



**STATEMENTS AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE
OACPS AFRICA-EU PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**



**OPENING REMARKS DELIVERED BY HON. JABULANI MABUZA, SPEAKER OF
THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, KINGDOM OF ESWATINI
1ST AFRICA - EU PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY AT THE EZULWINI PALAZZO
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE
12 MAY 2026**

Your Royal Highness (To Be Confirmed), Representative of His Majesty King Mswati III, Distinguished Co-Presidents of this Assembly, Honourable Ministers, Secretary General, Honourable Members of Parliament from the OACPS Africa Region Member States and from the European Union, Your Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic Missions and Representatives of International Organisations, Distinguished Invited Guests, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

It is my singular honour, as Speaker of the House of Assembly of the Kingdom of Eswatini, and that of my colleague Senate President, to welcome you to the Kingdom. To this soil, and to this moment.

We do not use the word “historic” lightly in parliamentary life. We have learned, as legislators, that the word is often borrowed before it is earned. But I say to you today, without hesitation, that what we inaugurate here is historic, not because we have gathered in great numbers, not because the flags of many nations are displayed in this building, but because of what this Assembly represents in the evolving relationship between Africa and Europe within the framework of the OACPS partnership.

For decades, the framework governing relations between African states and Europe was largely defined through agreements negotiated at executive level. From Lomé to Cotonou, those agreements did important work. But they were often negotiated far from the everyday realities of the citizens whose lives they would ultimately affect. Under the Samoa Agreement, a more modern and balanced partnership continues to emerge.

And today, through this Africa -EU Parliamentary Assembly, parliamentarians themselves assume a more central role in shaping that relationship.

This Assembly is therefore not merely procedural. It is symbolic of a broader evolution in the partnership between Africa and Europe, one grounded increasingly in dialogue between peoples, institutions, and elected representatives.

And I am proud that this inaugural gathering is taking place here in the Kingdom of Eswatini.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ASSEMBLY VENUE

Your Royal Highness, Distinguished Guests,

Allow me to speak briefly, not merely about this building, but about the place in which we gather today, because in Eswatini, places carry meaning.

We are gathered in Ezulwini, a name which, in English, means Heaven.

It is a valley of extraordinary beauty and tranquility, embraced by mountains, softened by flowing rivers, and defined by a calmness that has for generations made it a place of reflection, gathering, and national significance. Those who visit Ezulwini quickly understand why Emaswati speak of it with such affection and pride. It is not simply a geographic location. It is a spiritual and symbolic space within the life of our nation. And perhaps it is fitting that this Assembly convenes here.

For Ezulwini is already etched into the political and diplomatic history of our continent. It was here that Africa formulated and adopted what became known as the Ezulwini Consensus, a defining common African position on the reform of the United Nations Security Council, anchored on the principle that Africa must speak for herself in matters concerning her future and her place in the international system.

That historic consensus was born from dialogue, mutual respect, patient listening, and a shared belief that even diverse nations can find common purpose when guided by principle and sincerity.

It is our hope that the same spirit shall guide the deliberations of this Assembly.

The calmness of Ezulwini reflects something about the character of Emaswati themselves. We are a peaceful people. A people who value dialogue over discord, understanding over confrontation, and partnership over division. Our culture teaches us that important matters are best resolved not through shouting across divides, but through sitting together, listening to one another, and searching honestly for common ground. That is the atmosphere we hope you will experience during your stay in our Kingdom. That is the spirit in which this Assembly has been convened.

And it is within this valley, this “Place of Heaven,” that we welcome parliamentarians from Africa and Europe to engage in conversations that we hope will strengthen trust, deepen partnership, and shape a more balanced and humane international order.
Distinguished Guests,

You are seated in the Ezulwini Palazzo International Convention Centre, itself a reflection of Eswatini’s determination to position itself as a convenor of meaningful dialogue and international engagement.

This is not merely a conference facility. It is a statement of confidence in our future and in our ability, as a small but principled nation, to contribute meaningfully to continental and global conversations.

His Majesty King Mswati III, who this year marks forty years on the throne of the Kingdom of Eswatini, understood that nations which wish to participate meaningfully in shaping the future must invest not only in roads and buildings, but also in spaces where ideas meet, partnerships are forged, and understanding is cultivated.

The ICC is therefore part of that vision.

It is Eswatini saying to Africa and to the world:

“We are open. We are ready. Let us engage. Let us build together.”

And there is something profoundly symbolic about the fact that the inaugural Africa-EU Parliamentary Assembly is taking place here, in Ezulwini, a place associated both with peace and with one of Africa’s most important diplomatic consensus positions.

May that symbolism not be lost on us.

On behalf of the People and Parliament of Eswatini, I extend our deepest gratitude to His Majesty for his vision, for the ICC, for this Kingdom’s place in the continental conversation, and for forty years of dedication to Eswatini’s dignity and progress.

PURPOSE OF CONVENING THE ASSEMBLY

Now, to the business of why parliaments matter in this conversation. I think we owe ourselves that argument.

Heads of State sign agreements. Ministers negotiate frameworks. Technical experts draft the clauses and then those agreements come to us, to Parliament, often late, sometimes fait accompli, and we are asked to give them democratic clothing.

That is not partnership. That is ratification theatre.

What this Assembly offers is something different, something more honest and more durable.

Parliaments are the institutions closest to citizens. We do not govern from summits. We govern from constituencies, from the rural communities of Eswatini’s four regions, from the townships, from the villages, from the cities and farming towns of Europe.

We hear directly what trade policy feels like when it reaches a small business owner.

We understand from our own people what climate agreements mean when the rains fail or the floods come.

We know the human texture of the policies that executives negotiate in the abstract.

This Parliamentary Assembly must therefore be more than a forum for endorsement.

It must be a forum for initiation, where parliamentarians from African Member States and from the European Union bring the lived experience of their constituents into the shaping of our shared agenda before decisions are made, not after.

We must have meaningful input into the evolving Africa-EU partnership architecture under the Samoa Agreement.

We must be genuine partners in shaping trade, investment, development, governance, and people-centred cooperation between our regions.

We must hold our respective executives accountable, not adversarially, but as the democratic counterweight that keeps agreements honest and implementation real. That is the connective tissue parliaments provide.

Between citizens and the big agreements.
Between aspiration and accountability.
Between a signed document and a changed life.
Eswatini is a small Kingdom. We know this.

We are landlocked, we are not populous, and we do not come to this Assembly with the weight of a continental giant.

But we come with something that has always served small nations well in multilateral spaces, clarity of principle and consistency of voice.

We believe in the sovereign equality of all Member States.

We believe that the strength of this partnership lies not in the dominance of any one party, but in the genuine respect each brings to the table.

We believe, and I believe personally, that the quality of what we build here over the coming days will be measured not by the eloquence of our speeches, but by the seriousness of our intent.

Eswatini is committed to that seriousness.

This Assembly has our full support, as host, as participant, and as a Parliament that understands, from its own experience, the value of institutions that work.

CALL TO ACTION

To the Honourable Members from across the African region of the OACPS, welcome.

You carry with you the mandates of millions of citizens across our continent whose futures will be shaped by the quality of the partnerships we build and the decisions we take. Honour that responsibility.

To our colleagues from the European Parliament, welcome to Eswatini. We are glad you are here, not as visitors to a distant partner, but as fellow legislators grappling with the same fundamental challenge:

How do we build together a world that is more just, more prosperous, and more stable than the one we inherited?

To all invited guests, representatives of civil society, international organisations, and the diplomatic community, your presence enriches this gathering, and we welcome you warmly.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Forty years ago, a young King assumed the throne of this Kingdom and began the long work of building a nation, preserving its identity, safeguarding its sovereignty, and positioning it confidently within the community of nations.

Today, in a convention centre that stands as part of that legacy, parliamentarians from across Africa and the European Union gather for the first time in this format to begin a different, but equally important, long work.

The work of building trust between regions.

The work of strengthening understanding between peoples.

The work of ensuring that Africa-Europe cooperation is rooted not in dependency, but in dignity, mutual respect, and shared prosperity.

And perhaps it is fitting that this work begins here in Ezulwini, a place whose very name speaks of peace, reflection, and higher purpose.

May future generations look back on what was begun here in Ezulwini and say that, once again, this valley became the birthplace not merely of consensus, but of genuine partnership between peoples and nations.

Let us therefore be worthy of this moment.

Let us be worthy of the people who sent us here.

And let us leave the Kingdom of Eswatini with more than memories of a fine gathering.

Let us leave with the foundations of something enduring, something meaningful, something that advances the lives of the citizens we represent.

I declare this First Africa- EU Parliamentary Assembly open.

Ngiyabonga.

Thank you.

KINGDOM OF ESWATINI



SPEECH

BY

**HIS MAJESTY KING MSWATI III, DURING THE
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE FIRST AFRICA-
EU PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY HELD AT
EZULWINI PALAZZO.**

**12TH MAY 2026
KING'S OFFICE**

YOUR EXCELLENCIES,
HONOURABLE SPEAKERS AND MEMBERS OF
PARLIAMENT,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE AFRICAN UNION, THE
EUROPEAN UNION AND THE OACPS,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

**SIYANIVUSELA NONKHE BEKUNENE LAPHA
EZULWINI PALAZZO.**

PREAMBLE

I HAVE BEEN COMMANDED BY HIS MAJESTY KING MSWATI III, INGWENYAMA OF THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI, TO REPRESENT HIM ON THIS OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE FIRST AFRICA–EU PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY HERE AT EZULWINI, A PLACE FULL OF HISTORY AND HERITAGE OF OUR KINGDOM. IT IS MY HONOUR AND PRIVILEGE TO READ HIS MAJESTY'S SPEECH ACCORDINGLY.

INTRODUCTION

FROM THE ONSET, LET ME TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO WELCOME YOU ALL TO THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI - FOR THIS OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 1ST AFRICA EU-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY.

I AM SURE YOU HAVE ALREADY EXPERIENCED THE WARMTH AND LOVE OF OUR PEOPLE. THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI IS A COUNTRY THAT HAS SET ITSELF GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS THAT SEEKS TO PROPEL IT TO BE AT PAR WITH DEVELOPED NATIONS OF THE WORLD.

THIS OF ESWATINI IS PRIVILEGED TO HOST THIS HISTORIC GATHERING, WHICH BRINGS TOGETHER PARLIAMENTARIANS, POLICYMAKERS AND STRATEGIC PARTNERS FROM AFRICA AND EUROPE IN THE SPIRIT OF COOPERATION, DIALOGUE AND SHARED DEVELOPMENT.

ALLOW ME TO EXPRESS SINCERE APPRECIATION TO THE OACPS SECRETARIAT, THE EUROPEAN UNION, AND

ALL PARTICIPATING DELEGATIONS FOR THE CONFIDENCE PLACED IN THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI IN HOSTING THIS IMPORTANT ASSEMBLY. YOUR PRESENCE HERE REFLECTS THE ENDURING STRENGTH OF THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN AFRICA AND EUROPE AND OUR COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT TO MULTILATERAL ENGAGEMENT.

FIRST INTERNATIONAL MEETING AT EZULWINI PALAZZO

THIS OCCASION IS PARTICULARLY SIGNIFICANT FOR OUR COUNTRY BECAUSE IT MARKS THE FIRST MAJOR INTERNATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY GATHERING TO BE HOSTED AT THE EZULWINI PALAZZO. THIS MILESTONE REFLECTS ESWATINI'S CONTINUING COMMITMENT TO INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT, MODERN INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT, AND CONSTRUCTIVE DIPLOMACY.

WE ARE PROUD THAT THIS FACILITY BEGINS ITS JOURNEY BY HOSTING A FORUM DEDICATED TO

PARTNERSHIP, PEACE, DEMOCRATIC DIALOGUE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN AFRICA AND EUROPE. IT IS OUR HOPE THAT THIS IMPRESSIVE FACILITY WILL CONTINUE TO SERVE AS A PLATFORM FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION, INVESTMENT PROMOTION, CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING.

PROMOTION OF PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY IS KEY

EXCELLENCIES,
THE CONVENING OF THIS INAUGURAL AFRICA-EU PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY REPRESENTS AN IMPORTANT CHAPTER IN PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY BETWEEN OUR TWO REGIONS.

PARLIAMENTARIANS PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT.

IT FURTHER ENSURES THAT INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS RESPOND MEANINGFULLY TO THE ASPIRATIONS OF OUR PEOPLE.

WE ARE ENCOURAGED THAT THE PROGRAMME OF THIS ASSEMBLY ADDRESSES ISSUES OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE TO BOTH AFRICA AND EUROPE, INCLUDING:

- PEACE AND SECURITY;
- YOUTH MOBILITY AND EDUCATION;
- WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT;
- CRITICAL MINERALS PARTNERSHIPS;
- AND THE FUTURE OF MULTILATERALISM.

THE INCLUSION OF THE YOUTH FORUM, WOMEN'S FORUM AND BUSINESS FORUM ALONGSIDE THE PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS DEMONSTRATES A COMMENDABLE PEOPLE-CENTRED AND INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO COOPERATION.

ADDRESSING GLOBAL CHALLENGES

THE ASSEMBLY PROGRAMME FURTHER REFLECTS THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF PARLIAMENTARY

COOPERATION IN ADDRESSING CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL CHALLENGES. DISCUSSIONS SCHEDULED DURING THIS SESSION INCLUDE REGIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY COOPERATION, YOUTH EDUCATION AND MOBILITY, WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN AGRICULTURE VALUE CHAINS, CRITICAL MINERALS PARTNERSHIPS, AND REFORMS OF MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS.

AS WE MEET HERE TODAY, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY CONTINUES TO CONFRONT SIGNIFICANT AND INTERCONNECTED CHALLENGES, INCLUDING CLIMATE CHANGE, FOOD INSECURITY, GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS, DEBT PRESSURES AND RAPID TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION. THESE REALITIES REQUIRE STRENGTHENED INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY, PRACTICAL COOPERATION AND RENEWED COMMITMENT TO EFFECTIVE MULTILATERALISM.

ESWATINI SUPPORTS SAMOA AGREEMENT

ESWATINI REMAINS SUPPORTIVE OF THE SAMOA AGREEMENT AS THE NEW FRAMEWORK GOVERNING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE OACPS AND THE EUROPEAN

UNION. WE BELIEVE THIS AGREEMENT PROVIDES AN IMPORTANT PLATFORM FOR ADVANCING COOPERATION IN TRADE AND INVESTMENT, GOVERNANCE, CLIMATE RESILIENCE, EDUCATION, DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH.

AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES REMAIN CLEAR. OUR PARTNERSHIPS MUST SUPPORT INDUSTRIALISATION, INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT, VALUE ADDITION, FOOD SECURITY, YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION. WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT AFRICA'S NATURAL RESOURCES, INCLUDING CRITICAL MINERALS, MUST CONTRIBUTE MEANINGFULLY TO INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE PROSPERITY FOR AFRICAN PEOPLE.

EQUALLY IMPORTANT IS INVESTMENT IN OUR YOUTH THROUGH EDUCATION, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION. YOUNG PEOPLE AND

WOMEN REMAIN CENTRAL TO AFRICA'S ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND LONG-TERM PROSPERITY.

KINGDOM OF ESWATINI IS COMMITTED TO DIALOGUE

THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI REMAINS COMMITTED TO PEACE, DIALOGUE AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION. WE THEREFORE WELCOME THE ASSEMBLY'S FOCUS ON STRENGTHENING MULTILATERALISM AND ENSURING THAT AFRICA'S VOICE CONTINUES TO BE AMPLIFIED WITHIN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS AND INTERNATIONAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES.

CONCLUSION

IT IS OUR SINCERE HOPE THAT THE DELIBERATIONS OF THIS ASSEMBLY WILL DEEPEN COOPERATION BETWEEN AFRICA AND EUROPE AND CONTRIBUTE TO

PRACTICAL AND LASTING SOLUTIONS TO OUR SHARED GLOBAL CHALLENGES.

OUR PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT REGIONS ARE FOLLOWING THIS ASSEMBLY WITH KEEN INTEREST BECAUSE, THEY ARE CONFIDENT IT WILL COME OUT WITH A CLEAR DIRECTION FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR POPULACE OF INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT. LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND.

I WISH YOU PRODUCTIVE DELIBERATIONS AND A SUCCESSFUL PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY.

I THANK YOU. MAY THE ALMIGHTY GOD BLESS US ALL!



AFRICA-EU PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
ASSEMBLÉE PARLEMENTAIRE AFRIQUE-UE

Plenary session

OPENING REMARKS

Hilde Vautmans

Co-Chair European Parliament

Ezulwini, Kingdom of Eswatini

12 May 2026

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guest Speakers,
Parliamentarians from Europe and Africa,
The people of Eswatini,

It is both a privilege and a profound honour to address this Assembly at a moment that calls not only for cooperation, but for vision, courage, and renewed solidarity between Africa and Europe.

We gather here under the spirit of the Samoa Agreement, but also under something greater: the belief that nations, peoples, and continents are stronger when they walk forward together.

This Assembly remains one of the most powerful expressions of the parliamentary voice connecting our two continents. It is not merely a forum for dialogue, it is a bridge between peoples, generations, and shared destinies.

And while many international partnerships have weakened or disappeared in recent decades, the Africa–EU partnership has endured, evolved, and continued to stand firm. From Cotonou to Samoa, ours has remained a partnership capable of adaptation, resilience, and hope.

At a time when international uncertainty is growing and the foundations of multilateral cooperation are increasingly tested, our responsibility becomes even greater.

This is not a moment for hesitation.
It is a moment for leadership.

A leadership with the courage to act together when division appears easier.

A leadership with the ambition to shape the future rather than simply react to events.

A leadership capable of defending cooperation, dignity, stability, and opportunity in an increasingly fragmented world.

Because our futures are inseparable.

We are neighbours across a shared sea and a shared history. And neighbours who choose trust over distance become stronger than simple partners, they become anchors of stability for one another.

A good neighbour does not wait for the storm to arrive before reinforcing the foundations of the house. A good neighbour builds together, protects together, and grows together.

That is the true value of the Africa–EU alliance.

We need one another, not out of weakness, but because our peoples aspire to the same fundamental hopes: security, opportunity, dignity, and a better future for our children.

Together, we must manage migration with humanity and responsibility.
Together, we must confront inequality and poverty.

Together, we must ensure that global justice is not reserved for the powerful alone.

Our citizens expect more from us than declarations. They expect leadership that delivers impact.

A leadership capable of creating stronger value chains between our continents.

A leadership capable of investing in green economies and energy independence.

A leadership capable of unlocking the extraordinary potential of Africa's youth and women.

Across Africa, from Kenya to Nigeria, and beyond, a new digital generation is rising, innovative, entrepreneurial, connected to the world, and determined to shape its own future.

We must have the courage and the ambition to invest in that future.

Because the next generation will not inherit the world we grew up in. They will build new economies, new technologies, and new forms of cooperation that transcend borders and redefine opportunity.

And our responsibility, as parliamentarians, is to ensure they inherit not division, but possibility.

That is why the discussions of this Assembly matter.

The crises affecting the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Sudan, and the Sahel remind us that instability in one region ultimately touches us all. Fragmented responses are no longer enough. The moment calls for coordination, unity of purpose, and genuine multilateral action.

But let us also remember this: our partnership cannot be defined only by the crises we face. It must also be defined by the future we choose to create together.

A future where cooperation between Africa and Europe becomes a model of balanced partnership in the world.

A future where development is measured not only in growth, but in human dignity.

A future where no young person feels forced to abandon hope.

In the coming days, the voices of women and young people will not be secondary to our work, they will be central to it. No society can prosper while excluding the majority of its talent, creativity, and strength.

Excellencies,

The choices before us are too important to postpone and too consequential to make alone. If Africa and Europe do not shape these decisions together, others will shape them for us — and in doing so, limit the extraordinary potential that our proximity, our partnership, and our shared interests can unlock.

We will not be remembered for the number of meetings we held, but for the courage of the decisions we took when leadership was most needed.

History will remember whether, in a moment of uncertainty, neighbours chose to retreat behind their borders — or chose instead to build a stronger common future.

Nelson Mandela reminded us that:
"What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others."

And Robert Schuman, one of the founding fathers of Europe, warned us that:
"Peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it."

Today, those creative efforts must be ours.

Let this Assembly send a clear message:
that Africa and Europe still believe in partnership,
still believe in dialogue,
and still believe that cooperation between neighbours can shape a more peaceful, just, and prosperous world.

The future of our continents depends on the courage of the decisions we take together today.

Let us move forward together, with confidence, ambition, courage, and hope.



**ALLOCUTION DE L'HONORABLE DAVID HOUINSA
COPRÉSIDENT DU GROUPE PARLEMENTAIRE
DE LA RÉGION AFRIQUE DE L'OEACP
LORS DE LA CÉRÉMONIE D'OUVERTURE OFFICIELLE**

MARDI 12 MAI 2026

VALLEE D'EZULWINI – ROYAUME D'ESWATINI

Le représentant de Sa Majesté le Roi Mswati III,

Mesdames et Messieurs les députés,

Secrétaire général de l'OEACP,

Chers invités,

Mesdames et Messieurs,

C'est pour moi un honneur et un privilège de prendre la parole lors de cette session d'ouverture historique de la 1re Assemblée parlementaire Afrique-UE, instituée par l'Accord de Samoa.

Permettez-moi tout d'abord d'exprimer notre sincère gratitude à Sa Majesté le roi Mswati III, au gouvernement ainsi qu'au peuple du Royaume d'Eswatini pour leur chaleureuse hospitalité et l'excellente organisation dont ont bénéficié toutes les délégations réunies ici, dans la magnifique vallée d'Ezulwini.

Je souhaite également, Votre Majesté, au nom de l'Assemblée parlementaire Afrique de l'OEACP, vous adresser nos sincères félicitations à l'occasion du 40e anniversaire de votre règne. Au cours des quatre dernières décennies, votre leadership a assuré la stabilité, la continuité et le développement du Royaume d'Eswatini et de son peuple.

Nous tenons en outre à saluer et à exprimer notre profonde gratitude à Sa Majesté pour le succès des efforts de mobilisation des ressources entrepris en faveur de l'Organisation des États d'Afrique, des Caraïbes et du Pacifique lors du 11e Sommet de l'OEACP qui s'est tenu à Malabo, en Guinée équatoriale, du 27 au 29 mars 2026. Le leadership visionnaire de Sa Majesté, son engagement indéfectible en faveur du renforcement de l'Organisation et son dévouement constant à la promotion de la solidarité et de la coopération entre les États membres sont non seulement profondément appréciés, mais constituent également une source d'inspiration importante pour l'orientation future et le renouveau de l'OEACP.

Cette journée marque une étape importante dans l'évolution des relations entre l'Afrique et l'Union européenne. Pour la première fois, des parlementaires de nos deux régions se réunissent dans ce nouveau cadre institutionnel établi en vertu de l'Accord de Samoa, avec la responsabilité commune de façonner un partenariat plus équilibré, tourné vers l'avenir et stratégique.

Cette Assemblée est plus qu'un simple rassemblement parlementaire. Elle est l'une des premières institutions conjointes clés établies en vertu de l'Accord de Samoa et assume donc une responsabilité politique et institutionnelle considérable.

À cet égard, il est important de reconnaître qu'un partenariat OEACP Afrique-UE solide et efficace ne peut être maintenu que grâce à une OEACP forte, dynamique et réactive. L'Organisation reste le cadre politique et institutionnel plus large qui rassemble nos régions, promeut la solidarité entre les États membres et constitue le fondement sur lequel ce partenariat est bâti. Il est donc essentiel que nous continuions à renforcer l'OEACP en tant qu'institution moderne, pertinente et orientée vers l'action, capable de répondre aux défis mondiaux contemporains et de faire progresser les intérêts collectifs de ses membres. Les discussions que nous menons ici à Eswatini contribueront à définir le ton, l'orientation et l'ambition du futur engagement Afrique-UE, fondé sur le respect mutuel, la responsabilité partagée, la solidarité et les intérêts communs.

Honorables députés,

Mesdames et Messieurs

Le monde qui nous entoure connaît une profonde transformation. Les tensions géopolitiques, les conflits armés, l'incertitude économique, le changement climatique, l'insécurité alimentaire, les bouleversements technologiques et les inégalités croissantes continuent d'exercer une pression sur nos sociétés et nos institutions. Dans le même temps, le multilatéralisme lui-même est soumis à des tensions croissantes.

Dans ce contexte, la coopération entre l'Afrique et l'Europe n'est pas une question de choix, mais une nécessité stratégique.

L'Afrique se trouve aujourd'hui à un moment crucial de son parcours de développement. Le continent possède un immense potentiel humain et naturel, une population jeune en pleine croissance, une innovation numérique en expansion et d'importantes opportunités de transformation industrielle. Pourtant, nos citoyens attendent également des progrès concrets en matière de paix et de sécurité, d'emploi, de gouvernance, d'infrastructures, d'éducation, de mobilité et de développement durable.

Il est donc important que l'engagement Afrique-UE évolue au-delà des approches traditionnelles et s'adapte davantage aux réalités contemporaines et aux aspirations de nos peuples, et nous avons un rôle particulièrement important à jouer dans ce processus.

En tant que représentants de nos citoyens, nous sommes particulièrement bien placés pour concilier les perspectives régionales et politiques, renforcer la responsabilité démocratique et veiller à ce que notre partenariat reste centré sur les personnes. Grâce à la diplomatie parlementaire, à la coopération législative et au dialogue politique, nous pouvons contribuer à instaurer la confiance, à promouvoir des priorités communes et à soutenir la mise en œuvre de nos engagements. Cette Assemblée nous offre également l'occasion de renforcer la coopération dans des domaines d'importance stratégique sur lesquels nous allons délibérer.

En matière de paix et de sécurité, nos régions continuent de faire face à des menaces transnationales, notamment le terrorisme, l'extrémisme violent, les changements anticonstitutionnels de gouvernement, la criminalité organisée, les cybermenaces et l'insécurité maritime. Une coopération renforcée entre les organisations régionales, les parlements et les partenaires internationaux reste essentielle.

En matière de migration et de mobilité, nous devons adopter des approches équilibrées qui s'attaquent aux causes profondes tout en développant des voies sûres, ordonnées et régulières pour la mobilité, l'éducation, les compétences et les opportunités. La diaspora africaine, estimée à près de 160 millions de personnes dans le monde, a contribué à hauteur de plus de 95 milliards de dollars américains en transferts de fonds en 2024, contre environ 90 milliards en 2023, ce qui reflète la contribution croissante de la migration au développement, à la résilience et aux revenus des ménages à travers le continent. Dans la seule Afrique subsaharienne, les flux de transferts de fonds sont passés d'environ 55 milliards de dollars en 2023 à environ 56 milliards de dollars en 2024. Dans le même temps, les conflits, les chocs climatiques et les pressions économiques continuent d'entraîner des déplacements de population et des migrations irrégulières, soulignant la nécessité d'une gouvernance des migrations globale, équilibrée et centrée sur les personnes, qui élargisse les opportunités tout en s'attaquant aux causes profondes des migrations forcées.

En matière de transformation économique, nous devons veiller à ce que les partenariats sur les matières premières essentielles, la transition énergétique et le développement numérique favorisent la création de valeur ajoutée, l'industrialisation, le transfert de technologies et la création d'emplois en Afrique.

En matière de jeunesse et de développement humain, nous devons placer les jeunes au centre de notre coopération en investissant dans l'éducation, les compétences, l'entrepreneuriat et l'innovation.

En matière de multilatéralisme et de réforme des Nations unies, la voix et la représentation de l'Afrique dans la gouvernance mondiale doivent être renforcées afin de refléter les réalités actuelles et de consolider la légitimité du système international.

Les enjeux qui se présentent à nous sont interdépendants et exigent un leadership collectif, une compréhension mutuelle et un engagement politique soutenu. Le succès de notre partenariat dépendra en fin de compte non seulement de la force de nos institutions, mais aussi de notre capacité à traduire le dialogue en coopération concrète et en résultats tangibles pour nos peuples.

Honorables députés,

Mesdames et messieurs,

L'Accord de Samoa nous offre un cadre solide pour notre engagement, mais les accords seuls ne suffisent pas. Leur succès dépendra de leur mise en œuvre, de la volonté politique et d'un engagement soutenu.

À cet égard, nous devons veiller à ce que cette Assemblée parlementaire devienne une institution dynamique, efficace et adaptée à sa mission, capable de maintenir un dialogue continu, de renforcer la coordination entre nos circonscriptions et de produire des résultats concrets qui répondent aux attentes de nos peuples.

La responsabilité qui nous incombe est donc considérable. Nous devons travailler ensemble non seulement en tant qu'institutions, mais aussi en tant que partenaires engagés en faveur d'un avenir commun fondé sur la paix, la dignité, la prospérité et le développement durable.

Alors que nous entamons nos délibérations, faisons-le dans un esprit d'ouverture, de coopération et de respect mutuel. Tirons parti de cette Assemblée pour renforcer la compréhension, forger un consensus au sein de l'OEACP et proposer des solutions concrètes aux défis communs auxquels nos régions sont confrontées.

Je reste convaincu que les bases que nous posons ici à Eswatini, dans le cadre de l'OEACP, contribueront de manière significative à un partenariat Afrique-UE plus solide, plus stratégique et plus tourné vers l'avenir dans les années à venir.

Je vous remercie de votre aimable attention.



SPECIAL ADDRESS

VIDEO MESSAGE BY H.E. Ms Kaja Kallas, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice President of the European Commission

Dear Prime Minister Dlamini,

Honourable Members of the Africa – EU Parliamentary Assembly,

Dear Excellencies,

Earlier in my career, like you I was a member of parliament – in Estonia’s Riigikogu and in the European Parliament. So I have a special bond with parliamentarians.

Speaking from my current post, I am glad to see that parliamentary diplomacy is growing stronger. In the current geopolitical context, whether government to government, parliament to parliament or people to people, we need more diplomacy not less.

The European Union is already the main partner for African countries in many areas:

- We are the top trading partner and investor.
- And as the leading partner on peace and security, our work supports African-led missions, helps tackle the root causes of instability including terrorism and climate change, and strengthens maritime security.

But our shared ambition goes way beyond this. That was the big takeaway from last year's summit between the European Union and African Union.

- More EU investment via Global Gateway to create jobs and local value;
- More trade within African countries and between our continents;
- And scaled-up work on clean energy and technology, to name just a few areas.

Closer cooperation will help us build a safer and more prosperous future for our people.

This in turn requires an understanding of what citizens on both sides need.

For example, although it is the cradle of civilization, the African continent is far more youthful than Europe is today.

That is why we invest heavily in young African talent and youth exchanges through Erasmus+ and the Youth Mobility for Africa initiative. And I welcome the initiative to hold a dedicated Youth Forum alongside your meeting in Mbabane (m-ba-bane).

Talking about young people, we know that young Africans are being recruited by Russia with the offer of a well-paid job or a place at a university. These are false promises. They are actually luring your people into fighting a war that isn't yours. And your young people will be killed.

Russia sees partnership as a means to take your resources, not to strengthen your security.

That is not Europe's idea of cooperation. We are a partner that any country and region can rely on.

And that is also why we can be Africa's partner of choice at the multilateral level, not least to strengthen the rules-based order.

This is by far the best chance we have for long-term peace and stability in the world.

Indeed, Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, along with the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and Gulf which has heavy impacts on many African countries, is the clearest indicator of what happens when the system breaks down.

But we share your view that the system can only work if it is fair and delivers for every country. That is why Europe is a major supporter of a stronger African voice in global governance. Let us lead this work together.

Prime Minister Dlamini,
Excellencies,

I look forward to hearing your ideas on how to strengthen our partnership further.

And I wish you a productive session.

Thank you.



**SESSION I: EXCHANGE OF VIEWS
WITH REGIONAL
PARLIAMENTARY
ORGANISATIONS: 'THE ROLE OF
REGIONAL
ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR
PARLIAMENTS IN PEACE AND
SECURITY IN AFRICA'**



SESSION I: SPEAKERS



Discours de l'Honorable Présidente du Parlement de la CEDEAO

**1^{ère} session de l'Assemblée parlementaire
paritaire Afrique–Union européenne**

***Thème : Le rôle des organisations régionales et
de leurs parlements dans la promotion de la
paix et la sécurité en Afrique de l'Ouest***

11–14 mai 2026

Messieurs les Coprésidents,

**Distingués membres de l'Assemblée
parlementaire paritaire OEACP–UE,**

Excellences,

Mesdames et Messieurs,

1. Permettez-moi, tout d'abord de vous adresser Madame la coprésidente, mes remerciements les plus sincères pour l'invitation que vous avez voulu adresser au Parlement de la CEDEAO. Cet honneur que vous me faites en me donnant la parole à cette session inaugurale apporte une preuve de votre attachement au dialogue politique régional structuré qu'exige l'accord de Samoa.

2. Je voudrais vous assurer que le Parlement de la CEDEAO porte un grand intérêt pour ce dialogue institutionnel la co-construction entre parlementaires africains et européens. C'est pourquoi, je trouve particulièrement opportuns nos échanges de cet après-midi.

Excellences, mesdames et messieurs,

3. L'Afrique de l'Ouest se trouve confrontée aux défis sécuritaires très complexes, dans un environnement de plus en plus volatile.

4. Ces défis exacerbent les vulnérabilités économiques et sociales, précarisent les conditions de vie et menacent la paix et la sécurité internationale et régionale.

5. Face à ces enjeux, la CEDEAO s'est dotée d'un cadre normatif et opérationnel s'appuyant sur des instruments fondamentaux qui encadrent les actions en matière de paix et de sécurité dans la région.

6. Outre les différentes stratégies de lutte contre le terrorisme et l'extrémisme violent, la CEDEAO a également renforcé ses mécanismes d'alerte précoce et procédé à la mise en place de sa force en attente, pierre angulaire de l'architecture sécuritaire régionale.

Ces instruments ont sous-tendu les efforts menés dans la consolidation de la gouvernance politique. Ils ont permis d'assurer la convergence des normes constitutionnelles, ainsi que le respect des droits humains et l'état de droit.

Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs,

Si le cadre régional bâti, offre beaucoup d'opportunités pour la sécurité collective, les défis sont tout aussi réels et persistants.

7. C'est dans ce contexte exigeant que le Parlement de la CEDEAO se positionne comme un acteur essentiel et complémentaire pour la consolidation de la paix et de la sécurité régionales. En tant que voix des peuples, nos efforts visent à renforcer la légitimité démocratique et à ancrer l'action régionale dans les aspirations profondes des citoyens de la Communauté. C'est à ce titre que nous avons développé un **outil** encore trop peu valorisé : **la diplomatie parlementaire préventive**. Nous sommes convaincus que la capacité

à faire dialoguer les acteurs politiques, là où les institutions sont bloquées, contribue également à la sécurité collective.

8. En outre, l'action de mon parlement contribue de manière significative à consolider les dispositifs d'alerte précoce ainsi qu'au renforcement de la confiance entre les citoyens et les institutions.

9. L'expérience nous enseigne que la paix durable ne saurait être l'apanage exclusif de l'exécutif. Elle requiert des processus politiques inclusifs, un contrôle démocratique effectif et la participation active des représentants élus.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

10. Je voudrais mettre en évidence l'importance stratégique de la diplomatie parlementaire en tant que passerelle entre l'élaboration des politiques et les réalités vécues par nos citoyens sur les deux continents.

11. Il apparaît dès lors indispensable d'approfondir la coopération entre les parlements régionaux. Cela passe, en premier lieu, par l'institutionnalisation de cadres de dialogue réguliers, propices à l'échange de bonnes pratiques, d'expériences législatives et

d'informations sur les menaces sécuritaires émergentes.

12. Par ailleurs, l'harmonisation des cadres juridiques et réglementaires relatifs aux menaces transnationales — qu'il s'agisse du terrorisme, de la cybercriminalité ou de l'insécurité maritime — constitue un impératif stratégique pour accroître l'efficacité de nos réponses communes.
13. Enfin, aucune stratégie de consolidation de la paix ne saurait être pleinement efficace sans inclusion. La participation active des femmes et des jeunes aux processus parlementaires constitue non seulement une exigence démocratique, mais également une condition essentielle à l'instauration d'une stabilité durable à long terme.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

14. Le Parlement de la CEDEAO attache une importance toute particulière au partenariat global entre l'Afrique, les Caraïbes, le Pacifique et l'Union européenne.
15. Nous réaffirmons, à cet égard, notre ferme volonté d'approfondir notre engagement au sein du cadre parlementaire de l'OEACP-UE. L'Accord SAMOA tire son fondement des principes de réciprocité, de co-responsabilité et de partenariat équilibré. Le Parlement

de la CEDEAO est déterminé pour un dialogue politique horizontal renforcé.

16. La quête de la paix et de la sécurité en Afrique de l'Ouest appelle des institutions fortes, un attachement indéfectible aux principes démocratiques et une coopération renforcée à tous les niveaux.

17. Je voudrais ainsi, pour finir, réitérer notre disponibilité à œuvrer avec cette assemblée pour un espace de paix, de stabilité et de prospérité partagée.

Je vous remercie de votre bienveillante attention.



SESSION I: MEMBER STATES STATEMENTS



**INTERVENTION BY THE ESWATINI COMMITTEE MEMBER
AFRICA–EU PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY, SOUTHERN AFRICA
REGION PARLIAMENTARY GROUP**

**THEME: THE ROLE OF REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR
PARLIAMENTS IN PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFRICA**

1. OPENING REMARKS

**YOUR EXCELLENCY CHAIRPERSON,
HONOURABLE COLLEAGUES,**

BEFORE WE PROCEED WITH TODAY'S BUSINESS, ALLOW ME, ON BEHALF OF ALL DELEGATIONS, TO PLACE ON RECORD OUR DEEPEST GRATITUDE TO HIS MAJESTY KING MSWATI III AND HER MAJESTY THE INDLOVUKAZI FOR THE MAGNIFICENT GALA DINNER HOSTED FOR US LAST NIGHT.

BAYETHE, WENA WAPHAKATHI.

HIS MAJESTY'S HOSPITALITY WAS FELT IN EVERY DETAIL. THE FOOD, THE MUSIC, THE PEACE THAT ALLOWED DIFFERENT NATIONS TO DINE AS ONE FAMILY AND LAST NIGHT, WE TRULY FELT THE HEART OF ESWATINI.

I TRUST THAT AFTER THE DRUMS, THE SIBHACA, AND ESWATINI'S GENEROUS CUISINE, ALL HONOURABLE MEMBERS WERE INDEED ABLE TO WAKE UP THIS MORNING FOR ANOTHER ROBUST DAY OF DEBATE. IF SOME LEGS ARE A LITTLE TIRED FROM THE DANCE FLOOR, I AM TOLD THAT IS THE MOST WELCOME FORM OF DIPLOMATIC INJURY.

THE OFFICIAL RECORD WILL SHOW WE MET. BUT OUR MEMORIES WILL SHOW WE CONNECTED AND THAT IS BECAUSE OF HIS MAJESTY'S GENEROSITY.

BAYETHE WENA WAPHAKATHI, NKHOSI NDLOVUKAZI!

2. THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATIONS

REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY BODIES SUCH AS THE SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM (SADC PF) AND THE PAN-AFRICAN PARLIAMENT (PAP) CONSTITUTE INDISPENSABLE PLATFORMS FOR DIALOGUE THAT TRANSCEND NATIONAL BOUNDARIES. THEY ENABLE US TO ANTICIPATE AND DEBATE EMERGING CONFLICTS BEFORE THEY ESCALATE.

- A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE IS THE CABO DELGADO INSURGENCY IN MOZAMBIQUE, WHERE PARLIAMENTARY VOICES AMPLIFIED CALLS FOR COORDINATED REGIONAL SECURITY RESPONSES UNDER THE SADC MISSION IN MOZAMBIQUE (SAMIM).

3. OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN PEACE MISSIONS

PARLIAMENTS ARE THE GUARDIANS OF DEMOCRATIC OVERSIGHT. THEY ENSURE THAT PEACE OPERATIONS LED BY THE EXECUTIVE ARE TRANSPARENT, ACCOUNTABLE, AND RESPECTFUL OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

- THE DEPLOYMENT OF SAMIM IN MOZAMBIQUE WAS STRENGTHENED BY PARLIAMENTARY SCRUTINY, WHICH SAFEGUARDED RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND REINFORCED LEGITIMACY.

I THEREFORE PROPOSE THAT REGIONAL PEACE MISSIONS INSTITUTIONALIZE REPORTING FRAMEWORKS TO BRIEF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES REGULARLY.

4. PROMOTING INCLUSIVE PEACEBUILDING

PEACE CANNOT BE SUSTAINED WITHOUT INCLUSIVITY. REGIONAL PARLIAMENTS MUST CHAMPION THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN, YOUTH, AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN PEACE PROCESSES.

- THE SADC PF MODEL LAW ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IS A CONCRETE EXAMPLE OF HOW PARLIAMENTARY INSTRUMENTS CAN ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES OF INSECURITY AND PROMOTE SOCIAL COHESION.

5. ADDRESSING CROSS-BORDER SECURITY CHALLENGES

INSTABILITY IN ONE MEMBER STATE INEVITABLY AFFECTS ITS NEIGHBOURS.

- THE LESOTHO POLITICAL REFORMS PROCESS, SUPPORTED BY SADC, ILLUSTRATES HOW PARLIAMENTARY ENGAGEMENT WAS CRITICAL IN STABILIZING GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND PREVENTING SPILLOVER INSTABILITY.

THIS UNDERSCORES THE PRINCIPLE THAT AN INJURY TO ONE MEMBER STATE IS AN INJURY TO THE REGION.

6. STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

REGIONAL PARLIAMENTS REQUIRE SUSTAINED CAPACITY-BUILDING SUPPORT TO EFFECTIVELY MONITOR PEACE AND SECURITY INITIATIVES.

- THE EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF THE PAN-AFRICAN PARLIAMENT IN MIDRAND DEMONSTRATED HOW PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY CAN REINFORCE CONTINENTAL UNITY IN ADDRESSING CRISES.

CAPACITY-BUILDING MUST THEREFORE REMAIN A PRIORITY IN AFRICA–EU COOPERATION.

7. PARTNERSHIP WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

THE EUROPEAN UNION IS A STRATEGIC PARTNER IN FINANCING AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT FOR PEACE MISSIONS.

- I CALL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JOINT PARLIAMENTARY MONITORING MECHANISMS BETWEEN AFRICAN AND EU PARLIAMENTS TO TRACK PROGRESS ON PEACE AND SECURITY COMMITMENTS.

THIS PARTNERSHIP MUST BE ANCHORED IN MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND SHARED VALUES.

8. ESWATINI'S PERSPECTIVE AND CONTRIBUTION

THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI HAS DEMONSTRATED ITS READINESS TO PROVIDE A NEUTRAL PLATFORM FOR DIALOGUE.

- THE HOSTING OF THE OACPS–EU JOINT PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY IN EZULWINI IN MAY 2026 IS A TESTAMENT TO OUR COMMITMENT TO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION.

ESWATINI'S UNIQUE TINKHUNDLA SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE, WHICH HARMONISES TRADITION WITH MODERN PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICE, OFFERS A MODEL FOR STABILITY AND RESILIENCE.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ASSEMBLY

I RESPECTFULLY SUBMIT THE FOLLOWING PROPOSALS:

- INSTITUTIONALIZE REGULAR EXCHANGES BETWEEN REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATIONS AND THE AFRICA–EU ASSEMBLY.
- DEVELOP A CONTINENTAL PARLIAMENTARY PEACE AND SECURITY INDEX TO BENCHMARK PROGRESS.
- ENCOURAGE JOINT MISSIONS OF AFRICAN AND EU PARLIAMENTARIANS TO CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS FOR FACT-FINDING AND SOLIDARITY.

10. CLOSING NOTE

HONOURABLE CHAIRPERSON, DISTINGUISHED COLLEAGUES,

ESWATINI REAFFIRMS ITS UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO THE PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF CONFLICTS AND TO PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY AS A CORNERSTONE OF REGIONAL SECURITY. LET US STAND UNITED IN THE CONVICTION THAT OUR PARLIAMENTS MUST BE THE FIRST RESPONDERS IN SAFEGUARDING PEACE AND STABILITY ACROSS AFRICA.

I THANK YOU. SIYABONGA. MERCI.

INTERVENTION BY THE GAMBIA: HON. ABDOULIE CEESAY

When we speak of peace and security in Africa, We are speaking about the lives of mothers who want their children to grow up free from fear, about young people who dream of opportunities instead of conflict, and about communities that long for dignity, justice, and stability.

Africa's challenges are real. We see violent extremism tearing at the fabric of societies in the Sahel. We

witness fragile states struggling to hold onto stability. We feel the weight of humanitarian crises, often worsened by climate change. These are not distant problems—they are lived realities for millions of our brothers and sisters. And the truth is simple: no single nation can carry these burdens alone.

The Gambia calls for stronger partnerships between African institutions and international bodies. These partnerships must be based on respect, equality, and shared responsibility. Africa does not seek

paternalism—it seeks partnership. We want international organizations to listen to African voices, respect African priorities, and support African solutions. We want parliaments to foster dialogue that bridges cultures and builds trust across continents.

International organisations and parliaments are indispensable partners in Africa's quest for peace and security. They provide the frameworks, legitimacy, and solidarity needed to transform challenges into opportunities. Therefore, to ensure that Africa's

future is defined not by conflict, but by unity, justice, and sustainable development, there must be collaboration in all angles.

INTERVENTION BY RWANDA: Hon. Uwineza Beline

Topic of Today: Exchange views with regional parliamentary organisations: The role of regional organisation and their parliaments in peace and security in Africa.

Thank you for the flow, Mr. Co-Chair, Madam Co-Chair.

Parliamentary institutions such as the Pan-African Parliament and the East African Legislative Assembly where Rwanda belongs to, are committed to promote peace and security through democratic oversight, accountability, and citizen representation while parliamentary diplomacy strengthens dialogue, trust, and conflict prevention.

For Rwanda, these commitments are deeply shaped by the lessons of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, which highlighted the devastating consequences of international inaction. Guided by this history, Rwanda has maintained a strong commitment to peacekeeping, the responsibility to protect, and regional stability.

Today, Rwanda is the fourth-largest global contributor to UN peacekeeping operations and the leading contributor in Africa, with military and police personnel deployed in South Sudan and the Central African Republic. Rwanda also provides bilateral security support to the Central African Republic and Mozambique, reflecting its continued commitment to peace, resilience, and shared security, in line with the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians adopted in 2015.

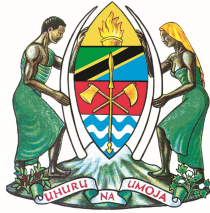
At the national level, the Parliament of Rwanda plays a central role in advancing peace and security. It does so through the ratification of international and regional treaties, oversight of government policies, and the promotion of unity, reconciliation and resilience among our people. Through active participation in regional and continental parliamentary bodies, our Parliament also contributes to strengthening inter-parliamentary cooperation and dialogue.

**Mr. Co-Chair, Madam Co-Chair,
Hon. Members of Parliament,
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,**

We must deepen collaboration between the African Union, European Union and Regional Economic Communities; empower parliamentary institutions to play an active role in oversight and accountability, and invest in early warning systems, preventive diplomacy and decisive and timely intervention from regional and continental levels. Above all, we must ensure that our peace and security efforts remain people-centered, reflecting the aspirations and needs of our citizens. Parliamentary diplomacy and cooperation remain critical tools in advancing stability across the continent.

In conclusion, Rwanda's experience shows that even after profound tragedy, resilience and reconciliation can lead to a lasting contribution to global peace. Regional organisations and their parliaments must continue to work hand in hand to build a stable, secure, and prosperous Africa.

Let us reaffirm our shared commitment to peace, strengthen our cooperation, and act decisively to secure a better future for our continent. **I thank you.**



**PROPOSED INTERVENTION BY HON. DANIEL BARRAN SILLO (MP), DEPUTY
SPEAKER OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA, ON THE OCCASION OF
THE EU-AFRICAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ORGANISATIONS:
“THE ROLE OF REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR PARLIAMENTS IN
PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFRICA”
Tuesday, 12 May 2026 | 14:00 – 16:00**

Honourable Co-President,

I thank you for giving me the floor.

I thank the panellists for their insightful contributions. Regarding this agenda item, I wish to highlight five key messages.

First Message: Sustainable peace requires African ownership and locally grounded solutions.

Honourable President, Honourable President, we have witnessed various international initiatives aimed at mediation, peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Africa. These efforts are important, and we support them. However, my delegation of the opinion that local communities and institutions must remain at the centre of these processes because they best understand the realities on the ground. Involvement of national and regional stakeholders is very crucial for achieving long-lasting and sustainable peace

Second Message: More partnership is required between Africa and EU to bridge the financial gap in peace and security efforts in Africa.

Honourable President, peacebuilding, mediation, post-conflict reconstruction and stabilisation all require predictable and sustainable financing. In this regard, we

appreciate the support provided by partners, including the European Union, through instruments such as the European Peace Facility.

However, the scale of current challenges continues to outpace available resources. We therefore call for strengthening our partnership and mobilise more financing for peace support operations, conflict prevention and institution-building across the continent.

At the same time, we must preserve and strengthen the spirit of international burden sharing, particularly for countries that continue to carry the humanitarian and economic consequences of conflicts occurring in neighbouring states.

There is therefore a need for the international community and partners to continue supporting refugee-hosting countries in line with internationally agreed principles of solidarity and burden sharing. They should not be left to carry this responsibility alone.

Third and Final Message: Invitation to the upcoming IPU Meetings in Tanzania.

Honourable Colleagues, before I conclude, allow me, on behalf of the Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania, to warmly invite all delegations to the upcoming meetings of the Inter-Parliamentary Union scheduled to take place in Arusha Tanzania from 5th to 9th October 2026.

We look forward to welcoming you to Tanzania unforgettable land of Kilimanjaro, Serengeti and Zanzibar and assuring you of our well-known hospitality. I wish to assure you all that we have committed ourselves to guaranteeing **VISA ON ARRIVAL** to all delegates, spouses, accompanying officials, and observers. More I wish to confirm to you that the City of Arusha is not only a peaceful place but it is well connected and accessible by air and ground transport..

For ease of preparation and access to logistical information, please visit the Parliamentary Website

I thank you for your attention.



**CLOSING REMARKS BY
PRESIDENT OF THE OACPS
AFRICAN REGION
PARLIAMENTARY GROUP AND
CO-PRESIDENT OF THE OACPS
AFRICA-EU PARLIAMENTARY
ASSEMBLY**

HON. DAVID HOUINSA



**CLOSING REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE OACPS
AFRICAN REGION PARLIAMENTARY GROUP AND CO-
PRESIDENT OF THE OACPS AFRICA-EU
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

HON. DAVIND HOUINSA

**Honourable Colleagues,
Distinguished Delegates,**

This discussion on peace and security comes at a particularly important moment for our continent and for the international community more broadly. Across Africa, we continue to witness evolving and increasingly interconnected security challenges, including armed conflicts, terrorism, violent extremism, unconstitutional changes of government, organised crime, cyber threats, maritime insecurity and the growing impact of climate-related pressures, displacement and socio-economic instability. Recent developments in regions such as the Sahel, Sudan, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and parts of the Horn of Africa continue to demonstrate the complex and transnational nature of contemporary security threats.

These challenges increasingly transcend national borders and require coordinated regional, continental and international responses. No single country or institution can address these challenges alone. There is therefore a growing need for stronger cooperation between governments, regional organisations, continental institutions, parliaments and international partners in order to strengthen prevention, mediation, peacebuilding and long-term stability efforts.

In this regard, regional organisations such as ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC, ECCAS and the East African Community continue to play an essential role in preventive diplomacy, mediation, electoral support, peace support operations and the defence of constitutional order. Their contribution remains indispensable in responding to crises and maintaining regional stability.

At the same time, regional parliamentary organisations and parliamentary diplomacy have become increasingly important components of Africa's peace and security architecture. Through dialogue, oversight, confidence-building, legislative harmonisation and democratic accountability, parliaments can contribute significantly to conflict prevention, governance and the promotion of sustainable peace. Parliamentary institutions also provide an important bridge between regional commitments and the aspirations of citizens.

The Samoa Agreement offers an important framework in this regard. Peace and security are recognised as strategic priorities of partnership, with provisions supporting political dialogue, conflict prevention, mediation, peacebuilding, governance, human rights and cooperation against transnational threats, including terrorism, organised crime, cybercrime and illicit trafficking. The Agreement further recognises the importance of regional and continental approaches, including cooperation with the

African Union and regional organisations, while also strengthening the role of parliamentary institutions in promoting dialogue, accountability and implementation.

This exchange therefore provides an important opportunity to reflect on how regional organisations and their parliaments can contribute more effectively to peace and security in Africa, and how the OACPS–EU partnership can further support African-led solutions and stronger institutional cooperation in this area. It also allows us to consider how parliamentary diplomacy can complement the work of governments and regional organisations in addressing the evolving security challenges facing our continent.

We may consider the following:

- Establishing a regular OACPS–EU Parliamentary Dialogue on Peace and Security to facilitate structured exchanges between regional parliamentary organisations, the Pan-African Parliament and relevant parliamentary committees on emerging security challenges and conflict prevention.
- Develop a mechanism for regular information-sharing and early warning exchanges between regional parliamentary bodies, particularly on issues relating to unconstitutional changes of government, electoral tensions, violent extremism and cross-border insecurity.
- Undertake joint parliamentary solidarity and fact-finding missions, where appropriate and with regional organisations, to support dialogue, mediation and confidence-building in situations of political tension or post-conflict recovery.
- Encourage each regional parliamentary assembly under the OACPS framework to establish or strengthen specialised committees or focal points on peace, security and governance, aligned with the African Peace and Security Architecture and the Samoa Agreement priorities.
- Advocate for dedicated funding windows within the OACPS–EU partnership framework to support parliamentary diplomacy, mediation initiatives, youth peacebuilding programmes and capacity-building for regional parliamentary institutions.
- Strengthen parliamentary engagement on the prevention of violent extremism, including through legislative cooperation on cybercrime, terrorism financing, illicit trafficking, small arms and organised crime, while ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law.

I therefore look forward to a constructive and forward-looking exchange of views on this important subject.



***YOUTH FORUM- TOPIC
RELATED TO THE KEYNOTE
DEBATE ON YOUTH EDUCATION
& MOBILITY***



YOUTH FORUM: SPEAKERS

INTERVENTION BY AU Migration Youth Ambassador and IOM Global Youth Changemaker, Youth Unite Zambia

Africa - Europe Parliamentary Assembly

Youth Forum Address

Walter Kasempa

Distinguished Members of Parliament, representatives of the African Union and the European Union, fellow young leaders, ladies and gentlemen,

Greetings to you all from Lusaka, Zambia, and thank you for the honour of joining this historic Assembly virtually.

I want to begin with a simple observation: mobility has become one of the defining political questions of the 21st century. Not only because people are moving, but because movement increasingly determines who has access to opportunity, security, education, and ultimately human dignity.

For many years, migration debates between Africa and Europe have largely been framed through the language of crisis management, irregular migration, border security, containment, and demographic pressure. But I would argue that this framing is fundamentally incomplete.

Mobility is not simply a consequence of instability. It is also a feature of development itself.

Historically, societies do not develop in isolation. They develop through exchange, exchange of labour, knowledge, technology, culture, and ideas. Movement has always been central to economic and political transformation. In many ways, modern globalization itself is built on mobility, even if access to that mobility remains deeply unequal.

And this inequality is becoming increasingly visible among young people.

Today, Africa has the youngest population in the world, while Europe faces demographic ageing and labour shortages across multiple sectors. Yet despite this structural interdependence, the dominant policy architecture governing mobility between the two regions still tends to prioritize restriction over strategic partnership.

This creates a contradiction.

On one hand, African youth are constantly told they are the future of the global economy. On the other hand, many encounter a global mobility regime in which movement is heavily stratified by geography, nationality, and economic power.

A young engineer in Lusaka, Dakar, or Nairobi may possess the same capability as their counterpart elsewhere, yet face vastly different levels of access to academic exchange, financing, visas, digital infrastructure, and professional networks.

So the issue before us is not simply migration. The deeper issue is the distribution of mobility rights in the international system.

And this is why discussions around youth education and mobility are so important.

If Africa–Europe relations are to evolve into a genuinely strategic partnership, then mobility cannot remain understood primarily as a security issue. It must also be understood as a development issue, a labour issue, an education issue, and increasingly, a climate issue.

We need to move beyond reactive frameworks and toward long-term mobility governance that is both ethical and economically rational.

That includes investment in educational exchange, mutual recognition of qualifications, skills partnerships, research collaboration, and legal mobility pathways that are transparent and accessible.

But it also requires honesty about the risks of unequal integration.

Partnership cannot mean a permanent extraction of African talent without corresponding investment in African institutions and labour markets. Otherwise, we risk reproducing dependency under the language of cooperation.

What Africa requires is not isolation from global mobility, but bargaining power within it.

And equally important is the question of intra-African mobility.

Too often, discussions about African mobility become disproportionately centred on Europe. Yet the long-term future of the continent will also depend on the success of African integration itself — including implementation of the free movement agenda and the African Continental Free Trade Area.

A fragmented Africa will always negotiate from a position of weakness. A more integrated Africa will engage Europe from a position of greater balance and strategic agency.

Finally, I want to say this: young people should not only be included in these conversations symbolically.

Youth are often invited to speak about the future while remaining excluded from the structures that actually shape it. Yet young people across Africa are already producing policy ideas, leading civil society initiatives, building digital economies, and responding directly to challenges linked to migration, climate change, and inequality.

The question is whether institutions are prepared to treat youth not merely as stakeholders, but as intellectual and political actors in their own right.

Because ultimately, the future of Africa–Europe relations will not be determined only by declarations or diplomatic summits. It will be determined by whether both regions can construct a model of partnership that is perceived as fair, reciprocal, and historically conscious by the next generation.

Thank you very much.

Speech by Thembela Msibi, Regional Board Member, Southern Africa Youth Forum) SAYoF)

Distinguished Co-Presidents, Honorable Members of the Africa-EU Parliamentary Assembly, and fellow Young Leaders.

As we gather here in Eswatini for this historic inaugural plenary, we are doing more than just discussing policy; we are designing the architecture of a shared future. With over 60% of Africa's population under the age of 25, our continent is not just a participant in the global economy - we are its future engine.

But for this engine to run, we must align our education, our mobility, and our trade agreements. Today, I want to speak about the strategic economic synergy that defines our era.

We cannot speak of mobility without acknowledging the sobering realities. The Conflict-Climate-Migration Nexus is real. Climate displacement from the Sahel to Southern Africa and protracted conflicts are driving millions into vulnerability. Too often, the lack of legal pathways pushes our brightest minds onto high-risk routes, where they face exploitation and tragedy.

We must advocate for orderly, safe and regular mobility, as outlined in the Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA). We seek a partnership that respects the dignity of the migrant and values the potential of the youth.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is the most significant economic project of our generation. By creating a single market of 1.4 billion people, it provides the scale needed for industrialization.

However, a free trade area is meaningless if people cannot move. As we implement the AU Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, we must align it with our trade goals. If goods can cross borders seamlessly, the talent that produces, manages and innovates those goods must be able to follow. We are advocating for a "Right of Establishment" that allows an African youth to legally start a legitimate business in any corner of this continent and eventually, to partner seamlessly across the Mediterranean.

Our relationship with the European Union has entered a new phase with the Samoa Agreement. Specifically, Titles III and VI provide the legal mandate for human development and mobility.

But the "teeth" of this agreement lie in the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package. With €150 billion in planned investments, we must ensure these funds are not just for roads and ports, but for human infrastructure.

We need to link the Youth Mobility for Africa flagship to the EU-AfCFTA Memorandum of Understanding signed just weeks ago in Addis Ababa.

This MoU is about more than trade; it's about "Team Europe" supporting African integration. We must ensure this translates into "Skills Corridors" where the EU's labor shortages in Green Tech and Digital Innovation are met by a mobile, highly-trained African workforce.

To make this work, a degree from Nairobi should be a golden ticket in Brussels. We must accelerate the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF). This is how we achieve "Brain Circulation." We want an era where a young African researcher can move to a European university through Erasmus+, gain world-class expertise, and return to an African innovation hub funded by the AU-EU Innovation Agenda to launch their own startup.

As legislators, you have the power to turn these frameworks into reality. I urge you to:

1. Fund the Human Capital: Ensure that a significant portion of Global Gateway investments is dedicated to the Africa-Europe Youth Academy and vocational training.
2. Harmonize the Law: Push for the mutual recognition of diplomas and the streamlining of visas for students and researchers.
3. Bridge the AfCFTA and EU Agreements: Ensure that our Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are not just about raw materials, but about value-addition and the youth who will lead those industries.

The youth of Africa are not looking for a "way out"; we are looking for a "way up." We are the drivers of the AfCFTA, the innovators of the Digital Transition, and the guardians of the Green Transition.

Let us move away from a donor-recipient past and toward a co-investor future. Let us build the bridges that allow talent to flow, ideas to circulate, and both our continents to prosper.

Thank you.



YOUTH FORUM: MEMBER STATES STATEMENTS

INTERVENTION BY THE GAMBIA: HON. ABDOULIE CEESAY

Statement on Youth Education and Mobility

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members,

Youth education and mobility remain among the most pressing challenges of our time. Across Africa, youth unemployment is alarmingly high—reaching nearly 60% in some countries—while opportunities for education and mobility remain limited. Even in Europe, youth unemployment averages 16.2%, showing that this is a global crisis with shared consequences.

Our young people face overcrowded classrooms, outdated curricula, limited scholarships, and restricted access to international opportunities. The digital divide continues to exclude rural and marginalized youth, while women and girls face

systemic barriers that silence their voices. These challenges, if left unaddressed, risk undermining national stability and development.

parliaments are a fundamental pillar in addressing these issues. We must:

- Allocate reasonable budgets that prioritize education, skills, and innovation.
- Lead youth-friendly policies and legislation that guarantee affordable education and fair employment.
- Exercise strategic oversight to ensure ministries deliver on youth-focused programs.
- Create platforms for youth representation and participation in governance.

Despite limited resources, The Gambia continues to support youth through expanded access to basic education, vocational training, and scholarships. We remain committed to ensuring that our budgetary allocations reflect the urgency of youth needs, that

legislation protects their rights, and that oversight guarantees delivery. For us, youth education and mobility are not privileges—they are rights, and they must be safeguarded.

Africa and Europe must work together to lessen the burden on our youth. Through programs such as Erasmus+ which is widely valued by young people as a life-changing program that provides opportunities for education, cultural exchange, and mobility, but they also highlight persistent challenges such as limited accessibility, complex application processes, and insufficient funding for inclusio

The Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme, and joint youth summits are steppingstones, we can expand opportunities for education, skills development, and mobility. We strengthen Partnerships in green jobs, digital innovation, and entrepreneurship that help bridge the gap and empower our youth to thrive in a global economy.

Honourable Members, the statistics are alarming, but they are also a call to courage. If nearly 60% of young Africans remain unemployed, then our parliaments must act decisively—not tomorrow, but today. Let us legislate boldly, allocate wisely, and collaborate globally. Let us give our youth the tools to learn, the freedom to move, and the opportunities to thrive.



**SESSION II: KEYNOTE DEBATE ON
CHALLENGES AND
OPPORTUNITIES RELATED TO
MOBILITY AND YOUTH
EDUCATION**



SESSION II: SPEAKERS

Keynote Address

For **H.E. Nardos Bekele-Thomas, CEO of AUDA-NEPAD**

To be delivered by **Dr. Ildephonse Musafiri**

1st Africa-EU Parliamentary Assembly — Session II: Mobility and Youth Education

Ezulwini, Eswatini | 13 May 2026

**Your Excellencies, Honourable Members of Parliament from Africa and Europe,
Distinguished Co-Presidents of the Africa-EU Parliamentary Assembly, Representatives of
Regional Organisations, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great honour to address this historic first Africa-EU Parliamentary Assembly, convened here in Ezulwini under the Samoa Agreement. I bring you warm greetings from **H.E. Ms Nardos Bekele-Thomas, Chief Executive Officer of AUDA-NEPAD**, who extends her appreciation for this important invitation and for the opportunity to contribute to this timely debate on **mobility, youth education, skills development and opportunity**.

This Assembly is not an ordinary gathering. It brings together African and European parliamentarians at a moment when both continents are asking a fundamental question: **how do we move from declarations to delivery?** The agenda before you — peace and security, mobility and youth education, critical minerals, and the future of multilateralism — speaks directly to the future of Africa-Europe relations and to the future of Africa's own integration agenda.

Today, I wish to deliver one clear message on behalf of AUDA-NEPAD: **Africa has a clear mandate, a clear vision, and a clear implementation institution. But Africa cannot fully implement its development mandate while its borders remain closed to Africans.**

AUDA-NEPAD is the African Union's development agency. Our role is to help translate **Agenda 2063** from aspiration into action; to support Member States and Regional Economic Communities with technical advisory services; to broker partnerships and mobilise resources; to execute priority continental programmes; and to strengthen monitoring, learning and accountability for results. We are asked to help build regional value chains, support the AfCFTA, accelerate infrastructure, food systems transformation, skills development, industrialisation, climate resilience and youth employment.

But let us be honest: **we are handicapped in this work when Africans cannot move easily within Africa.**

When AUDA-NEPAD convenes African experts, entrepreneurs, youth innovators, policymakers, researchers or parliamentarians in an African country, the first challenge should not be a visa. The first budget line should not be excessive visa costs. The first delay should not be paperwork, embassy appointments, invitation letters, unclear online systems, or last-minute travel authorisations. Yet this is too often our reality.

These are not small inconveniences. They are **transaction costs on African integration**. They increase the cost of doing continental business. They slow down implementation. They discourage youth participation. They make it difficult for African professionals to serve Africa. They turn borders into administrative barriers against the very people who are expected to build the continent.

The Africa Visa Openness Report 2025 gives us both encouragement and warning. It shows that progress is possible: more countries are opening up, and there are African champions demonstrating leadership. Rwanda and The Gambia remain at the top of visa openness; Kenya has made impressive progress; and several countries have shown that political will can change the experience of mobility. But the report also tells us that **Africans still need a visa before travel for about 51% of intra-African travel scenarios**, while only about **28% are visa-free** and about **20% allow visa on arrival**.

This means that more than half of the time, an African wishing to travel to another African country must still seek prior permission before departure. That is not the Africa we want. That is not the logic of the AfCFTA. That is not the foundation of a common market. And it is certainly not the foundation upon which we can unleash the energy of Africa's youth.

The issue is not only visas. It is also the growing risk that technology becomes a new barrier. E-visas and electronic travel authorisations can help modernise border management, improve security and simplify procedures. But when they become costly, complex, single-entry, opaque or burdensome, they risk becoming **visas in disguise**. The Africa Visa Openness Report rightly cautions that advance travel authorisations should not undermine the spirit of visa-free policies and should not impose unnecessary requirements on travellers.

Our message is therefore not a call for uncontrolled borders. It is a call for **intelligent borders**: borders that are secure but open; digital but simple; well-managed but not exclusionary; capable of managing risk without blocking opportunity.

Honourable Members,

Europe has an important lesson to offer Africa — not because Europe is perfect, but because Europe acted. Europe understood that integration could not be built on closed borders. It understood that a common market required the movement of people, goods, services, capital and ideas. It understood that trade corridors are meaningless if people cannot cross them. It understood that students cannot benefit from regional education opportunities if mobility is blocked. It understood that businesses cannot scale across borders if their workers, investors and partners are trapped by administrative restrictions.

This is the lesson Africa must learn from Europe: **those in the driving seat must exercise their powers.**

Europe did not remove barriers because all risks had disappeared. It did so because political leaders, legislators and institutions decided that the benefits of integration outweighed the fears of fragmentation. They built systems. They built trust. They harmonised rules. They created mechanisms for cooperation. They moved step by step, but they moved.

Africa must now do the same — with urgency, courage and confidence.

We cannot continue to praise the AfCFTA while making it difficult for African traders to cross borders. We cannot speak of youth education while making it expensive for students to attend universities, innovation hubs or training programmes in neighbouring countries. We cannot speak of regional value chains while experts, technicians, transporters and investors are delayed at borders. We cannot speak of African solidarity while an African may find it easier to travel outside the continent than to travel within it.

The AfCFTA is not only about tariffs. It is about people. The value of the AfCFTA lies in the ability of Africans to reach opportunities — in goods, services, investment, innovation,

professional exchange and knowledge. The Visa Openness Report says it well: **a visa-free Africa is good economic policy**, and the AfCFTA's value depends on Africans being able to reach the opportunities it creates.

Honourable Parliamentarians,

This is why your role is so critical. You are not observers of this process. You are among the few actors with the authority to unblock it.

Parliamentarians can ratify protocols. You can domesticate continental commitments into national law. You can review outdated immigration legislation. You can question excessive visa fees. You can ensure that digital travel systems remain facilitative rather than restrictive. You can demand accountability from executives on the implementation of free movement commitments. You can protect legitimate security concerns while preventing security from becoming a permanent excuse for inaction.

Above all, you can give political courage to a project that has been delayed for too long.

The AU Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons is one of the boldest instruments of African integration. Yet progress remains slow. The Visa Openness Report notes that there have been no further ratifications beyond the initial four countries in recent years, and that progress has instead relied mainly on individual country reforms and regional efforts.

This is where parliaments must step in. This Assembly should send a clear message: **Africa's integration cannot remain hostage to hesitation.**

We should move from discussing free movement as a future ambition to treating it as an implementation priority. Let us begin where progress is already visible. Let us learn from ECOWAS, from the East African Community, and from countries that have opened their doors to fellow Africans. Let us explore regional mobility arrangements, mutual recognition of identity documents, simplified digital systems, regional visas where appropriate, and fast-track travel authorisation for those working under AfCFTA contracts.

The 2025 Visa Openness Report even invites us to think boldly about an “**Africazone**”, inspired by the Schengen area — starting with willing countries and regions, using data for transparency, not for unnecessary authorisation, and allowing people to move.

This is the spirit we need.

Honourable Members,

Mobility is not separate from youth education. It is the foundation of youth opportunity.

Africa’s young people do not only need classrooms. They need access. They need regional universities. They need exchange programmes. They need apprenticeships across borders. They need innovation hubs that serve not only one country, but the continent. They need to meet, collaborate, compete, learn and build together.

A young engineer in Kigali should be able to attend a technology bootcamp in Nairobi without facing prohibitive administrative barriers. A young agripreneur in Accra should be able to participate in a continental food systems innovation programme in Lusaka. A medical researcher in Dakar should be able to collaborate with a laboratory in Johannesburg. A youth entrepreneur in Maputo should be able to pitch to investors in Abidjan. A student in Eswatini should see the whole continent as a learning space.

This is how demographic potential becomes demographic dividend.

But if young Africans cannot move, they cannot connect. If they cannot connect, they cannot innovate at scale. If they cannot innovate at scale, Africa’s promise will remain divided by borders that were never designed for our collective prosperity.

The same applies to goods. Free movement of people and free movement of goods are twin pillars. A truck delayed at a border carries more than goods; it carries working capital, contracts, trust and livelihoods. A trader blocked by visa restrictions carries more than a passport; she carries enterprise, ambition and continental value creation. A researcher denied mobility carries more than documents; he carries knowledge that Africa needs.

This is why AUDA-NEPAD insists that border openness is not a peripheral issue. It is central to our mandate. It affects infrastructure. It affects trade. It affects education. It affects agriculture and food systems. It affects industrialisation. It affects peace and security. It affects whether Africa can act as one market, one investment space, and one community of destiny.

The broader Africa-EU partnership also faces this test. The paper on EU-AU relations rightly argues that a credible partnership requires institutional respect for the AU's coordinating role, strategic transparency, accountable implementation, and a genuine mobility framework aligned with demographic reality. It also warns that declarations without delivery deepen the implementation gap.

That warning is relevant not only to Africa-Europe relations. It is relevant to Africa's own internal integration. We cannot ask partners to respect African integration if Africans do not implement it ourselves. We cannot ask Europe to treat the AU as a serious continental interlocutor if we do not give our own continental institutions the practical conditions to deliver.

So today, from this Assembly, let us make a practical commitment.

Let us agree that within the Africa-EU dialogue, mobility must not be discussed only as migration management. It must be discussed as **development infrastructure**. It must be treated as part of education policy, trade policy, industrial policy, skills policy and youth employment policy.

Let us agree that Africa's parliaments should launch a renewed legislative push for the free movement agenda.

Let us agree that visa costs for Africans travelling within Africa should be reduced, simplified or eliminated, beginning with students, researchers, entrepreneurs, AfCFTA traders, parliamentarians, technical experts and development practitioners.

Let us agree that digital systems should facilitate movement, not monetise restriction.

Let us agree that the AU, RECs, national governments and parliaments should work together to identify a coalition of willing countries ready to pilot deeper mobility arrangements — an African pathway toward an Africazone.

And let us agree that the Africa-EU Parliamentary Assembly should become a platform not only for dialogue, but for accountability — asking, year after year: what borders have we opened, what costs have we reduced, what protocols have we ratified, what young people have we enabled, what goods have we allowed to move?

Honourable Members,

Africa's integration project has never lacked vision. We have Agenda 2063. We have the AfCFTA. We have the Free Movement Protocol. We have regional treaties. We have AUDA-NEPAD as the development agency mandated to support implementation. What we need now is the courage to act.

The question before us is simple: **Do we believe in one Africa only in speeches, or also at our borders?**

If we believe in one Africa, then let Africans move.

Let the student move.

Let the trader move.

Let the researcher move.

Let the entrepreneur move.

Let the farmer access markets.

Let the engineer build across borders.

Let the parliamentarian lead by example.

Let AUDA-NEPAD implement its mandate without unnecessary barriers.

Let Africa become a continent where borders are gateways to opportunity, not walls against ambition.

Europe's experience shows that integration is not built by fear. It is built by trust, law, institutions and political courage. Africa now has an opportunity to move with the same seriousness. Not by copying blindly, but by learning wisely. Not by waiting for perfect conditions, but by creating the systems that make openness safe, orderly and productive.

As you sit together in one room — African and European parliamentarians — let this be the beginning of a new political compact: a compact that places people at the centre of integration; a compact that recognises youth mobility as a foundation of skills and opportunity; a compact that understands that Africa’s development agency cannot deliver fully when Africa itself remains administratively divided.

The future of Africa will not be built behind closed borders.

It will be built by Africans moving, learning, trading, producing, investing and innovating together.

Let us open the borders.

Let us reduce the costs.

Let us trust our people.

Let us allow Africa to work.

I thank you.

1ST AFRICA-EU PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

Ezulwini, Eswatini | 13 May 2026

*Session II: Challenges and Opportunities Related to Mobility
and Youth Education*

Statement by H.E. Ms Nardos Bekele-Thomas

*Chief Executive Officer, African Union Development Agency–
NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD)*

~3-Minute Statement | Approximately 430 words

Dr David Godonou Houinsa, Co-President of the African-EU Parliamentary Assembly, distinguished Members of the African and European Parliaments, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

I regret that I cannot be with you in Eswatini today, but I am honoured to address this Assembly remotely — because what is happening in Ezulwini matters.

Africa and Europe have been partners for decades. What this Assembly represents is a deliberate choice to make that partnership more equal, more structured, and more directly accountable to the people it is supposed to serve.

That is not a small thing. And I welcome this forum as the institutional space to act on it.

Africa has the youngest population on earth. By 2050, one in four people in the world will be African. This is not a demographic burden to be managed.

It is the most significant development asset any continent has ever held — but only if we act with honesty and urgency.

That demographic advantage becomes a dividend only when young people are educated, skilled, mobile, and economically included. Right now, too many are not.

When we speak of mobility, we must speak plainly. **Mobility cannot be reduced to migration from Africa to Europe.**

Real mobility means young Africans moving freely across African regions, accessing opportunities created by the AfCFTA,

contributing to regional integration, and building the skills ecosystems that Agenda 2063 demands.

That is why AUDA-NEPAD is hosting the **African Continental Qualifications Framework** — a system for mutual recognition of qualifications and skills across borders, so that an engineer trained in Dakar can work in Nairobi, and a technician certified in Lusaka can contribute to a regional energy corridor.

Intra-African mobility is where the greatest transformation will happen.

At the same time, education systems must undergo a fundamental shift — **from certification to capability**. Through our **Skills Initiative for Africa (SIFA)**, we have deployed EUR 100 million across 48 active TVET projects in eight countries, benefiting over 22,000 young people.

Through the **Creating Opportunities for Youth and Women in Africa (COYWA) Programme**, operating across five regional economic communities, we are equipping young Africans with digital skills, entrepreneurial capacity, and access to finance.

Through the **Africa Critical Skills Bank**, we are building real-time labour market intelligence so that what young people are trained for actually matches what economies need.

These are not pilots. These are scalable models, and they are working.

Excellencies, AUDA-NEPAD exists to translate continental frameworks into delivery — linking Agenda 2063, the AfCFTA, and regional integration to institutional reality on the ground.

We do not just produce strategies. We build the financial and institutional bridges that turn policy into impact.

In that spirit, I call on this Assembly to advance three concrete shifts in the Africa-EU partnership.

First: invest in and scale mutual recognition of qualifications — make it the norm, not the exception.

Second: treat vocational, technical, digital and entrepreneurial education as strategic co-investment — not development assistance.

Third: build structured mobility pathways that are legal, dignified, development-oriented, and beneficial to both continents.

Europe and Africa must not build a relationship where African talent only leaves.

We must build one where African talent circulates, grows, returns, invests, and transforms economies — on both sides of the Mediterranean.

The **Energize Africa Fellowship** shows this is possible: young African professionals embedded in regional institutions, driving implementation from within. That is the model we should scale together.

Distinguished Parliamentarians — declarations are not enough.

Use this Assembly to shape recommendations that become instruments, financing, partnerships, and measurable

outcomes for young people. They are watching and they deserve nothing less. *I thank you.*

INTERVENTION BY Mr Yitna Getachew, IOM Sub-Regional Director for Southern Africa and Chief of Mission for South Africa

Talking Points: Challenges and Opportunities Related to Mobility and Youth Education

When & where

Wednesday 13 May 2026

1st Plenary Session, Ezulwini Palazzo International Convention & Conference Centre, Ezulwini, Eswatini

Speakers (TBC)

- Mr. Yitna Getachew, IOM Sub-Regional Director for Southern Africa;
- Ms Susanne Raab, Director General International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)
- Ms Nardos Bekele-Thomas, CEO of The African Union Development Agency NEPAD
- Mr Joseph Asunka, Chief Executive Officer Afrobarometer

Talking Points

Executive Overview

Across Africa, over 10 million young people enter the labour market each year, yet current growth patterns are estimated to generate only around 3 million formal jobs annually.¹ The result is not simply unemployment, but a much larger transition crisis: many young people enter informality, underemployment, survival self-employment, or migration in search of opportunity. This gap is not a failure of young people or education systems alone. It reflects weak connections between education, labour – market demand, work experience, mobility systems, and access to decent work. Young people invest in education and skills, but those investments too often fail to translate into income because systems that connect learning to work - labour-market information, skills recognition, matching, placement, first work experience, finance, and worker protection - remain weak. Where local labour markets cannot absorb new entrants, young people move, either within countries, across regions and/or internationally. Mobility is therefore not an exception to youth employment policy - it is one of the ways young people respond to uneven opportunity. The policy failure is when mobility is unmanaged, unsafe, poorly matched to labour-market demand, or disconnected from worker protection..

IOM's extensive experience supporting labour migration governance and skills mobility for international and regional labour markets targets systems equally relevant within domestic labour markets. The priority is to build work-access systems, i.e., practical arrangements that help young people move from education

¹ World Data Lab, Mastercard Foundation, and University of Cape Town, Development Policy Research Unit. Africa Youth Employment Outlook 2026. Washington, DC / Cape Town, 2026.
<https://cdn.buttercms.com/Ld24RloTjGMCjphoq3o2>

or training to real opportunities, including matching, placement, , skills recognition, safe mobility, and worker protection.

IOM's distinctive contribution lies in its role as an essential connector within the youth employment ecosystem, linking young people, governments, employers, training systems, recruiters, regional bodies, and protection actors to enhance access pathways to work where mobility is a prerequisite.

IOM acts as a systems enabler, convening actors, strengthening institutions, piloting mobility pathways, supporting ethical recruitment and skills recognition, and helping governments and partners to build the labour market and mobility system needed to translate education investments into decent work. These positions IOM in alignment with Africa–EU partnership objectives and the ambitions of the Samoa Agreement.

1. Data on How Education Is Expanding Faster Than Jobs

The following data illustrate continent-wide trends, with regional and country examples used to demonstrate how shared structural pressures manifest in specific contexts.

- Across Africa, over 10 million young people enter the labour market every year, yet only around 3 million formal jobs are created—leaving most new entrants locked into informality or exclusion.
- Work does not equal security: around 90% of employed young Africans work informally, and roughly one-third remain in poverty even while employed.²
- The core challenge is not youth effort—African youth are working—but the absence of systems that convert education, skills, and mobility into productive, protected, and sustainable employment.
- Youth employment pressures are structural, not cyclical: first-time jobseekers face labour markets dominated by low-productivity, informal work with few entry points into stable employment. Demographic growth, uneven economic transformation, and limited formal labour absorption combine to weaken entry points into stable employment.
- Fewer than half of African youth are engaged in education or training. In sub-Saharan Africa, only around 40% of youth (15–24) were in school or training in 2023, compared with over 60% in high-income regions, reflecting persistent access and affordability constraints.³
- Africa is the only region where youth labour-force growth is accelerating, with an estimated 70+ million additional young labour-market entrants by 2050, placing sustained pressure on education, TVET, and training systems to deliver job-relevant skills at scale.⁴
- The majority of young African workers are mismatched to their jobs, with low- and middle-income countries (including sub-Saharan Africa) showing that around two-thirds of young

² Africa Youth Employment Outlook 2026 – World Data Lab & Mastercard Foundation

³ ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024, https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/GET_2024_EN_web4.pdf

⁴ ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024, https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/GET_2024_EN_web4.pdf

adults work in jobs that do not match their level of education, driven largely by under-qualification and weak training–employer linkages.

- Nearly one in four African youth is NEET, reflecting persistent breakdowns in school-to-work transitions, limited access to first work experience, and barriers to re-entry into learning or work.
- Education outcomes remain constrained: only about 9% of young Africans complete tertiary education, while access to quality technical, vocational, and work-based training remains uneven as economies shift toward services and higher-skill roles.
- Skills mobility depends not only on training, but on whether qualifications, competencies, and work experience are trusted and recognized by employers, regulators, and destination labour markets. For these reasons, the AU Migration Policy Framework highlights skills portability and mutual recognition of qualifications as part of Africa’s labour migration governance agenda.
- Participation in education around the world has expanded, but unevenly: globally, the share of youth in schooling or training rose from 38% in 2000 to 48% in 2023, yet remained just 40% in low-income countries, compared to over 60% in high-income countries.⁵
- Education still improves labour-market outcomes, but returns are weakening: tertiary-educated youth are less likely to be NEET, informal, or low-paid, yet slow structural transformation has limited the availability of higher-skilled jobs needed to sustain these gains.
- Skills mismatches remain pervasive: around two-thirds of young adult workers in low- and middle-income countries hold qualifications that do not match their jobs, reflecting weak alignment between education, training systems, and employer demand.

2. Additional Data on Africa-EU Mobility

- The majority of African mobility, around four out of five movements, takes place within Africa, underscoring that mobility is primarily a regional and domestic labour-market phenomenon, not only a Europe-facing issue.
- Africans account for only about 15% of the global migrant population, despite being the world’s fastest-growing youth workforce. This reinforces the equally important need to focus on African labour markets, regional mobility, and intra-African pathways.
- Rapid growth in Africa’s working-age youth population—over 10 million new labour-market entrants each year—makes mobility a structural response to employment pressure, not a temporary crisis behavior.
- As Europe’s population ages and labour shortages grow, Africa’s expanding youth workforce represents a long-term opportunity—if mobility pathways are aligned with skills recognition, labour demand, and protection.

⁵ ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024, https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/GET_2024_EN_web4.pdf

- In 2024, the EU issued around 3.5 million first residence permits to non-EU citizens. Employment was the largest reason for first permits, accounting for 31.9% of all first residence permits. ⁶This shows that legal migration to Europe is already significantly linked to labour-market demand. The challenge is whether African youth can access these pathways through fair, transparent, and recognized skills channels.
- EU labour shortages create a potential basis for skills mobility partnerships, but the opportunity should not be understood as a general solution to African youth unemployment. The strongest case for Africa–EU skills mobility is therefore sector-specific: identifying real shortages, preparing workers to meet occupational and language requirements, ensuring recognition of qualifications, and matching candidates to verified employers.
- Skills mobility partnerships raise a different and important policy implication. Africa–EU skills mobility should not be framed as simply moving African workers to Europe. It should be designed as a mutual-benefit system that includes skills development, occupational standards, language preparation, certification, recognition of qualifications, ethical recruitment, employer engagement, worker protection, and reintegration or circularity options where relevant. Done well, skills mobility can expand opportunity for young Africans, address specific labour-market needs in both Africa and Europe. Done poorly, it risks reproducing skills waste, exploitation, and politically contested forms of migration.

3. Skills Alone Do Not Create Jobs – Transitions Do

- Youth disadvantage in labour markets is driven in part by a “last-in, first-out” mechanism: employers systematically favour candidates with previous work experience, leaving first-time jobseekers at a disadvantage. This structural barrier contributes to persistently higher youth unemployment, which is typically two to three times higher than adult unemployment across regions.
- Education and training systems often operate separately from labour-market intelligence, employer-demand, and occupational standards - producing skills without pathways to jobs.
- The core bottleneck lies in weak transition systems, —from education into wage employment or viable self-employment.
- Without effective intermediation, matching, skills recognition and trusted certification, employment-readiness support, and access mechanisms, even relevant skills fail to translate into income.
- As a result, youth move between education, unemployment, informality, survival entrepreneurship, and migration.
- The policy focus must shift from skills supply alone to skills-to-work conversion: how skills are recognized, matched, used, and translated into income.

⁶ Eurostat. *Residence permits – statistics on first permits issued during the year.*

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Residence permits - statistics on first permits issued during the year](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Residence_permits_-_statistics_on_first_permits_issued_during_the_year)

4. Mobility Delivers Access and Opportunity in Labour Markets

- Labour demand and supply are geographically and sectorally uneven, while education systems remain largely place-bound. Young people often need to move to where opportunity, employers, training, or markets are located.
- Young people respond rationally by moving—to urban centres, secondary cities, growth corridors, and sometimes across borders.
- In the absence of systems, reliable information, fair recruitment, documentation, and protection, mobility often becomes irregular, unsafe, and exclusionary, particularly for young women.
- While mobility can support improved employment outcomes when well aligned with labour-market demand, in practice many migrants face under-employment, skills mismatch, or skills wastage, limiting the extent to which education and skills translate into work.
- Domestic, regional, and international mobility are therefore structural features of youth employment, not policy deviations.
- Mobility is not equally accessible. Poorer youth often cannot afford transport, documentation, recruitment fees, accommodation, or time away from family responsibilities. Well-designed mobility systems must reduce these barriers and prevent debt-financed migration.

5. Missing Links in the System

- Youth employment succeeds when multiple functions work together:
 - Labour-market information and forecasting
 - Skills matching and recognition
 - Access to first work experience
 - Ethical recruitment and intermediation
 - Worker protection and portability of social security
- Most investments focus on inputs (training, grants, entrepreneurship), not market access systems that determine whether young people obtain decent work.
- Education systems alone cannot compensate for weak labour-market infrastructure, weak employer engagement, poor information, and unsafe or inaccessible mobility pathways.
- Where opportunity is uneven, mobility governance becomes part of the employment system itself.
- Without these connecting functions, good education outcomes still fail to translate into decent work.

6. IOM's Value Proposition – A Systems Enabler for Youth Employment

- IOM operates across the full mobility spectrum, working with aspiring, returning, displaced, and excluded youth.
- We position safe, regular labour mobility as a bridge to jobs, not a substitute for local development, job creation, or investment in origin communities.
- IOM works on the functions that block transitions to work: labour-market information, matching, skills recognition, ethical recruitment, pre-departure and post-arrival support, protection, grievance referrals, and reintegration.
- Our operational presence, government trust, and convening role allow us to work at scale, including in fragile and hard-to-reach contexts.

- This makes IOM a systems partner - not just an implementer - helping governments and partners design, coordinate, and institutionalize the pathways that connect education, mobility, and decent work.
- IOM's value also lies in managing the risks of mobility: misinformation, exploitative recruitment, contract substitution, skills wastage, discrimination, gender-based violence, and weak access to remedy.

7. Turning Education and Mobility Into Dignified Work at Scale

- Youth pathways must reflect real labour-market behaviour, combining wage employment, self-employment, and enterprise growth.
- Labour mobility pathways—domestic and cross-border—help align skills development with real demand when they are regular, affordable, demand-led, rights-based, and linked to recognition and protection.
- Measurement must track employment quality, (which considers the inclusion of wages, retention, contract compliance, safety, access to remedy, social protection, skills use, career progression, and outcomes for women and excluded groups), protection outcomes, and sustainability, not just participation.
- Scale requires alignment with government systems, regional labour markets, employers, training providers, worker organizations, financing mechanisms, and long-term institutional ownership.
- The objective is not movement alone, but decent and fulfilling work.

8. Examples of IOM Interventions

- **Youth Business Incubators (East & Horn of Africa):** Cohort-based enterprise model combining skills, mentorship, and market linkages—demonstrates how skills, mentorship, market linkages, and enterprise support can help mobile, displaced, or underserved youth convert capabilities into livelihoods.
- **Promoting Intra-Regional Labour Mobility (Southern and West Africa):** Links youth employment, entrepreneurship, and migration governance to reduce irregular migration while expanding job access.
- **Inclusive Youth Employment in Informal Retail (South Africa):** Addresses informal labour markets, youth unemployment, and social cohesion by linking marginalized youth to real income opportunities.
- **Enterprise Development Fund (multiple contexts):** Market-driven SME financing model that mobilizes private and diaspora capital to support youth- and women-led enterprises.

Example Framing Suggested By SRD, "100 Young People" from [News 18](#)

Summary:

If Africa had 100 young people, the story would not be that young people are inactive or unwilling to work. Most would be studying, working, searching, moving, trading, caring, or combining several livelihood strategies. But only a minority would access stable, formal, protected wage employment. Many would be in informal or low-quality work; some would be unemployed or outside education and training; and many would need to move to reach opportunity. This shows that the critical constraint is not skills alone. It is access: access to information, first work experience, skills recognition, fair

recruitment, mobility pathways, finance, protection, and employers. Where movement is necessary to reach opportunity, mobility governance becomes part of the employment system itself.

- If Africa had 100 young people, the majority would have invested in schooling or skills development, and most would be working. However, the overwhelming share would be in informal or low-quality jobs, with only a small minority accessing stable, formal waged employment—showing that education and effort far outpace job creation and job quality across the continent.
- **Unemployment and NEET status reflect blocked transitions, not disengagement**
Around one in four of those 100 young people would be unemployed, underemployed, or NEET, often cycling between education, job search, informal work, and inactivity—illustrating systemic failures in school-to-work transitions rather than a lack of effort or aspiration.
- **Informality is the dominant labour-market outcome**
For most of the remaining young people, informal or survival self-employment would be the norm, not a stepping stone—underscoring that informality is the primary labour market African youth actually enter.
- **Mobility is a rational response to uneven opportunity**
With jobs and productive sectors unevenly distributed across countries, regions, and cities, many of those 100 young people would need to move—within countries, across regions, or internationally—to find work. Mobility is therefore a structural feature of youth employment in Africa, not an exception.
- **The critical constraint is access, not skills alone**
The “100 young people” lens shows that outcomes depend less on skills acquisition alone and more on access—to first work experience, labour-market information, intermediation, recognition, and protection. Without these connecting systems, education does not convert into income.
- **Employment systems and mobility systems are inseparable**
When movement is necessary to reach opportunity, mobility governance becomes part of the employment system itself. Across Africa, well-regulated, safe, and demand-aligned mobility increases the likelihood that education leads to decent and sustainable work.



SESSION II: MEMBER STATES STATEMENTS

Intervention du Benin: Hon. Emilie SAMA TIBOUTE

Intervention sur la jeunesse et la mobilité des jeunes

L'Afrique est le réservoir des ressources et matières premières, elle est en pleine construction de son développement et pourtant il y a un fort taux de chômage

Quel contraste !

Il n'y a pas de dignité sans travail et donc la migration n'est pas toujours voulue.

Ki-Zerbo disait : « On ne développe pas, on se développe »

Ki-Zerbo était un grand intellectuel panafricaniste et théoricien du développement endogène. Et par cette citation, il voulait dire que le véritable développement ne peut être imposé de l'extérieur : un peuple doit puiser dans ses propres ressources humaines, culturelles, historiques et économiques pour construire son avenir.

Nous avons besoin de faire de nos pays de s hub technologiques, former les compétences qui seront utilisées.

Quand nous prenons nos douches, nos cuisines, nos maisons etc. les $\frac{3}{4}$ sont importés. Même les allumettes sont importées.

Et c'est pour cette raison que nous pensons à un Erasmus à l'africaine qui pourrait devenir un puissant instrument d'intégration continentale, de mobilité des talents et de construction d'une identité panafricaine concr-te dans l'esprit de l'union africaine et de la zone de libre échange continentale.

Former en Afrique, circuler en Afrique, construire en Afrique et créer ainsi une élite panafricaine connectée utile à leur pays .

STATEMENT

BY

HONOURABLE MR. CATERPILLAR KAINANGURA HIKUAMA

Member of Parliament of the Republic of Botswana

Chairperson: Portfolio Committee on Basic Education & Skills Development

OCCASION: 1st Plenary Session of the Africa-EU Parliamentary Assembly

VENUE: Eswatini

DATE: 12th May 2026

1.0. SALUTATIONS

- **Co-Presidents of the Assembly,**
- **Honourable Members of Parliament from Africa and Europe,**
- **Representatives of the OACPS and the European Union,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Good day,

2.0. INTRODUCTION & THE, SHARED VISION

It is a profound honour to stand before this inaugural session of the Africa-EU Parliamentary Assembly. As we gather here in Ezulwini-Eswatini, we mark a historic milestone in our inter-parliamentary cooperation under the **Samoa Agreement**.

I bring you greetings from the Republic of Botswana. Our message today is clear: Botswana stands firmly aligned with the shared vision of a strengthened Africa-EU partnership—one that does not merely "include" youth but places them at the absolute **epicentre** of our cooperation.

For Botswana, investing in education, skills, and mobility is more than a social priority. It is the cornerstone of our **National Development Strategy** and the fuel for our transition from a resource-based to a **knowledge-based economy**.

3.0. BOTSWANA'S PROGRESS: THE STEAM & TVET REVOLUTION

In recent years, Botswana has made significant strides in re-engineering our educational landscape. We are not just expanding access; we are ensuring relevance. Through our **National Human Resource Development Strategy**, we have pivoted toward the sectors of the future:

- **STEAM Excellence:** Institutions like the **Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST)** are leading our charge into the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- **TVET Modernization:** We are reforming Technical and Vocational Education to ensure our youth are not just "degree holders," but "skill owners" ready for a globalized workforce.

4.0. THE DYNAMICS OF MOBILITY: OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS

We recognize that mobility is a powerful engine for innovation. While many of our students benefit from European scholarships, we must be candid about the "friction" in the system. To truly unlock the potential of our youth, we must address:

- 4.1. Administrative Barriers:** The complexity and length of visa procedures remain a significant deterrent.
- 4.2. Financial Constraints:** The high costs of international study often exclude talented youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 4.3. Recognition Gaps:** We need a robust **Africa-EU Platform** for the mutual recognition of qualifications to ensure a degree in Gaborone carries its rightful weight in Brussels, and vice versa.

5.0. STRENGTHENING THE ERASMUS+ PARTNERSHIP

Botswana applauds the **Erasmus+** flagship program. Its focus on social inclusion and the "green and digital" transitions mirrors our own national aspirations. We are keen to explore deeper cooperation under this framework, specifically targeting:

- **Expanded Traineeships:** Creating direct pathways for our university and TVET students to gain hands-on experience in European industries.
- **Professional Development:** Empowering our teachers and trainers with international exposure.
- **Blended Mobility:** Leveraging Botswana's recent investments in **digital infrastructure** to combine online learning with short-term physical exchanges, ensuring that even those in our most remote areas are not left behind.

6.0. THE CALL FOR A BALANCED FRAMEWORK

Honourable Colleagues, Botswana advocates for a **Structured Africa-EU Mobility Framework**. This framework must promote **Circular Mobility**. We do not seek a "brain drain"; we seek a "brain gain." We want our graduates to acquire world-class skills abroad and feel empowered to return home to build the Botswana—and the Africa—we want.

7.0. CONCLUSION

As we deliberate over these three days, let us remember that our policies must be **inclusive**. Whether it is a young woman in a rural village or a person living with a disability, our success will be measured by the doors we open for those who have historically been left behind.

Botswana remains a committed partner. Let us advance a mobility agenda that is fair, predictable, and mutually beneficial.

I thank you for your kind attention.

CONTRIBUTION OF RWANDA ON THE TOPIC OF MOBILITY AND YOUTH EDUCATION

**Honorable Co-Chairs,
Distinguished delegates,**

I would like to simply observe that we need a transformative impact of investing in young people. Through innovation hubs, digital literacy programmes, and partnerships, young people will increasingly participate in technology, research, and entrepreneurship ecosystems. No country can address these issues alone. A stronger solidarity that places youth at the centre of our partnership must be a priority. Let us work together to build bridges of knowledge, opportunity and solidarity.

Genuine partnerships require mobility systems that are fair, accessible and mutually beneficial.

**Honorable Co-Chairs,
Distinguished delegates,**

Rwanda has established itself as a top performer in visa openness, having implemented a comprehensive visa-free for all African citizens, citizens of the Commonwealth and the Francophonie, reinforcing its role as a regional hub for education, tourism and business.

I think this is a good example to emulate.

Thank you.



**PROPOSED INTERVENTION BY HON. DANIEL BARRAN SILLO (MP), DEPUTY
SPEAKER OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA, ON THE OCCASION OF
THE EU-AFRICAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON CHALLENGES
AND OPPORTUNITIES RELATED TO MOBILITY AND YOUTH EDUCATION**

Wednesday, 13 May 2026 | 11:00 – 13:00

Honourable Co-President,

I thank you for giving me the floor.

My delegation wishes to begin by expressing appreciation for the longstanding partnership between Africa and the European Union in the area of education and skills development. Programmes such as Erasmus+ and other academic mobility initiatives have opened valuable opportunities for many young Africans to acquire knowledge and gain important professional experience. We commend the continued expansion of these programmes

However, Honourable Colleagues, as the global economy continues to change rapidly, there is also a need to continuously review and modernise these programmes so that they remain aligned with the realities, priorities of our countries and aspirations of today's youth.

My first message concerns the content and focus of educational programmes. Many scholarship and mobility programmes were designed at a time when global economic and labour market demands were very different from what we see today. At that time, much of the focus was placed on social sciences, administration and management. These disciplines remain important and continue to play a valuable role in nation-building.

However, the structure of the global economy has evolved significantly. Today, competitiveness and economic transformation are increasingly driven by science, technology and innovation. We therefore need to place greater emphasis on fields that are shaping the future economy, including engineering, artificial intelligence, digital technology, renewable energy, biotechnology, advanced manufacturing and other science and technology-related disciplines.

My delegation therefore calls for a strategic review of scholarship and mobility programmes so that they better respond to current global realities, the changing needs of our economies, and the aspirations of today's youth.

My second message concerns mobility and the long-term impact of these educational investments. We have observed that many young Africans, particularly those trained in highly specialised fields, often remain abroad after completing their studies. While mobility programmes are intended to build skills and human capital for our countries, in some cases the benefits are not fully transferred back home.

One of the reasons for this situation is that opportunities to apply advanced knowledge, research and innovation within our countries are still limited. Many young professionals return home highly skilled and motivated, but without the research environment, infrastructure, financing or industrial ecosystem necessary for them to fully utilise their expertise. As a result, many end up continuing their careers abroad.

My delegation therefore calls for stronger Africa-EU cooperation in building supportive ecosystems that can attract, utilise and retain talent within Africa. This includes increased investment in centres of excellence, research institutions, innovation hubs, technology parks, digital infrastructure and industrial partnerships across our continent.

I thank you.

INTERVENTION BY ZIMBABWE

I rise to contribute to this important debate on the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme, a programme that seeks to strengthen academic cooperation, student exchanges, and institutional partnerships across our continent.

This programme comes at a critical time for Africa. We are a continent with a rapidly growing youthful population. Nearly every African country speaks about industrialisation, innovation, digital economies, and modernization. However, none of these ambitions can succeed without investing in human capital.

Education remains one of the strongest tools for transforming Africa.

The Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme recognizes that African students, researchers, and academic institutions must collaborate more closely. It promotes scholarships, mobility opportunities, institutional cooperation, and skills development linked to climate change, entrepreneurship, and employability.

These are commendable objectives.

However, Mr. President, we must approach this matter with balance and honesty. Mobility must not become another channel through which Africa loses its brightest minds permanently. Africa already suffers from significant brain drain in medicine, engineering, academia, and technology. If mobility programmes are not linked to industrial growth and economic opportunities within Africa, we risk training talent for export while our own institutions remain weak.

We therefore need policies that encourage return service, regional innovation hubs, and reinvestment of skills into African economies.

Secondly, the benefits of such programmes must not remain concentrated in urban elites.

In many rural communities across Africa, students still learn under difficult conditions. Some schools lack laboratories, internet access, libraries, and even adequate classrooms. Many talented young people from rural regions never hear about scholarship opportunities because of poor communication systems and digital exclusion.

If mobility programmes are truly inclusive, they must deliberately target rural youth, women, persons with disabilities, and disadvantaged communities.

Mr. President,

Africa must also address the issue of qualification recognition. It cannot be acceptable that an African graduate struggles more to work in another African country than

elsewhere outside the continent. Regional integration must include harmonisation of academic standards and mutual recognition of qualifications.

Furthermore, the programme correctly identifies climate change and green transition skills as priorities.

This is important because Africa is already facing droughts, floods, food insecurity, water shortages, and environmental degradation. Academic cooperation must therefore produce practical solutions in agriculture, renewable energy, mining technology, irrigation systems, and climate adaptation.

Mr. President,

Education must also connect directly with economic production.

Universities cannot continue producing graduates who cannot find opportunities within their own economies. There must be stronger partnerships between higher education institutions and industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, mining, tourism, and technology.

Africa's future depends not only on educating young people, but on creating economies capable of absorbing their skills.

Lastly, while international partnerships are welcome, Africa must gradually strengthen domestic investment in education and research. Sustainable development cannot depend entirely on external support.

As Zimbabwe and as Southern Africa, we support initiatives that promote African cooperation, skills transfer, innovation, and youth empowerment. However, mobility must translate into tangible development outcomes for ordinary African citizens.

Our goal must not simply be movement across borders.

Our goal must be building a skilled, confident, innovative Africa that develops itself using its own human capital.



**WOMEN'S FORUM: 'EMPOWERING
WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE VALUE
CHAINS AS A DRIVER OF
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT'
IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE UN
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE
WOMAN FARMER (IYWF) 2026.**



WOMEN'S FORUM: SPEAKERS



**MINISTRY OF WOMEN AFFAIRS, COMMUNITY, SMALL AND
MEDIUM ENTERPRISES DEVELOPMENT**

**SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF WOMEN AFFAIRS,
COMMUNITY, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES DEVELOPMENT**

HON. MONICA MUTSVANGWA (SENATOR)

**AT THE WOMEN'S FORUM ON THE MARGINS OF THE 1ST AFRICA-
EU PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

EZULWINI, KINGDOM OF ESWATINI

13 MAY 2026

SALUTATIONS

- The Co-Presidents of the Africa–EU Parliamentary Assembly
- Honourable Speakers
- Members of Parliament
- Distinguished Delegates from Africa and the European Union
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening.

It is a profound honour to address this Women’s Forum convened on the margins of the 1st Africa–EU Parliamentary Assembly here in Ezulwini, Kingdom of Eswatini. I sincerely thank the organisers for inviting Zimbabwe to contribute to this important dialogue taking place at a defining moment in Africa–EU relations and in the global movement for women’s empowerment.

This Assembly, established under the Samoa Agreement, marks the beginning of a renewed institutional partnership between Africa and the European Union, grounded in cooperation, shared prosperity, and inclusive development. It is therefore fitting that one of the central conversations of this historic gathering focuses on women and agriculture, because agriculture remains the backbone of many African economies, and women remain the backbone of agriculture itself.

I am particularly encouraged that this Forum is being held during the United Nations International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026. This global observance recognises what African communities have always known: that women are central to food security, nutrition, environmental stewardship, economic resilience, and community survival.

Across the world, women work in every segment of agrifood systems. They are farmers, processors, traders, fishers, beekeepers, exporters, scientists, entrepreneurs, and custodians of indigenous knowledge systems. Yet despite their immense contribution, women continue to face unequal access to land, finance, markets, technology, training, and decision-making.

The International Year of the Woman Farmer is therefore not merely a celebration of women's contribution to agriculture. It is a global call to action. It calls upon governments, financial institutions, development partners, and the private sector to close gender gaps, invest in women's leadership, and build fair, inclusive, and sustainable agrifood systems that leave no woman behind.

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN ZIMBABWE

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Zimbabwe's approach to women's economic empowerment cannot be separated from our national history and liberation struggle. Zimbabwe witnessed a painful rebirth as a modern African nation in 1980. A youthful generation paid the supreme sacrifice in a protracted liberation war against a deeply entrenched racist settler minority regime of British imperial origin.

The liberation struggle became a total people's war that mobilised all sectors of society, including women, as equal participants in the fight for freedom and justice. Women were fighters, organisers, mobilisers, caregivers, providers, and custodians of communities under immense hardship and oppression.

As I stand before you today, I do so not only as a Minister in the Government born out of that liberation struggle, but also as one of its surviving participants and products. I speak as someone shaped by that crucible of sacrifice, courage, solidarity, and unwavering hope for a better future.

For those of us who lived through those difficult years, history is never abstract. It informs how we understand justice, development, inclusion, and the responsibility we carry toward future generations.

Our liberation struggle was never solely about political independence. It was fundamentally about restoring dignity, reclaiming economic agency, and dismantling systems that excluded the majority from meaningful participation in the economy.

Equal gender participation therefore became an imperative. Women fought side by side with men during the liberation struggle, and in independent Zimbabwe, the foundations were laid for women's equal participation in nation-building.

Age-old discriminatory traditions, customs, and practices gradually gave way to constitutional and legislative reforms. Women ceased to be legal minors in socio-economic affairs. Equal access to land ownership was entrenched as a constitutional principle. The girl child gained equal access to education, including Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), strengthening Zimbabwe's national talent pool and capacity for innovation.

The Zimbabwean woman of today has earned her freedoms through struggle and sacrifice. She is not the product of the generosity of a condescending patriarchy.

These historical foundations continue to shape Zimbabwe's contemporary Gender Value Chains agenda.

WOMEN AND AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAINS

In Zimbabwe, as in many African countries, women constitute nearly sixty percent of the agricultural workforce. They till the land, plant the seeds, tend crops, preserve harvests, process food, and sustain rural economies. They feed families, communities, and nations.

Yet for many years, women remained concentrated at the lowest and least profitable levels of agricultural production. They produced the food but received only a fraction of the final value, while middlemen captured the greater share of profits.

Studies indicate that intermediaries often capture more than 85 percent of the value generated by women producers. This economic imbalance is rooted in historical inequalities that limited women's control over productive assets, markets, and financing.

This is why the development of Gender Value Chains is not merely a technical or economic programme. It is part of the unfinished business of liberation itself.

When we advocate for inclusive value chains, we are saying that women must not remain confined to the lowest levels of production. Women must occupy strategic positions across the entire economic spectrum — from production to processing, financing, innovation, industrialisation, trade, and global market participation.

We are called upon to build economies that reflect the very values for which so many sacrificed during the liberation struggle: equality, dignity, participation, justice, and shared prosperity.

THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Empowering women in agricultural value chains is not merely a social aspiration. It is an economic development imperative with measurable national benefits.

Women consistently reinvest a larger proportion of their income into food, healthcare, and education. When women earn more through value chains:

- Child nutrition improves
- Infant mortality declines
- School attendance increases
- Household resilience strengthens
- Long-term human capital grows

Closing gender gaps in agricultural value chains also increases productivity. Studies show that if women farmers had equal access to productive resources, agricultural output would rise significantly, reducing food imports and stabilising local economies.

Value chain integration also moves women from subsistence agriculture into commercial production. When women process, package, and market their

own produce, they generate taxable income, create jobs, and contribute meaningfully to national GDP growth.

Women-led value chains also promote diversification into high-value sectors such as horticulture, spices, and essential oils, which generate stronger export earnings and higher returns per hectare.

Investing in women's control of agricultural value chains is therefore a direct investment in national economic transformation.

ZIMBABWE'S POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Guided by the National Gender Policy, Zimbabwe has implemented several initiatives to promote equitable economic empowerment.

The National Broad-Based Women Economic Empowerment Framework sets out strategies to close gender gaps in ownership and control of productive assets while transforming traditional livelihood activities into viable economic enterprises.

Under the leadership of His Excellency President Dr. Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, Zimbabwe's Second Republic has advanced a national vision anchored on inclusive development and shared prosperity under Vision 2030.

The President has articulated several guiding national principles:

- "Zimbabwe can only be built by its own people."
- "Leaving no one and no place behind."
- "Zimbabwe is open for business."
- "Zimbabwe is a friend to all and an enemy to none."
- "Zimbabwe is a Pan-African nation-state."

These principles continue to shape Zimbabwe's women-centred development agenda.

KEY INTERVENTIONS SUPPORTING WOMEN IN VALUE CHAINS

1. Land Tenure Security

The Government has introduced bankable and transferable land tenure documentation. Women in resettlement schemes are now recognised as joint or primary landholders.

These documents enable women to use land as collateral for formal bank credit. Since the policy's implementation, Zimbabwe has recorded a significant increase in women-led agricultural loan applications.

2. Devolution and Local Economic Development

Zimbabwe's devolution agenda has transferred resources and decision-making authority to provinces and districts. Women now participate in local economic planning and determine which value chains should be prioritised within their communities.

One example is the Hauna Fruit and Vegetable Processing Plant, established in a region where women farmers produce substantial banana harvests. Located close to producers, the facility adds value to agricultural products, reduces post-harvest losses, and improves market access for women farmers.

3. Export-Led Agricultural Growth

The National Export Strategy and Horticulture Recovery and Growth Plan target high-value export crops such as blueberries, peas, chillies, and essential oils.

As a result, Zimbabwean women are increasingly exporting directly to European markets, bypassing exploitative intermediaries.

4. Women-Focused Agricultural Financing

Zimbabwe has introduced targeted financing mechanisms designed specifically to unlock women's participation and leadership in agribusiness value chains.

The Zimbabwe Women's Microfinance Bank has developed innovative financing products tailored to women's realities. Beyond cash loans, the bank provides in-kind support such as seeds, fertiliser, farming tools, and tractor schemes for women farmers.

Many women beneficiaries are now contracted to major agribusiness companies and receive significantly improved prices for their produce.

The Seed Revolving Fund, established in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization and the African Development Bank, provides certified seed loans to farmers, with women receiving forty percent of the allocations.

The Women's Development Fund and the Community Development Fund also provide low-interest, no-collateral financing facilities for women excluded from traditional banking systems.

5. Cooperatives and Market Access

My Ministry also oversees the cooperative sector, where women-led cooperatives continue to expand.

Through cooperative structures, women farmers gain access to financing, improved technologies, resilient crop varieties, and collective bargaining power. Aggregation enables women to align production with market demand, reduce overproduction, secure premium prices, and strengthen resilience against market volatility.

We are also investing in training on value addition, processing, packaging, and export standards to ensure women can compete effectively in premium international markets.

REGIONAL COOPERATION AND THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA

Distinguished delegates,

No country can build complete value chains in isolation. Economic transformation requires regional cooperation and cross-border synergies.

Zimbabwe is a committed member of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which creates opportunities for women entrepreneurs to access larger markets while reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers.

Across Africa and Europe, regional cooperation offers important opportunities to strengthen women-led agricultural trade and agro-processing. This includes the development of shared regional processing hubs located near borders, where women's cooperatives from multiple countries can collectively supply products for value addition and export.

Regional cooperation must also include harmonised sanitary and phytosanitary standards, simplified customs procedures, improved cold-chain systems, and secure cross-border logistics.

Many women currently trade agricultural products informally across borders. Formalising and supporting these trade routes would significantly strengthen women's businesses while benefiting participating economies.

Such synergies extend value chains beyond national boundaries, create economies of scale, and improve Africa's competitiveness in global agricultural markets.

A CALL FOR PARTNERSHIP

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Women are not seeking aid. They are seeking fair partnership in value chains.

We therefore invite African and European development finance institutions, impact investors, agribusiness firms, and development partners to support:

- Co-investment in women-led aggregation and processing hubs
- Technology transfer, including cold-chain systems, solar drying, and packaging technologies
- Direct and long-term offtake agreements with women's cooperatives
- Financing models that reduce dependence on exploitative intermediaries
- Programmes that support women's ownership and leadership across value chains

When women have access to finance, markets, technology, and decision-making power, they repay loans, increase productivity, strengthen communities, and grow economies.

Zimbabwe is backing this reality through concrete policies, dedicated financing mechanisms, cooperatives, and unwavering political commitment.

CONCLUSION

The International Year of the Woman Farmer reminds us that empowering women across agricultural value chains is not only a gender issue.

It is:

- an economic imperative,
- a food security imperative,
- a climate resilience imperative, and
- above all, a development imperative.

Zimbabwe remains fully committed to advancing policies and programmes that strengthen women's leadership and participation across agrifood systems.

As Africa and Europe begin this new chapter of parliamentary cooperation, may we collectively commit ourselves to building agricultural value chains that are inclusive, sustainable, competitive, and women-centred.

The question before us is no longer whether women should participate in agricultural value chains. The question is how quickly and how boldly we are prepared to act together to ensure that women fully lead, benefit from, and transform those value chains for generations to come.

The future of Africa's food systems will not be built without women.

It will be built because of women.

I thank you.



**Empowering Women in Agricultural Value Chains as a Driver for Economic
Development
Presentation for the OACPS**

By Hon. Senator Dr. Linda Nxumalo

Chairperson, Women Parliamentary Caucus – Kingdom of Eswatini

Programme Director,
Hon. Presidents
Hon. Speakers present
Hon. Ministers
Clerks of Paliarment, Distinguished Delegates,
Development Partners,
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon,

As the world commemorates the UN International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026, we are reminded that women are not only central to agriculture, but central to economic transformation, food security, climate resilience, and poverty reduction.

In Eswatini, agriculture contributes approximately 8% of GDP, yet supports over 70% of rural households. Women remain the backbone of this sector, particularly within smallholder farming, food production, informal agricultural trade, agro-processing, and household nutrition systems.

Program director, Despite this immense contribution, women farmers continue to face structural barriers:

- * Limited access to land ownership,
- * inadequate financing,
- * climate vulnerability,
- * limited mechanisation,
- * and weak access to export markets and value addition opportunities.

Yet, there is encouraging progress.

Through partnerships between the Government of Eswatini, the European Union, FAO, IFAD, WFP, UN Women, and other development partners, important strides have been made toward empowering women in agricultural value chains.

Recent FAO-supported initiatives have enabled women and youth farmers to transition from subsistence farming into commercial production through:

- * greenhouse technologies,
- * climate-smart agriculture,
- * protected farming systems,
- * and structured market access through NAMBoard.

The World Food Programme further reports that in 2024, over 1,000 smallholder farmers received technical support and inputs in Eswatini, with 70% of beneficiaries being women.

The newly launched SAPEMP programme, valued at approximately E851 million and supported by IFAD and the Green Climate Fund, is expected to directly benefit nearly 19,600 households and over 117,000 people through improved productivity, climate resilience and market access.

These interventions demonstrate that when women are empowered:

- * agricultural productivity improves,
- * household incomes rise,
- * food systems become more resilient,
- * and rural economies grow.

However, more must still be done.

Eswatini now has a unique opportunity to strengthen:

- * women-led agro-processing,
- * climate-smart agriculture,
- * irrigation systems,
- * digital agriculture,
- * export readiness,
- * and agricultural financing targeted specifically at women and youth.

Future collaboration opportunities with OACPS partners, the EU, UN agencies and the private sector should focus on:

- * value addition and industrialization,
- * women-focused agricultural financing,
- * regional trade under AfCFTA,
- * innovation and technology transfer,
- * and sustainable climate adaptation.

Across the region, there are strong lessons we can learn from:

- * Rwanda's women-inclusive land reforms and cooperative systems,
- * Kenya's integration of women into horticulture export value chains,
- * and Ethiopia's successful women-led coffee cooperatives.

These examples prove that investing in women farmers is not social welfare — it is economic strategy.

As Parliamentarians, we must continue strengthening policy oversight, gender-responsive budgeting, and legislative reforms that place women farmers at the centre of national development.

The empowerment of women in agriculture is ultimately about dignity, inclusion, productivity and economic justice.

If Africa is to achieve sustainable development, food security and inclusive growth, then the woman farmer must move from the margins of policy discussions to the centre of economic transformation.

With this Distinguished delegates,
I thank you.
Merci,
Obrigada ,
Asante sana,
Enkosi,
Siyabonga!

**INTERVENTION BY Ms Lauren Phillips, Director, Partnerships and UN Collaboration -
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**

Speaking Points :

**1st Plenary Session of the Africa–EU Parliamentary Assembly
Ezulwini, Eswatini 12-14 May 2026**

**Women’s Forum: 'Empowering Women in agriculture Value Chains as a driver of
Economic Development' in the framework of the UN International Year of the Woman
Farmer (IYWF) 2026.
13 May | 14:30 – 16:00**

1. Opening: Setting the Scene

- Distinguished Co-Chairs, Honourable Parliamentarians, Excellencies, colleagues,
- it is a great honour to address the Women’s Forum of the first Africa–EU Parliamentary Assembly.
- I would like to express FAO’s deep appreciation to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Eswatini and to the European Parliament for their invitation to participate in this discussion.
- This first Africa–EU Parliamentary Assembly marks an important moment in giving tangible meaning to the parliamentary dimension of the Samoa Agreement, strengthening political dialogue and shared action between our two continents.
- The continuous inclusion of the Women’s Forum in these Parliamentary Assemblies sends a clear and powerful message: inclusive dialogue is central — not peripheral — to the future of the Africa–EU partnership.
- It is especially meaningful that this discussion takes place in 2026, the International Year of the Woman Farmer, a global moment to recognise women farmers’ vital contributions to agrifood systems and to accelerate action to close persistent gender gaps.
- Gender equality is not a standalone issue; it is a cross-cutting driver of sustainable development, resilience and food security, and a cornerstone for transforming agrifood systems in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Introducing the IYWF 2026

- The IYWF 2026 highlights the critical role women play across agrifood systems, sustaining food security, rural communities, and economic development, while addressing the structural inequalities they continue to face.
- FAO along with the other RBAs, IFAD and WFP, was mandated to facilitate the implementation and observance of the year.

The Year celebrates women farmers in all their diversity. It celebrates women farmers working across every node of the value chain.

2. Women at the Heart of Agrifood Systems

- Across Africa and Europe, women and girls are essential actors in agrifood systems — as producers, processors, traders, entrepreneurs, caregivers and innovators, sustaining households, communities and entire food economies.
- Agrifood systems are crucial for human survival, and women form the backbone of these systems across the entire value chain — from production and processing to marketing, nutrition and care.
- Yet, despite their central role, gender inequalities remain among the most persistent structural barriers to building efficient, inclusive and resilient agrifood systems.
- The reality remains that women's contributions are undervalued and under-supported. In the EU, farming is male dominated, with only 31.6 % of farmers being women in 2020. In addition, most farms in the EU are small (under 5 hectares), and many depend on family labour.
- New data shows that 76 percent of working women in sub-Saharan Africa are employed in agrifood systems – the largest share worldwide. FAO's recent report on The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa, launched in April 2026 at the first World Food Forum – Africa highlights that closing the productivity and wage gaps in Africa could increase the regional GDP by 2.58 percent - USD 53 billion - and reduce food insecurity by 3.79 percent.
- Globally, women make up 41 percent of the agrifood workforce but face more precarious working conditions. They earn 78 cents for every dollar earned by men, and they typically farm smaller plots with less access to credit, inputs, training and technology.

- Recent estimates show that if we were able to close gender gaps in agrifood systems, we could raise global GDP by 1 trillion dollars and lift 45 million people out of food insecurity.
- Women continue to face systemic constraints, particularly in access to:
 - secure land and natural resources, with land rights remaining unequal in many countries
 - finance, inputs and technologies, including digital and financial services
 - extension services, skills development and markets
- leadership and decision-making spaces, including institutions shaping agrifood laws, policies and investments
- These constraints are deeply rooted in discriminatory social norms, institutional biases and unequal power relations, which limit women's full participation and leadership.
- As a result, women are over-represented in informal, low-paid and vulnerable jobs, earn less than men, and manage farms that are less productive — not due to lack of capacity, but because of unequal access to resources and opportunities.
- These inequalities do not only affect women's rights and livelihoods:
 - they reduce productivity and incomes
 - weaken resilience to climate, economic and conflict-related shocks
 - and undermine food security and nutrition for entire communities
- In both Africa and Europe, closing gender gaps in agrifood systems is therefore not optional — it is essential for achieving shared Africa–EU development objectives and transforming agrifood systems in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3. Why Gender Equality Is Now More Urgent Than Ever

- Agrifood systems are under **unprecedented pressure** from:
 - climate change and environmental degradation
 - conflicts and economic instability
 - rising food insecurity and poverty
- Evidence is clear:

- Closing gender gaps in productivity and employment generates significant economic, social and nutritional gains
- Failing to do so undermines food security, resilience, and sustainable growth
- Despite growing recognition, progress remains too slow, and policy commitments often fail to translate into concrete benefits for women.
- To this end, the IYWF 2026 focuses on three main objectives:
 - Increasing awareness and deepening understanding of the challenges faced by women farmers, including barriers related to land tenure, access to finance and productive resources, markets, and participation in decision-making processes.
 - Supporting the development and implementation of policies and long-term investments that empower women farmers and ensure their priorities remain central to global agendas beyond 2026.
 - Strengthening the availability, accessibility and use of high-quality gender-disaggregated data in agrifood systems. In this context, FAO is developing a dedicated gender domain within FAOSTAT to centralize gender-disaggregated data relevant to agrifood systems, provide information on gender-related indicators (such as SDG 5.a.2 on women’s land rights), and clearly identify data gaps. This will support more evidence-based policymaking and informed investment decisions.

4. The Strategic Role of Parliamentarians

- Parliamentarians are key governance actors in agrifood systems.
- Through legislation, budgeting and oversight, they can:
 - enact gender-responsive legal frameworks
 - ensure public investment reaches women farmers and entrepreneurs
 - hold institutions accountable for gender commitments
- Parliamentary action is essential to move from policy recognition to real transformation.

5. FAO’s Engagement with Parliaments

- FAO has supported **over 70 Parliamentary Networks and Institutions worldwide**, including in Africa and Europe.

- This support focuses on:
 - integrating gender equality into parliamentary agendas
 - strengthening legislative and oversight capacities
 - sharing evidence, tools, and good practices
- FAO works closely with parliamentarians to ensure that laws, policies, and investment plans translate into tangible outcomes for women in agrifood systems.

6. A Call to Action for the Africa–EU Partnership

- This Assembly offers a unique opportunity to:
 - align Africa–EU cooperation with gender-responsive agrifood transformation
 - ensure women’s priorities are reflected in joint recommendations to the Council of Ministers
- FAO looks forward to promoting this handbook together with parliamentarians, governments, civil society, international organizations and grassroots actors.
- Advancing gender equality in agrifood systems is not only a matter of rights - it is a strategic investment in a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable future.

7. Closing

- Women’s leadership in agrifood systems must be recognized, supported and institutionalized — not as an exception, but as a foundation for resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.
- Parliamentarians can — and must — be champions of gender-transformative agrifood system transformation, translating commitments into laws, budgets and oversight that deliver real results for women and girls.
- In this spirit of continued engagement with the parliamentary community, FAO is organizing the Third Global Parliamentary Summit Against Hunger and Malnutrition, which will be hosted by the African continent, in Kenya, on 16–17 November 2026.
- This Summit will provide a global platform for parliamentarians to exchange experiences, strengthen political commitment and accelerate action towards ending hunger and malnutrition, with gender equality at the heart of agrifood system transformation.

- All interested parliamentarians and partners are warmly invited to join efforts, contribute to the dialogue and work together towards a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood future.
- FAO stands ready to continue supporting Africa–EU parliamentary leadership in turning shared commitments into concrete action.



WOMEN'S FORUM: MEMBER STATES STATEMENTS

Intervention du Benin: Hon. Emilie SAMA TIBOUTE

Intervention sur le forum des femmes

Bonjour Mesdames et chères collègues,

Les femmes sont l'avenir de nos territoires

Je me suis demandée s'il y a des femmes agricultrices dans la salle, j'aurais aimé que des agricultrices du Bénin soient là pour partager leurs expériences

Je fus mentor de femmes entrepreneures aussi bien citadines que rurales et les défis auxquels elles sont confrontées m'ont amenée justement à faire une thèse

J'ai soutenu il y a peu une thèse sur l'entrepreneuriat des femmes vu par les auteures africaines où j'y ai fait un lien entre les féminismes africains, l'entrepreneuriat féminin et l'inclusion financière.

Et l'une des conclusions est qu'il faut encourager la positive masculinité positive,

Utiliser les féminismes africains qui sont des féminismes de négociation (et non de confrontation) basés sur nos réalités sociales et culturelles, impliquer les hommes en utilisant les soft skills ou soft power pour avoir leur adhésion.

Créer des financements dédiés comme un fonds dédié à l'entrepreneuriat de la femme rurale dénommée FIER (Fonds d'investissement de l'Entrepreneuriat Féminin)

Ma demande est comment par exemple l'UE peut aider ou participer à la création des fonds dédiés.

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

TOPIC: EMPOWERING WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAINS

Co- Presidents, Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Afternoon

Agriculture remains central to Kenya's economy, contributing significantly to employment, exports, and food security. Women form a substantial portion of the agricultural workforce, especially in dairy, horticulture, tea, coffee and informal agricultural trade.

In the Kenyan experience, women participate in nearly all stages of value chains which include- production, harvesting, storage, processing, and distribution. For instance, **in Dairy farming:** Women-led cooperatives have strengthened rural incomes and employment;

In Fish processing: women in Western Kenya and the Lake Region dominate small-scale fish trade and processing; **Similarly, in Tea, coffee and horticulture:** Women form the majority of harvest laborers and smallholder growers. These experiences show that women are not just workers but key drivers of agribusiness and food systems.

Despite their critical role, women continue to face major challenges, including limited access to land ownership, agricultural financing, extension services, technology, and markets.

While the Constitution and laws such as the Land Act, Community Land Act, and Matrimonial Property Act provide legal protection for women's land rights, implementation gaps remain particularly in rural and customary settings. Women are also disproportionately affected by

climate change, poor infrastructure, non-tariff trade barriers, and limited access to digital agricultural technologies.

There are ongoing policy efforts in Kenya aimed at supporting women in agriculture, including **climate-smart agriculture initiatives under the Climate Change Act, digital inclusion through the Digital Economy Blueprint, and value addition strategies under Vision 2030.**

To strengthen women's participation in agricultural value chains, **Kenya proposes the enforcement of land and inheritance laws, enhancement of agricultural extension and agritech targeting rural women, stronger parliamentary oversight on gender policy implementation, and increased support for women's participation in AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area) and Africa–EU sustainable agriculture partnerships.**

We also call upon our EU partners to collaborate with us on the expansion of affordable financing alternatives and climate-smart agricultural support through the Global Gateway Investment Package.

Empowering women in agriculture is not only an economic necessity but also a development priority, essential for reducing poverty, strengthening food security, and promoting inclusive and sustainable growth across Africa.

I thank you.

INTERVENTION BY RWANDA: Hon. Uwineza Beline

Topic for Women Forum: Empowering Women in agriculture Value Chains as a driver of Economic Development in the framework of the UN International Year of the Women Farmer 2026.

Thank you, Madam Co-Chair,

Rwanda reaffirms the central role of women in agriculture as key drivers of food security, rural transformation, and sustainable development. Agriculture remains a cornerstone of Rwanda's economy, contributing about 20% of GDP (2025) and employing 43.7% of the workforce. The empowerment of women in this sector is therefore both a development priority and an economic necessity.

Evidences show strong progress in women's economic inclusion within agriculture in Rwanda. Women represent 51.7% of the agricultural household population and account for 66.2% of employment across agricultural value chains, particularly in production. Access to Land among women stands at 94.8%, while formal non-bank savings increased from 44% to 53% by 2024, indicating improved financial inclusion. Women also hold 42% of leadership positions in agricultural cooperatives and constitute 43.2% of users of agricultural extension services.

In Rwanda, Ongoing agricultural modernization continues to expand opportunities through climate-smart agriculture, Subsidies and inputs to obtain improved seeds and fertilizers; improved access to finance and insurance, strengthened post-harvest infrastructure, and better market integration. Women-led enterprises are increasingly active in coffee, horticulture, and agro-processing, contributing to job creation and local economic resilience.

The Parliament of Rwanda remains committed to advancing gender-responsive policies and ensuring inclusive agricultural transformation. We recommend to promote an agriculture sector where women are not only participants but also leaders, innovators, and equal beneficiaries of development, and calling for strengthened global cooperation to build inclusive and resilient agricultural systems.

I thank you.