

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. MIROSLAV LAJČÁK, PRESIDENT OF THE
72ND SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, AT AFRICA DAY
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Excellencies,

*Her Excellency, Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the African Union,
Mr. Tageldin Ibrahim Hamad, Secretary-General of the Universal Peace Federation,
Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am honoured to be here, to mark the 55th anniversary of the establishment of the Organization of the African Unity – which is now the African Union. I want to start by thanking our organisers tonight: the African Group, the African Union, the African Ambassadors' Spouses Group, and the Universal Peace Federation. We need a night like this. For three reasons:

One: to celebrate. Because, for Africa, the future is bright. Economies are growing. Natural and human resources are abundant. Integration is happening faster than ever before. A continental free trade area is on the horizon. Technology is expanding rapidly. A growing youth population presents huge opportunities. A battle has been waged, against corruption. More and more women have decision-making power. And big steps are being taken, towards Sustainable Development. These are all trends which look set to continue. And we need to celebrate them.

But, secondly, this event is also a learning opportunity. Because, frankly, we all have a lot to learn, from Africa. In many different areas. But I will point to three in particular.

First: Peace. African mediators are usually first to the table, when tensions are high on the continent. And they are first on the scene, when conflict hits. They see things we don't see...they have access we don't have. And that is why we must listen and learn. The United Nations has made conflict prevention a priority. But the African Union has, frankly, been faster – in turning this priority into action. And here I will point to some initiatives, such as early warning mechanisms...the African Standby Forces...and efforts to silence the guns, by 2020. As both organisations work to better prevent – rather than respond to – conflict, stronger partnership is crucial.

Second: Sustainable Development. Through its Agenda 2063, Africa has set out a clear vision for its development. It has also been a major player, in work to implement our global Sustainable Development Goals. And, I think we are going to see even more action, on this front. I attended the Transform Africa Summit, in Rwanda, this month. And, I was really impressed by what I saw. Visionary leadership... commitment... innovative thinking... and real cooperation. These are all essential, if we want to accelerate Sustainable Development.

And third: Migration. Simply put, Africa has more experience than many of us. People have moved within...to...and from the continent – for generations. As you all know, we are approaching our final negotiations on the world's first Global Compact on Migration. And that means we need Africa's engagement – more than ever. Not only because of its experience and knowledge base – but because the voice of the African Group is listened to, by all.

Excellencies – dear colleagues,

Like I said, the future looks bright. Particularly, when it comes to partnership and cooperation – which is my third and final point, this evening United Nations-African Union engagement

has never been stronger. We have tangible frameworks in place. We have made strong commitments. And this is thanks to the strong cooperation between the Secretary General and the Chairperson of African Union Commission. Now, we need to keep up momentum. And, I hope to play my own, modest part.

During our luncheon earlier this year, you had an idea. You proposed a mechanism for annual meetings between the President of the General Assembly and the Chair of the African Union. I brought this proposal to President Kagame two weeks ago. And he agreed to hold regular meetings with the General Assembly's President. This is a positive step; one towards even more cooperation.

So....I will conclude here. But, I want to add one, last thing. Yes, the future is bright. But not for everyone. There are many people today – in Africa, and elsewhere – who do not have so much hope. They are the reason we are all here. And, they are the reason we need to work even closer together. This means more engagement... More partnership.... And more listening to, and learning from, an Africa on the rise.

Thank you.