



ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES  
ASSOCIATION DES UNIVERSITÉS AFRICAINES

اتحاد الجامعات الافريقيه

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES (AAU), PROF ANTONIO QUILAMBO AT THE INAUGURATION OF AAU NORTH AFRICA REGIONAL OFFICE

***Cairo, Egypt, March 12th, 2019***

- Your Excellency The President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
- The Grand Imam of Al Azhar University
- The Minister of Higher Education of the Republic of Egypt
- Representatives of the Government of Egypt
- Excellencies the Ambassadors and Representatives of Diplomatic Missions
- The Representative, African Union Commission
- The Secretary-General of the Association of African Universities
- The President, Al Azhar University
- Special Invited Guests
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
- All Protocol Observed

It gives me the greatest pleasure, in my capacity as the President of the Association of African Universities (AAU), to welcome you to this historic gathering marking the inauguration of another Regional hub of the AAU, which is the North Africa Regional Office that is being hosted here in Cairo by Al Azhar University.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In its fifty second (52) years of existence, the AAU has been centrally coordinated from its headquarters in Accra, Ghana since 1970. From this uni-location, AAU has reached out to all corners of the continent through its programmes and interventions for the African higher education community. Yet, you and I will agree that the higher education terrain in Africa is becoming more and more diverse, which calls for a more proactive way of interacting among ourselves, with the productive sector, and with the outside world.

For Africa's higher education institutions to remain relevant and compete favourably with others we must first network among ourselves with a common understanding that in our unity lies our strength. We must also embrace internationalization to attract quality staff and students from diverse backgrounds and produce relevant research that addresses societal problems. This confirms an African proverb that says that "**sticks in a bundle are unbreakable**", and yet another from Tanzania which says that "**two ants do not fail to pull one grasshopper**".

The idea of establishing regional hubs of the AAU is to speed up not just the visibility of the Association's programmes but more importantly to facilitate effective networking among ourselves first at the country levels, sub-regional levels and then at the continental level. The current AAU Board has committed itself to pursue this agenda during its four-year mandate. The Association is also organizing, on 8-11 July 2019, its biannual Conference of Rectors, Vice Chancellors and Presidents of African Universities (COREVIP 2019), in Collaboration with the Government of Egypt and Al Azhar University. The theme is: "**The Role of Higher Education Institutions in Promoting Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016-2025)**". You are all most welcome to attend.

We, as a Higher Education community in Africa are confronted with a challenge: managing a growing youthful population that is expected to continue to grow throughout the remainder of the 21st century, more than doubling from current levels by 2055. Comparatively, Africa has relatively few universities. According to a 2015 report by Quartz

Africa, there were a little over 740 universities serving some 660 million of Africa's 1 billion people in the top 10 most populous countries on the continent. On the other hand, the United States of America had about 5,300 universities and colleges serving a population of over 323 million people.

Given our limited infrastructural and human resources, how do we turn this huge resource potential in our youth into something productive for the development of Africa? The answer lies with us, through the institutions of higher learning on the continent. Building strategic and effective partnerships, collaborations and alliances remains, perhaps, the surest way for the continent to fast-track its development agenda and be in league with other regional competitors. And this is what we are doing here today in Cairo.

The establishment of the North Africa regional office of the AAU will help us effectively network among ourselves in the sub-region while we look up to the Association's headquarters for effective leadership and collaboration with other regional networks and global linkages.

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**, the AAU is grateful to our host country, the Arab Republic of Egypt, for agreeing to host the North Africa AAU Office. North Africa is the citadel of the conceptualization of the AAU in the immediate post independent Africa. The Association was founded in November 1967 at a conference in Rabat, Morocco which hosted representatives of 34 universities but preceding this conference were consultative meetings of executive heads of African universities in Antananarivo, Madagascar in 1962 and a another a year later, in 1963, in Khartoum, Sudan. This was a turnaround meeting that drew the roadmap for the 1967 conference in Rabat. Egyptian Universities have played a significant role, and it is not a coincidence that this great country should host the second regional office of the AAU.

Our sincere gratitude goes to:

- 1- the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, who in spite of his busy schedule, has honored our Association by bringing a special 'shine' to our ceremony;
- 2- the Grand Imam Al Azhar University for his impressive commitment to our activities and higher Education as a whole;
- 3- the Ministry of Higher Education;
- 4- the President of Al Azhar University and his able Local Organizing Committee, who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that this office is firmly established. Thank you Professor Mohamed El-Mahrasawy for your invaluable commitment to the Association and the fruitful collaboration concretized by the upcoming first African University Olympics.
- 5- and all other players who have made today a historic moment for the Association of African Universities.

**Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen**, on behalf of the Governing Board and the entire 400 plus membership of the AAU, we say SHUKRAAN to you all.