



**MESSAGE BY H.E. MADAM JULIA DOLLY JOINER
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ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST AFRICA DAY ON DECENTRALIZATION AND
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT**

On 10 August 2012, Member States of the African Union will be celebrating the first ever **African Day on Decentralization and local Development**, established during the 18th Summit of the African Union held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 23 – 27 January 2012. In establishing this day, the African Union seeks, above all else, to remind Africans living on the Continent and in the Diaspora of the importance of decentralization in the edification of a people-centered Africa and to highlight the contributions of both our territories and local communities to the building of our nation-States. It also wishes to afford them the opportunity to focus attention each year on the challenges to which our States are today confronted in implementing decentralization and local development, with due regard for the opportunities that the latter offer for local governance consistent with the vision of the African Union.

The theme chosen for this maiden edition of the Africa Day on Decentralization and Local Development is: “**Financing decentralization, public services delivery and local development**”. This theme requires each and every one of us to pay special attention to one of the greatest challenges encountered by most of our States in implementing decentralization policies and achieving local development. Indeed, it compels us to reflect not only on the cogency of our policy options and the issue of the provision by our States to their local governments of requisite resources to permit their harmonious development, but also on their contribution in achieving national development goals.

Indeed, without resources commensurate to the challenges they encounter in delivering public services and achieving local development, local governments are doomed to inertia and inefficiency. We are all aware that decentralization does not consist solely in adopting standards neither does it boils down to a mere institutional cosmetic. The rules sanctioning it must be enforced in practice. Decentralization compels us to effectively transfer to legitimate local governments not only the resources they need to satisfy the needs of the population, but also the powers and management competencies attendant thereto, given the development responsibilities incumbent upon them.

The Celebration of this first edition of the **Africa Day on Decentralization and Local Development** by reflecting on the chosen theme thus appears as a *sine qua non* for supporting the decentralization process in our context today. There is no doubt that the Bureau of the Conference of African Ministers in charge Decentralization and Local Development sought to devote this first Day to this theme in light of the financial difficulties that impede the deepening of the decentralization process in

most of our Member States. The African Union Commission would like to avail itself of the opportunity afforded by this first Decentralization Day to urge all Member States to honor their commitments with respect to the transfer of resources to local governments as well as enhancement of their financial capacities.

The African Union Commission would also like to point out that the celebration of this first Day on Decentralization and Local Development under the theme, “**financing decentralization, public services delivery and local development**”, falls squarely in line with the African Union agenda as set forth in its Constitutive Act. It cannot be overemphasized that resolving the problems of the population and tackling the development concerns of our States constitutes one of the major strategic objectives of the African Union.

As one of the avenues likely to permit achievement of the African Union’s vision, this theme is to be appreciated in light of three fundamental legal instruments of our continental organization, which form not only part of the normative pillar of the African Governance Architecture, but also constitute the bedrock of governance for all our Member States whatever the level of their public action. The said instruments include the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (2003), the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007) and the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration (2011).

Throughout the world, particularly where decentralization has been experimented, corruption risks and confirmed cases thereof have been recorded. We are all aware that the States of our Continent are not immune to this scourge. Thus, improving the financing of decentralization must have as corollary the enhancement of mechanisms for preventing and combating corruption at local level in order to protect State resources meant to deliver better services to the population and secure local development. Indeed, significant resources cannot be entrusted to African local governments without at the same time requiring that they, in return, comply with good governance standards that are to be achieved today through corruption control, accountability, transparency and compliance with the right of access by the population to basic services and to development.

Until now, the greater focus of corruption control efforts has been the central State and, the local level, we all know, too often eludes the requirements of transparency, accountability and institutionalized control that permit at once to prevent and combat corruption. To reverse this trend, the African Union would like to urge all Member States to strengthen the mechanisms for transparency and accountability in the management of the resources allocated to local governments so as to prevent corruption that generally leads to illicit enrichment and huge loss of resources intended for public service delivery and the development of our territories.

The African Union Commission urges all Member States of the African Union to celebrate this Day with enthusiasm, fervor and real commitment. Such celebration may take various forms, ranging from the organization of brainstorming sessions on the chosen theme to experience-sharing on good practices while rewarding some of them. These various forms remain the best bet for infusing a fresh impetus into our collective action. Indeed, it is by identifying and rewarding good practices, good lessons and the best experiences as well as carrying out critical reflection thereon

with the intent to promote and disseminate pioneering practices that we will be able to learn from each other and forge ahead together towards States that are better governed at all levels to satisfy the needs of the population and meet the development demands of our territories.

The 6th “Africities” Summit that will be held in Dakar in Senegal, in December 2012 under the theme, “Building of Africa from its Territories” shall be another opportunity to deepen our reflection on the place of decentralization on the political, economic and social integration agenda of our Continent. While urging Member States and local stakeholders to participate massively, the African Union Commission calls on all Member States of our Union to put at the disposal of local governments the financial resources necessary to permit them contribute efficiently and creatively to the building of a united, integrated, prosperous, stable, peaceful and people-centered Africa playing a significant role in the concert of nations.

The African Union Commission wishes a happy celebration to all African local governments and to all local stakeholders of our dear Continent on the occasion of this first edition of the Africa Day on Decentralization and local Development.