



**CLOSING REMARKS BY
H.E. DR. AISHA ABDULLAHI (AMB.)
COMMISSIONER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

AT THE AFRICAN REGIONAL FORUM ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

**DELIVERED ON HER BEHALF BY
DR. MAMADOU DIA
AG. DIRECTOR FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS**

**ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
18 SEPTEMBER 2014**

Your Excellency, Dr. Michael Ado, Chairperson of the UN Working Group on Human Rights and Business and Distinguished Members present,

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, Heads of Delegations and Members of the Diplomatic Corp,

Mr. Eugene Owusu, UN Resident Coordinator,

Mr. Idrissa Kane, Deputy Representative of the UN OHCHR-EARO,

Mr. Kebour Ghenna, Executive Director of the Pan African Chamber of Commerce and Industry,

Mr. Tutu Alicante, Executive Director of EG Justice,

Distinguished Representatives of the UN Agencies,

Distinguished Representatives of the National Human Rights Institutions,

Distinguished Representatives of International and Regional Organizations,

Distinguished Representatives of the Civil Society Organizations,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of H.E. Dr. Aisha Laraba Abdullahi, Commissioner for Political Affairs of the African Union Commission, who is unable to be present here today at this closing ceremony of the 2014 African Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights organized jointly by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR), the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the Department of Political Affairs of the African Union Commission (DPA/AUC).

The African continent, richly endowed with natural resource, has witnessed decades of numerous human rights challenges resulting from a diverse range of factors, among them war, poverty, corruption, autocratic governance. It is against this background that Member States of the African Union, solemnly undertook to promote and safeguard freedom, justice, equality and human dignity in Africa by putting in place instruments to enforce these values. This includes the adoption of a number of instruments as well as the establishment of a number of mechanisms to promote and protect human and peoples' rights in Africa.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Africa is currently the world's fastest growing continent, and its GDP is expected to rise over the next decade, as foreign direct investment continues to grow. Many African countries have significant wealth of extractable natural resources and the continent continues to be a key source of minerals to the rest of the world. These developments provide a timely opportunity for promoting the integration of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights into regional governance frameworks as well as the business practices with a view to addressing business-related human rights challenges on the continent.

It is of particular relevance from the various interventions of our forum to note that business and human rights agenda are closely linked to key socio-economic rights enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Growth in GDP, foreign direct investment, extraction of vast natural resources, and global demand for minerals – all render the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights become of particular importance to African. Regional governance frameworks and state and business best practices will constitute valuable tools to address business-related human rights challenges in Africa.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

The African Union Commission is committed to joining forces with the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights to initiate a process of engaging African Member States to develop an African Strategy for the implementation of the Guiding Principles under the leadership of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. This will contribute to joining the dots and building mutual inter-linkages between global and regional efforts and strengthen the regional movement to address corporate practice that impacts negatively on enjoyment of human rights across the African continent. The process will bring together a wide range of stakeholders, some of them with contrasting points of view, to openly discuss how African governments, business and CSOs can move to address the impact of business activities on the rights of the people in Africa.

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights will form the basis of African home-grown strategy and also national action plans, which could hold great potential for widening awareness of standards, contributing to capacity building of relevant actors and leveraging ongoing efforts with a view to transforming business practices on the ground.

It would be paramount importance to contribute to the promotion of a community practice and constructive dialogue on business and human rights amongst governmental institutions, regional bodies, business, industry associations, civil society, national human rights institutions and other relevant stakeholders. Identifying challenges and ways to overcome them as well as learning from existing good practices represent another core aim.

Once again, I wish to conclude by expressing my gratitude to the Chairperson and Members of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR), the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) for the commitment shown to the AU Human Rights Agenda and by working together co-organize this important meeting here in Addis Ababa.

I thank you.