's Agenda 2063**, particularly **Aspiration 3** ("An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law") and **Aspiration 1** ("A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development").

Moreover, the **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)** Agreement provides a complementary economic framework that integrates sustainability and human rights principles into Africa's trade and investment architecture. By embedding responsible business conduct (RBC) and due diligence standards within the AfCFTA, the African Union ensures that continental economic integration becomes a **vehicle for equity, fairness, and shared prosperity**.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Africa has made significant normative and institutional strides over the past decade. The **Draft AU Policy on Business and Human Rights**, currently undergoing continental consultations, embody our shared ambition to contextualize the **UN Guiding Principles** within the African Charter and Agenda 2063. These instruments, together with the **Joint AU–UN Human Rights Framework** signed in November 2023, create a coherent architecture linking **human rights norms**, **economic governance**, and **corporate accountability**.

Yet, as this year's theme reminds us, *commitment alone is not enough*. We must accelerate the transition from high-level declarations to tangible results that ensure **effective remedies, meaningful reparations, and responsible business practices** that transform the daily realities of Africa's communities, workers, and rights-holders.

Indeed, the 2025 **African Union Theme of the Year "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations"** calls on all of us to reimagine justice beyond

its historical dimensions. It invites us to ensure that **reparations for business-related harms** are integrated into our modern framework of accountability. Remedy and reparations are not acts of goodwill; they are obligations grounded in human rights law and essential for restoring trust between people, business, and the State.

This Forum thus represents more than a policy dialogue; it is a collective step toward redefining how business can contribute to Africa's social contract, one rooted in justice, equity, and accountability.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The African Union Commission, through the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security, stands ready to deepen its partnership with Member States, National Human Rights Institutions, civil society, the private sector, and development partners to:

- Strengthen **legislative and policy frameworks** to ensure access to effective remedy and reparations;
- Institutionalize **human rights due diligence** within national and regional business environments;
- Integrate **responsible business conduct** across AfCFTA trade and investment frameworks;
- Enhance **State and non-State grievance mechanisms**, including NHRIs, ombuds institutions, and corporate operational grievance systems;
- And finally, develop **monitoring and reporting mechanisms** aligned with Article 62 of the Charter to track progress and accountability at the continental level.

Africa's development journey must remain human-centered, rights-based, and environmentally sustainable. The path we choose today will determine whether our economies empower or exploit, include or exclude, repair or replicate harm. The African Union envisions a future where **business in Africa is synonymous with human dignity, transparency, and justice** — a future where economic growth uplifts every community and honours every right.

Let us therefore use this Forum not merely to exchange ideas, but to **commit to measurable action**, to advance a generation of businesses that respect human rights, contribute to peace and stability, and drive the Africa We Want.

I thank you.