

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB HEADLINERS LUNCHEON WITH
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION CHAIRPERSON MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT

SUBJECT: THE ROLE OF A UNITED AND INTEGRATED AFRICA

MODERATOR: JEFF BALLOU

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JEFF BALLOU: [sounds gavel] Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Awfully quiet. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen!

AUDIENCE: Good afternoon!

MR. BALLOU: I'm Jeff Ballou, America's news editor for Al Jazeera media Network's English language channel, and the 110th president of the National Press Club, where we have the trademarked motto: the world's leading professional organization for journalists. And I would like to welcome you all to the Club this afternoon, especially our guests from the African Union and the World Affairs Council who are here in force, and many members of the diplomatic corps.

Today, we are pleased to have as our Luncheon speaker His Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

First of all, again, if you haven't already, please silence your cell phones and other things that may go tweet during the day and night and otherwise interrupt the proceedings. However, we do encourage you to tweet to @PressClubDC using the hashtag #Headliners. My Twitter handle is @NPCPresident. Again, that's @PressClubDC, using the hashtag #Headliners, using the handle for me @NPCPresident. So if you want to actually not just write down your questions— and many of you here in the house have cards, you should have cards, and if you don't raise your hand and the staff will bring them around; that's how we will receive questions here to the podium. And from those of you who are watching on television, you can tweet your questions. And if I see them on Twitter, and I do have my phone up here where I can try to follow along, we'll try to fold in as many questions as time

allows and which are not repetitive, et cetera.

I'd like to acknowledge, and always have some thank-yous going into the proceedings. We'd like to thank our Headliners team who are responsible for organizing today's event: our Headliners chairs Betsy Fischer Martin and Lisa Matthews and Jamie Horwitz, Heather Forsgren Weaver, Lisa Russo, Joe [02:27], Tony Culley-Foster and Tamara Hinton, and the Press Club staff, especially Lindsay Underwood, Laura Coker, and Bill McCarren.

Before I introduce our Headliner, I'd like to share some upcoming events coming to the National Press Club. Tomorrow, we'll be hosting for members and our guests representatives from the Embassy of Ireland, who will be presenting a whiskey tasting, which I understand is sold out. Friday, we have our last lobster night of 2017 in the Fourth Estate restaurant. For those of you in the house, that's just a few feet away, and you can book the restaurant any time in Open Table. November 12th, we'll be hosting the president of the World Bank. December 8, our annual Club elections. So members, look out for the balloting period and you'll get that in due course. December 12, we'll be hosting former Democratic National Committee Chair Donna Brazile, who will be bringing her book *Hacks* to the Club. A little out of order, but December 9 is our annual children's holiday party, right here in the Ballroom. And December 18, Walter Isaacson brings us his latest book; and it's not a small one. He never writes small books, but it's on Leonardo da Vinci. So I encourage you to grab those books, buy a ticket and come to the Club and hear our authors.

Now, on to today's proceedings. His Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat took office as Chairperson of the African Union in just this March. Prior to his election, he served since 2008 as Foreign Minister of Chad. He's also served as that country's Prime Minister from June 2003 to February 2005.

Chairperson Mahamat is in Washington, DC, to attend the AUC-US High Level Dialogue. He plans to meet US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson as part of this three-day visit.

The African Union Commission is a unit of the African Union. The Commission is responsible for representing the Union and defending its interests. The Union was created in 1999 when the heads of state and the government of the Organization of African Unity issued a declaration to establish the Union to, according to its own website, "accelerate the process of integration in the continent to enable it to play its rightful role in the global economy, while addressing multifaceted social, economic and political problems compounded as they are by certain negative aspects of globalization."

So with no further ado, for remarks, followed by question-and-answer, please join me in welcoming the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, His Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat. [applause]

MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: Ladies and gentlemen of the press, the journalists, ambassadors,

dear friends, I'm very happy to be here at my first visit as the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, to be here at the Press Club in Washington, DC, in order to address you.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: I know everything that concerns Africa is of interest to you, how to build this Africa. And these are the fundamental concerns to the leadership of the continent, and I as the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: As you're aware historically, it was 15 years ago the African Union became the successor organization of the Organization of African Unity. In fact, the OAU, the inception was in 1963. It accomplished its task and its mission; that is the liberation of the continent from the colonial yoke, and also the fight against apartheid. Now this is an additional stage we have reached with the African Union.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: At the risk of repeating myself, I would say that the objective and the purpose of the African Union was to unite the continent, unite the African countries, unite the African peoples of the continent.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: The African continent is a very vast continent with 1.2 billion inhabitants, and basically, the population is young. Sixty percent of the population is composed of youth. The continent has a wealth of huge resources and obviously Africa is like in a kind of adventure. We are trying to bring the peoples of the continent together on the basis of principles that used to build the African continent that is the Africa that we want.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: This additional stage of building the continent. At the celebration of the 50 years of the inception of the Organization of African Unity and the African Union, the continent adopted its vision, which is Agenda 2063. It is the projection of the continent over the next 50 years.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: At the beginning of this year, in fact the beginning of 2017, at the time when I have been brought to the helm of the African Union, the assembly of heads of state and government of the African Union initiated a process that is the reform of the African Union, which is a project under way and in gestation.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: This reform is necessary because this is what is going to lead us to implement the vision of the continent that is Agenda 2063.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: The issues of peace and security, the economic integration of the continent, the prosperity of the continent, issues of governance, human rights, elections, all these are dealt in detail in this Agenda 2063, which means that we need to fine-tune the tools that we need in order to implement this vision Agenda 2063.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: Despite all the challenges faced by the continent, Africa is not a mere theater of instability and violence. In fact, it is, together with the economically active population, trying to build Africa.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: With the implementation of the African peace and security architecture, we have developed partnerships with different partners in the world – the United Nations, the United States, Europe and other partners in the world – to deal with the issue of peace and security across the continent, as well as in the world. And then we have this world phenomenon which is terrorism, which is affecting the continent. So we have decided that in order to deal with this issue, we have also a division of labor between the various partners, like the African Union, the United Nations and others.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: With development, we have, as I said we have important resources, natural resources, human resources. And we need to develop these in order to benefit the peoples of the continent. Therefore, we are also preparing open policies that will help trade, like, for example, the free trade area that the continent is doing, in order to have this partnership with the world.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: In fact, with international relations, we're talking of governance, governance in the world and Africa, which composes a quarter of the membership of the United Nations. And therefore, we wish that Africa finds its rightful place in the world. We want to speak with one voice so that we can find our rightful place in the community of nations.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: So without taking too much time, we'll set the stage for this development and presentation of Africa and the African Union with its dynamism inside the continent, as well as with the outside world.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: Talking of the ongoing reforms in the African Union, we have decided on the financing of the African Union; that is with our own resources. That is how we've come up with a levy of 0.2% on the eligible imports so that we can have our own resources to finance our own activities and programs. And also, we have established a peace fund; that is to take care of the African member states to contribute to that peace fund so that we can pay— it's 25% of the peacekeeping operations or the peace support operations on the continent. So it's a way for Africa to reassess its own self and also its partnership with the world, therefore American countries have to come together and speak with one voice, one way we are to talk of issues that relate to the African continent.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: Within the framework of these reforms we have laid special stress on women and youth – youth, which composes the majority of the population, 60% of the population; and women, also who form the majority of the population. These are forces that need to be unleashed. And to give them the means and the resources so that they can contribute meaningful to establish peace and security, and also deal with the development of the continent.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: Talking of peace and security, which is the priority of priorities of the continent, we have made important efforts to come up with some innovative ways, with initiatives – like, for example, the multinational joint task force in the Lake Chad Basin area, or the G5 Sahel Force, and AMISOM, which has been deployed for the past ten years in Somalia fighting against al-Shabaab. So relating to these issues we are already discussing with the United Nations, the United States, and tomorrow, since we'll be having this meeting with the authorities, peace and security surely will be raised. And we are looking for and seeking the support in order to fight against terrorism, which is a real threat to peace and security. And since the United Nations Security Council has the responsibility for international peace and security, we hope that the efforts will be supported by all those who can help us to fight against terrorism and all these issues of peace and security.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: Maybe during the exchange of views that we have, we may talk of other specific cases, but globally I would say that there's been a lot of progress that has been made in the area of governance, even in the observance of human rights. Elections are organized though we do face some problems here and there. But the process is irreversible. And we hope to be able to move forward in that way.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. [applause]

MR. BALLOU: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. As the questions are coming up, I'll try to sort these as quickly as I can. As you can imagine, a lot of questions about Zimbabwe. It's been a busy morning. In fact, you released a statement shortly before your arrival. So let's start there. The country's ruling party has been saying through representatives of defense forces that President Mugabe has been detained in his home by defense forces. Does the African Union support the military developments in Zimbabwe? What do you think is the best way to resolve the crisis? And will you be meeting as the African Union to discuss the situation there? And lastly, do you actually think it was a coup?

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: Indeed, this event took place by the time I was traveling to come to Washington. We've been following the developments that are taking place. The military have reassured us that this is not a coup d'etat. And as you know, the African Union is against any unconstitutional change of government. That is, anybody coming to power by force is of course condemned by the African Union. This is a very fundamental principle of the African Union. So we cannot accept any overthrow by using force, by arms or by rebellion or anything. So we condemn any unconstitutional change of government. And through the principle of subsidiarity, we have SADC, which is the Southern African Development Community, which is a regional economic community, and therefore the SADC is dealing with the matter being in the region.

And President Zuma, who is the chairman of SADC, has sent a delegation, in fact, to Zimbabwe. And I also, and she has issued a communiqué about the situation. And we hope that this problem will be solved in all its legality. We know that there are problems maybe within the ruling party to find a successor maybe to President Mugabe, but we all hope that there'll be no bloodshed and that everything will be solved peacefully.

MR. BALLOU: As a follow-up, and I realize these events happened when you were in the air, have you spoken to President Mugabe? And have you spoken to President Zuma to get an update on whether or not this situation is on its way to being resolved?

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: I've not been able to speak to President Mugabe or to President Zuma, but my bureau has been in touch with the authorities, and we are in touch with them. The minister of defense of South Africa and other officials have already reached Zimbabwe, have been dispatched over there. And the information we have is that, as we said, it's not a coup d'etat. President Mugabe and his family are safe in the country.

MR. BALLOU: I'm sure we'll be coming back to that because there are quite a few

questions on that. Talk about Somalia. During your remarks, you talked about the efforts to combat al-Shabaab. The United States helped lead an air strike in coordination with the federal government of Somalia against al-Shabaab in the Bay region, about 100 miles west of Mogadishu. To what degree is the African Union involved specifically? You talked about AMISOM, you talked about other forces in terms of combating al-Shabaab and, broadly speaking, terrorism throughout the member states of the African Union.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: Yes, in Somalia the situation is difficult. We have been deploying AMISOM for the past ten years, the African Union, and we have the support of the United States, which has been equipping some of the contingents that are there. They are using also drones in order to carry out and protect the corridors which are being used by the troops and the forces over there.

If it were not for AMISOM in Somalia, today we would not be in this situation. AMISOM has helped the country to contain al-Shabaab and obviously has helped in order even to have organized elections in that country and have a president who has been elected over there.

Somalia is developing a federal system. We are working together with the central government, as well as with the regional government. The situation is difficult, but we are trying our best. We also have the support of the European Union; we need to stress that. They have been helping AMISOM, and obviously we need the support that is there.

al-Shabaab has been weakened, has been degraded, but they still retain the capacity to do harm and to cause havoc. The very evidence you have is the attack that was carried out on the 14th of October, where more than 400 people died.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: AMISOM is fighting against al-Shabaab, but at the same time it is also training the defense and security forces of Somalia. Because we need to prepare the defense and security forces of Somalia to take over after some time. Therefore, AMISOM is doing this dual work. And this is just for the financing of the peace operations on the continent we are discussing with the United Nations. The African continent obviously has come up with its action, and we are fighting against terrorism. But in fact, this is the work of the UN Security Council, that this force is doing; that is, to fight against terrorism. And therefore we need predictable funding sources, like also in the Sahel with the G5 Sahel Force.

MR. BALLOU: Just one follow-up to that. Will Somalia ever become a whole, stable country? And what is the African Union doing to support President Farrago and his government?

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: In fact, we have helped to stabilize the country, Somalia. We are supporting Somalia. We want the country to establish its institutions that are required. And as you know, the elections that have been there, there will be no universal suffrage, but we hope that the next elections that will be there, that the Somalis will be able to have universal suffrage, and then they can choose their leaders of their own choice.

MR. BALLOU: Let's talk about your upcoming visit with the Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson. What is it that you wish to achieve in this visit? What takeaways do you want to bring back to the African Union as a result of the exchange with him?

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: Yes, we have this partnership with the United States, which has been there since 2006. One year it is being held in Washington and the other, by rotation, is held in Addis Ababa. The new US administration, therefore we have come, the African Union has come with an open mind, that we'll exchange views with the authorities because there are issues like peace and security, trade and investment, and all other issues that are of direct interest and concern to the African Union that should be discussed. And we hope that this partnership and this cooperation will be enhanced to the benefit of both parties.

MR. BALLOU: One issue that's certainly to come up during your exchange with the Secretary of State is the investigation that led to the death of four US Green Berets in Niger. While we aren't still sure which armed group was responsible for the attack or whether the American troops were adequately armed, Sergeant La David Johnson's body was left in the desert for two days. The Secretary of Defense James Mattis told Congress that the country's counterterrorism posture towards Niger will become more aggressive going forward. Is this a good idea, in your view, in terms of the United States taking a more aggressive response in counterterrorism efforts? Is that being coordinated well with the African Union, in your view? And is it productive?

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: ISIS has been weakened in Syria, in Iraq. The combatants are now moving towards Africa, and Africa has become the theater for all these events and all these terrorist activities that are taking place. That is why we support the initiative that is taken by the G5 Sahel. And we know the situation in Libya is such that a country which is so vast with more than 3000 kilometers of seafont, and it had a military arsenal which was very huge, and with the situation that happened over there, all these arms and weapons have been poured into the Sahara and the Sahel. We have the terrorist groups that are very violent in the area. And of course, they are carrying out the activities in that way.

The American soldiers who lost their lives over there, we bow in memory of those who lost their lives over there. And we are saying that is why it is important to support the G5 Sahel, because this is a fight against terrorism, and terrorism is a global phenomenon which obviously affects everybody. There is need, therefore, to pool our efforts so that we

can work together, work together with the US. And we wish that this be formalized through the United Nations so that the United States Security Council should take it up and then finance the G5 Sahel because this is a fight against terrorism and therefore this should concern the whole world. Just like the world go together and mobilized to help fight terrorism in Syria and Iraq, therefore they should also do it for Africa.

MR. BALLOU: On that front, there's a general observation that the West has been inclined to intervene deeply in regional and national conflicts – Iraq, Syria, the Balkans, et cetera – but when it comes to African countries, a real reluctance to get involved, except for the example I cited. And you talked about the G5 Sahel Force against terrorist groups. Has the fear of neocolonial intervention prolonged national and regional conflicts on the continent, in the wake of sort of your answer you talked about, trying to make sure that the Sahel Force and AMISOM and others are trying to solve your own problems. But has the neocolonial intervention inadvertently from other conflicts prolong those conflicts in the continent?

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: Our choice and our doctrine is that Africans should be able to handle and manage their own security, deal with their crises that are there. And that is why we are working through our own troops and forces. For example, AMISOM, which has more than 10,000 troops, they are all Africans. In the G5 Sahel Force, we have some 5000 and they are Africans. In the Lake Chad Basin force, we have troops, more than 10,000 troops, and they are all Africans. Even in Mali, the troops that are there are mostly Africans

So our wish is to be able to cooperate with the other partners, whether it is through logistics and financing and support, equipment, and all that. They should help Africa to shoulder its own responsibilities. That will be less expensive, less costly for the world. And we do not wish that American soldiers go and die in Africa. It's the Africans, they can do the work, they can shoulder that responsibility. And therefore they should be able to do that with the support of others.

So we want our partners to understand this because the threat of terrorism is a global threat. It concerns the entire world, and therefore this is a fight for freedom, for liberty, and therefore for peace and security in the world.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: In fact, you should believe me that my advocacy and my plea with the African leaders is that we should find our own resources. We should find our own means in order to deal and handle our own security. And this is our ambition.

MR. BALLOU: Let's go to the economy. You may recall President Obama was the first US President to address the African Union, made trade and investing in Africa one of his priorities; in fact, created the Doing Business in African campaign in 2012 to help strengthen the commercial relationship between the United States and the continent. He extended for a

decade the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act which has dictated trade relations with Africa since 2000. What's been the impact of these efforts? Are you concerned that the new administration will roll back any of that progress?

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: I've not yet discussed with the authorities of the United States, so therefore I cannot anticipate the discussion that we'll have with the State Department. But we have been making very important efforts; like, for example, coming up with the continental free trade area. I think in most African countries now, we have very attractive investment codes which can guarantee the investment of various investors and create facilities for investors.

Trade and commercial are in fact vectors for common interests. And therefore we in the African Union, we in Africa, we hope that the new United States administration will work together with us in this area.

We have to take into account the realities of Africa and the pace at which Africa moves. Obviously the continent has problems, but it is trying to come up with its own structures. Ideologies and other such ideas should not come and hamper and impede the development that we want in the continent.

MR. BALLOU: Before I move on to another question, I just want to remind people that you can, on Twitter, you can monitor the Chairperson who has his own Twitter handle – I know I talked about mine – @MoussaFaki_M and also @AfricanUnion. And you can continue to tweet @PressClubDC using hashtag #Headliners. And also there is a launch of the AU DS4 television which is live streaming today's proceedings at *AUDS4TV.com*, in addition to our own live streaming on *Press.org*.

I want to talk quickly, as we're winding down on our time, what role– there were a couple questions about migration. What role has the African Union Commission played in the huge migration of Africans to Europe with such a major loss of life. And if not, why not? And I will tie to this, you talked about youth a lot in your opening remarks; what about the youth that are risking it all to cross the Mediterranean within that group of people making the migration?

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: These are very heartbreaking images that we see on the television, thousands of youth who try to cross the Mediterranean and perish in that sea. Obviously, they are trying to look for a better life on the other side in Europe. We cannot explain this phenomenon by looking at the consequences, but, rather, we should look at the root causes and try to explain. Ninety percent of the youth who are trying to cross over go through Libya. And this is a country where there is a huge vacuum. There are no institutions. And therefore, there is a lot of problem. And then the events that have taken place, the intervention of NATO and the attacks that were there, that has placed this country, Libya, in the state that it

is today.

Yes, together with this, we have poverty, we have drought, decertification, issues of governance, injustice, but we need to work on these areas in order to find a better environment so that we can establish the conditions that will not force our youth to be tempted to cross the Mediterranean at the risk of their own life.

Maybe statistics do not show clearly the number of people, of youth who die in the Sahara. There may be as many who die in the Sahara as those who are dying in the Mediterranean. In fact, this is an issue that we are going to take up at the summit, the forthcoming summit with the European Union on 29 and 30 November in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. We are going to discuss the issues. And obviously migration is a global phenomenon. The United States itself, which is a country of migrants and migration by excellence, in fact knows these situations, that the Africans are migrating in millions, I would say, within the continent compared to those who want to go and cross into Europe.

The historical relations that we have with Europe will also be an opportunity for us to discuss in a very lucid manner this issue, so that we Africans also are trying to find solutions to this problem in the continent.

MR. BALLOU: Before I ask the last question, we have a tradition here at the National Press Club. We present our Headliners with our traditional National Press Club mug. [applause]

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: Thank you very much.

MR. BALLOU: And one last question. This is actually on human rights. And there are several questions on it, so I'll try to consolidate this and make it simple. What is the African Union's position on the conflicts and, what this questioner characterizes as the colonization of southern Cameroon? What is AU's position to try and resolve the issue of military – I can't quite read this – military engagement in southern Cameroon? Is there a way that AU can resolve the issues there and the human rights matters therein?

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: I know that there is a problem in the south of Cameroon. That country was a federation before they all decided to merge into a single country. But I don't believe the difference or division of language should be a cause for dividing the country. There may be economic and political problems that are there, but we are trying to call on all the Cameroonian parties so that they can get together, discuss and find a solution to their problem.

In the African Union, we have a principle which is the inviolability of the borders of the countries. We in the African Union are trying to bring together more than 50 member states so that we become one entity. And the United States is a very good example of doing that. So we want to pool our efforts so that we can address the challenges that we are facing.

And we in the African Union are appealing, are asking the various parties in Cameroon, and we appreciate the statement made by the president of Cameroon, to say that there should be dialogue so that you can find a solution to those protesting against the way the country's governed or the various problems, bilingualism, et cetera. We, the African Union, we are ready to help and to bring the parties together, if need be, to discuss and find a peaceful solution.

CHAIRPERSON MAHAMAT: [in French]

TRANSLATOR: In fact, we think decentralization, the distribution of the resources and the wealth vis-à-vis the level of the country, these are tools that can be used to find a solution. Because by maintaining the specialties of the group, we should be able to find the necessary means in order to find a peaceful solution.

MR. BALLOU: Your Excellency, we appreciate your patience as you've traveled over the airways, and you are probably long tired and ready to rest a bit. But we thank you for paying us a visit at the National Press Club.

For any further information on the National Press Club programs, including in short order we'll be posting this online for future viewing, you can go to *www.Press.org*.

We are adjourned. [sounds gavel]

[applause]

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