

Speech by Federal Chancellor Dr Angela Merkel on the occasion of the hand-over of the Building for Peace and Security to the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa on 11 October 2016

Madam Chairwoman,
Prime Minister,
Distinguished Commissioners, especially Commissioner Chergui,
Ambassadors,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I'm delighted to be here with you and to welcome the representatives of the 54 member states of the African Union as well as the Commissioners present today.

The partnership between Africa and Germany is based on shared interests, but above all on countless contacts – at state level, as well as between our civil societies, our companies, the churches and church organisations. Our cooperation is marked by joint efforts for sustainable economic development, for education, for good governance, for peace and security.

We see from this building today that our partnership is taking form in a very literal sense. I'm pleased that we're opening this new African Union Commission building together: the Julius Nyerere Building for Peace and Security. Its architecture combines local traditions with German technology. It thus epitomises the long-standing and stable relations between the African Union and the Federal Republic of Germany.

The African Union operates both within and in the wider world. Since its establishment, it has worked to foster solidarity and cohesion among African states and peoples. Julius Nyerere personifies this goal. Furthermore, the African Union ensures that the interests of the entire continent are heard and taken into account at international level.

There are many good reasons for this. For in the light of ever greater globalisation and the interconnectedness of our world, an increasing number of states are faced with the same challenges. Both good and bad developments are often not limited to individual countries but, rather, have an impact on neighbouring countries, as well as beyond a single region or continent. Take, for example, the financial and economic crisis, epidemics such as Ebola, terrorist activities or refugee movements and displacement. An international community is much better placed to tackle such challenges than an individual state on its own. I therefore firmly believe that global issues require global answers.

Africa, the continent you represent, is increasingly gaining global significance. It's therefore important that the African states represent their common interests with the greatest possible unity – with a recognised point of contact such as the African Union.

Ms Zuma, it's sometimes difficult to find unity. I don't think I'm giving away any secrets when I say that this has been our experience in the European Union, even though we have only 28 and not 54 member states. The readiness and capability to find and agree on compromises is and will remain vital: compromises in which the interests of individual countries are subordinate and yet reflected and which, taken together, represent the will of an entire continent.

The decisions we have to make are based on fundamental values such as human rights, political and economic participation as well as good governance. Human dignity is indivisible. Our main priority must be to uphold this maxim in our policies. If human dignity is violated – no matter where – then we all have a duty to act.

In his speech to the African Union in 2004, former President of the Federal Republic of Germany Horst Köhler found an apt description for the African Union. He spoke of the acceptance of the unique character of different parts of the world. He said that it was not acceptable “that anyone should invoke this special character to justify or give free rein to oppression and abuses directed against their fellow citizens.” Horst Köhler spoke back then of a “duty as citizens of the world” to draw attention to such things. That applies to every continent and to every country. We are all called upon

not to simply accept intolerable conditions but to express our determination to try and change them.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a very good example of this. Germany campaigned hard for its adoption. The fact that this Agenda was adopted by all member states of the United Nations last year and that it is not only an agenda for the developing countries, for emerging economies or for highly developed countries but, rather, an agenda for everyone shows that its importance should not be underestimated.

The Federal Republic of Germany's desire to live up to its international responsibility is evident from many examples. For instance, we're applying for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council in 2019 and 2020 so that we can once again shoulder responsibility.

The African Union is also driven by the will for change. This new building thus symbolises a shared goal: more peace and more security in Africa. For this is the key prerequisite for a life in dignity. This modern building provides the African Peace and Security Architecture with more room – both literally and figuratively.

The African Union Commission has made closer security cooperation a priority, improved structures and built up considerable capacities. At the African Union Summit in Kigali, you looked at sustainable financing and made a key decision on greater self-financing. This is of prime importance for the African Union's continued ability to act. The African Union and its regional organisations have demonstrated in many different ways the importance of the ability to act. It has already been possible to prevent some major outbreaks of violence through rapid reaction and mediation. This responsibility in action saves lives and opens up new prospects.

For instance, mediators and peacemakers are endeavouring to prevent genocide and civil wars from recurring in the Great Lakes Region. I have to admit that we're deeply concerned about the situation in Burundi. We can see there's a danger that the old conflict could flare up again. However, the Peace and Security Council of the African

Union and the East African Community are doing everything in their power to prevent this.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the aim is to enable free elections to take place. Ten years ago, German soldiers were among those who ensured that the presidential elections went off peacefully. Now, however, we're concerned that much of what was built up over the last few years could collapse. I'd therefore like to call on the political leaders in Kinshasa, in the interest of the entire population, to uphold the constitution and save the Congo from plunging into a profound crisis.

The situation in the Central African Republic gives cause for optimism. Thanks to a successful democratic transition, there is now hope of political stability and an economic upswing. Such developments are also crucial when it comes to destroying the breeding ground for terrorist militia. For they attempt to capitalise on instability, discontent and a lack of prospects. Often their influence stretches beyond national borders. It's therefore all the more important that the African Union and regional associations of affected states take action against terrorist organisations which have no respect for human life.

The African Union's engagement in Somalia is especially impressive. AMISOM is its largest military mission. The fact that free elections can take place in Somalia soon despite difficult circumstances would be a crucial milestone. We hope this can be achieved.

Ultimately, stable state structures are required to eliminate lawless zones and safe havens for terrorists. Special attention therefore also has to be paid to developments around Lake Chad. This region has not only been hard hit by climate change, droughts and overexploitation but has also suffered devastation at the hands of extremists. Thousands of people have already fallen victim to the brutal campaign waged by Boko Haram. Millions have fled – within their own country or to neighbouring countries. The scale of this humanitarian disaster is difficult to comprehend. But at least a multinational force has already achieved some important successes in the fight against the terrorists. For example, they were able to free 700 kidnapped women and children. However, it is absolutely vital that this operation

continues. The European Union will provide assistance amounting to 50 million euros.

The peacekeeping mission in Mali is also bolstered by joint engagement. Germany is providing support there with its own contribution. Up to 650 German soldiers are involved in MINUSMA. Ensuring the stability of Mali is crucially important for development throughout West Africa.

A look at the continent shows where the collapse of state structures can all too quickly lead. Libya is a sad example of this. It is now all the more crucial that we do everything in our power to stabilise Libya. I expressly support the African Union's efforts to use its influence in this area to help resolve the conflict. Perhaps in the past we didn't talk to you about it enough; that is something I am critically telling myself. The UN-led peace process is geared towards the prospect of an inclusive Government of National Accord in Libya. Such a government would then be our point of contact for curbing illegal migration.

We cannot and must not tolerate human traffickers putting the lives of others on the line. Human trafficking has to stop. Far too many people have already drowned in the Mediterranean. It is often young people in particular who embark on the journey to Europe with totally false perceptions. They are prepared to put their lives at risk without knowing what awaits them or whether they will even be allowed to stay. On their journey they are often treated very badly. Yesterday I was able to talk to some of these young people at the International Organization for Migration in the Niger. It was very sobering to hear what these young people have already had to endure.

Yet we also see that the majority of people who flee their homes remain in Africa. It is impressive to see that states with major development problems themselves are taking in refugees. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ethiopia, for example – and the Ethiopian Prime Minister is here today – for taking in around 700,000 refugees.

Germany is funding comprehensive humanitarian and development projects to support people in need and minimise the causes of migration. Our focus is on countries of origin as well as transit and host countries.

The EU-Africa Summit in Malta, where we adopted the Valletta Action Plan, was an important step in this direction. To implement this Plan, the European Union has set up an emergency trust fund with 1.8 billion euros. I know that your countries are now rightly calling for the swift implementation of this Valletta agenda. And rapid implementation is of the essence, as the suffering people urgently need help.

One important tool is migration partnerships with African states. Germany, together with France and Italy, is active particularly in Mali and the Niger.

However, the best way to combat migration and the threat of terrorism is sustainable economic development. Africa has considerable economic potential. Africa has many natural resources. And Africa has a growing middle class in many countries. Yet Africa also has a rapidly growing population. Africa's population is young, and harbours many hopes. The country of which I am Chancellor has an average age of around 45 years. In contrast, the average age in African countries is between 15 and 19 years. So on the one hand you can see how much hope this continent contains, and on the other hand how much disappointment can ensue if together we don't manage to convert these hopes into reality.

I therefore discern three key tasks. First: we need to strengthen private investment in Africa in order to create sustainable growth and jobs. For this we need an appropriate framework and fair trading conditions. Second: advances must be made in developing infrastructure – in the areas of transport, communication and energy. We can now point to successful experiences in the area of renewable energy sources. In view of the number of people on the African continent who still have no access to electricity, particularly in rural areas, we are, of course, aware that it is very difficult to develop the economy in these regions. That is why infrastructure is so crucial. Third: we need better vocational training that is more closely oriented to the labour market, thus increasing job prospects.

In 2017 Germany will assume the Presidency of the Group of 20. We will make the issues that concern you in Africa one of the priorities of the G20 agenda and also launch a large-scale initiative with Africa to this end. A conference due to take place half way through the year in Berlin will play a particularly important role, featuring high-ranking representatives from G20 states and African countries as well as from international organisations and the private sector. Before that our German African Business Summit is planned – this time in Nairobi. Many German enterprises already operate in Africa, but considerably more could do so. That is something that I and our entire Government are working to encourage.

The African Union is also the driving force behind economic integration on the continent. It is good to know that in this respect, too, the AU is a key partner for the European Union. Africa is a continent with a future. Now, in the present, we need to do the groundwork to ensure that the future of this continent is indeed a good one – and that is the responsibility of many people, including us, the countries of Europe. Germany and the European Union are happy to support you in this process. We stand alongside you but in a way that does not dictate how you should go about things. Rather, we want to be partners, who, incidentally, still have a lot to learn about your history, your culture and your motivation. Our knowledge of Africa in Europe is not adequate, that is true at least for me as Germany's Chancellor and for many other people in Germany.

We need to understand that Africa's wellbeing is in the interests of Germany and in the interests of Europe. We want to cooperate in this spirit – here in this building, too, if we are invited back. Be that as it may, this building is now at your disposal. My hope is that it will play a key role in ensuring that peace, reconciliation and security can become even more of a reality for the people in Africa than is the case today.

I wish you, Ms Zuma, all the very best for your work, and all the very best to the Commissioners and all of you who bear responsibility for peace and security. Make sure you work well together. Strive for compromise in the African Union. You could serve as a role model for the European Union if we hear that you've managed to resolve complicated problems quicker than we have. We could even have a competition.

Thank you very much.