



ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES
ASSOCIATION DES UNIVERSITÉS AFRICAINES
اتحاد الجامعات الافريقيه

ADDRESS OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES (AAU), PROFESSOR ETIENNE E. EHILE, AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE NORTH AFRICA REGIONAL OFFICE OF THE AAU

Cairo, Egypt , March 12th, 2019

- His Excellency the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
- His Excellency the Grand Imam Al Azhar University
- The Minister of Higher Education of the Arab Republic of Egypt
- Excellencies the Ambassadors and Representatives of Diplomatic Missions
- The Representative, African Union Commission
- The President of the Association of African Universities
- The President, Al Azhar University Cairo
- Colleagues from various diplomatic missions and development partner organisations
- Executives and Board Members of Al Azhar University
- Executive members from Industry, Student Groups and other bodies
- Special Invited Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen
- All Protocol Observed

On behalf of the Association of African Universities, I welcome you all most cordially to the official inauguration of the North Africa Regional Office of the AAU being hosted by Al Azhar University, Cairo, in Egypt.

Your Excellency the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt,

Permit me to first of all, to congratulate you on behalf of the 400 AAU Member Universities on the occasion of your appointment as Chair of the African Union Commission last month.

Mister President, Your presence here this morning, on the occasion of the AAU North Africa Regional Office inauguration, not only brings a special patronage to our activities, but is above all, an eloquent testimony of the commitment at the highest level of the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt to higher education in Africa in general, and that of Egypt in particular. This commitment, Your Excellency Mr. President, is in line with the vision expressed by the African Union Agenda 2063, **"The Africa we want"** and the different strategies that accompany it, in particular the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25). In addition, the great interest expressed by Al Azhar University and the Government of Egypt to host the AAU North Africa Regional Office is a decision that enchants the entire African university community. Your Excellency, the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, please accept the infinite appreciation and deep gratitude of the Association of African Universities, **"the voice of higher education in Africa"**, for all the sacrifices made in favor of Higher Education in your country, on the one hand, and Africa on the other hand, having accepted to host our Regional Office. Of course, we will not be able to ignore the warm welcome and all the facilities that all the delegates have enjoyed since we walked on the soil of Egypt.

Your Excellency Prof Ahmed El-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al Azhar University, I would like to thank you for your guidance to Al Azhar University resulting in Al Azhar being a high performer and open to the world and to Africa. More than 40.000 international students is a remarkable testimony to this internationalization trends. AAU is also highly appreciative and sincerely values the collaboration with North Africa, through the current platform of the Regional office that we are proud of.

Ladies & Gentlemen, Thank you all for your distinguished presence here at this ceremony to celebrate Higher Education in Africa.

The establishment of regional offices in four regions of Africa forms a key focus of the AAU's strategy for effective programme delivery at the regional level in 2019 and beyond. The time is indeed ripe for us to work together as African countries to effectively respond to some of our basic higher educational needs and demands. We can work together to harness the opportunities in some countries, especially in areas like medicine, to bridge the gap and reduce the deficiencies in other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. In a typical university in Cote d'Ivoire, for instance, over 3,000 students apply and compete for 300 positions available for admission into the medical school, whereas there is enough capacity to admit some of these students in other countries, through strategic collaborations.

Strategic collaboration is key in availing unlimited opportunities to the African Higher Education Community. This new home of the Association of African Universities, being established in Cairo today, will provide us the opportunity to get closer to our members and increase our impact in the North Africa sub-region. The regional offices will further present the opportunity for AAU to work collaboratively with its members in finding solutions to issues confronting them and help respond to the broader mandate of improving higher education quality as recommended by the AU Agenda 2063 and other various strategies.

I seize this opportunity to express the AAU's profound gratitude to the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt and specifically to Al Azhar University for offering to host AAU's regional office in this beautiful country. We naturally cannot predict the exact impact of what will emerge from the establishment of this office, but I am very convinced, and can assure you that it will yield enormous benefits for all Higher Education Institutions, especially AAU members in your country and in the North Africa sub-region at large.

Ladies and Gentlemen, AAU was founded on November 12, 1967, in Rabat Morocco by representatives of 34 of the then 46 institutions of higher learning that qualified for membership. This group of 34 founding member universities included Al-Azhar University (Egypt), Ain Shams University (Egypt), University of Rabat (Morocco), University of Benghazi (Libya), University of Tripoli (Libya), University of Khartoum (Sudan) University of Algiers (Algeria), University of Ghana, Makerere University (Uganda) and the University of Dar es Salam (Tanzania)among others.

The Association of African Universities was established as an International NGO and the apex organization and forum for the consultation, exchange of information and co-operation among institutions of Higher Education in Africa.

AAU represents the voice of Higher Education in Africa and supports networking by African Institutions of Higher Education with the aim of improving the quality of teaching, research, and information exchange and collaboration.

The headquarters of the AAU is permanently located in Accra, Ghana since 1970 under a Headquarters Agreement between the Government of Ghana and the AAU. Together with our stakeholders, we celebrated AAU's 50th Anniversary and Golden Jubilee in Accra in June 2017. The founding fathers of the Association envisioned the AAU as an organization that would bring together African Universities in the same way that the Organization of African Unity (OAU) had brought together newly independent African Countries. I am glad to say that, up to today, the AAU still operates within this framework.

You would agree with me, that after 52 years of operation, the trends of Higher Education have surely changed. The number of AAU members has also increased from 34 in 1967 to 400 plus in 2019. Therefore, there is the need to get closer and closer to our membership so that we can identify their actual needs and together develop demand driven and relevant interventions.

I line with this, the AAU Governing Board tasked the Secretariat to set up regional offices in the four regions of Africa. AAU East Africa Regional Office was inaugurated 1 year ago, on 12th March 2018 and is improving day by day. North Africa Regional Office is from today a reality as a second step in that initiative.

Ladies and Gentlemen, AAU has been appointed by the African Union Commission as the coordinator for the implementation of The Higher Education Cluster of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25). CESA capitalizes on numerous, and active, players ready to mobilize financial, human and technical resources within national, regional and continental coalitions for education, science and technology. The strategy thus seeks to provide each education stakeholder the opportunity to make its best contribution to education and training in Africa.

Through this platform, I wish to once again reiterate the Association of African Universities' commitment to ensuring that the goals and strategic objectives of CESA are achieved by the 2063 timeline. Indeed, the AAU has put in place various strategies to ensure that we work more collaboratively and closely with the higher education community in Africa to improve the quality of service, in keeping with its mandate. Establishing this North Africa regional office today, is a step in the right direction. This initiative came timely with the appointment of His Excellency AL Sissi as Chair of the African Union Commission.

Distinguished Guests, I would like to emphasize that AAU is proud of the Arab Republic of Egypt for having 2 Board members positions out of the 15 available slots provided by the Association over the past 2 years:

Prof Ezzat Abdel Wahab President of Ain Shams University and Prof Mohamed El-Mahrasawy of Al Azhar University who were appointed at the 14th AAU General Conference.

I call on us all, gathered here today, to fully support the AAU regional offices, especially the one to be hosted by Al Azhar University to

function effectively and help improve the quality of education within the region. We have put in place a well-designed programme of activities, ranging from institutional evaluation on quality assurance, leadership and management development trainings and a programme on university industry linkages among others for all Higher Education Institutions within the region. These programmes were developed in consultation with various institutions on the needs of the African Higher Education sector.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, although we have achieved much in our respective institutions, there remains a great deal to be done to meet the capacity needs of our beloved continent. I reiterate that collaboration is the way forward and call on all parties to join forces with the AAU in fostering mutually beneficial partnerships among ourselves, with industry, governments and all relevant stakeholders.

Permit me to end my speech, by extending the AAU's appreciation to all the people who have worked tirelessly to make the establishment of this AAU North Africa Regional Office a reality. We say a big thank you to you all for your enormous support in particular Prof Mohamed El-Mahrasawy, President Al Azhar University

Thank you for your attention.