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Issue Brief

28th African Union Summit and the Election of New Chairperson

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The 28th African Union (AU) Summit will be starting from 21st January till 31st January 2017 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The summit will lead to some important developments, including the election of a new chairperson. The theme for 28th session of African Union summit is "harnessing the demographic dividend through investment in youth" as youth constitute 70% of African population, with a promising bright future. The summit will also make an appraisal of the Agenda 2063 for the African continent and how to confront the challenges leading to its realisation. The political developments in the continent will also be discussed, especially the recent democratic transition in Gambia.

The summit will include three sessions on Permanent Representative Committee; Executive Council; and Union Assembly. Besides election of chairperson of AU Commission, ceremonial posts from other organs of AU shall also be selected. Moreover, the agenda item includes the submission for reform of AU from the President of Republic of Rwanda, discussion over Free Trade Agreement for the continent and the induction of Morocco as a member state to AU.

The contest for the chairperson of AU commission remains the highlight of this summit. Election for the post of Chairperson of the Commission includes five candidates competing, Pelonomi Venson Moitsoi (Botswana), Moussa Faki Mahamat (Chad), Agapito Mba Mokuy (Equatorial Guinea), Dr. Amina C. Mohammed (Kenya), and Dr. Abdoulaye Bathily (Senegal).¹

The African Union Leadership Academy convened the first ever debate of the contestants replacing the outgoing chairperson Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma of South Africa. This debate was telecast live under the series "Africa Leadership Debates", dubbed Mjadala Afrika.

Some of the key themes which surfaced in this debate included issues of peace and security, economic governance, African integration, issues of youth and women, institutional reform, climate change, migration and most importantly, the place of Africa in the world. Moussa Faki Mahamat from Chad pointed that since 2001, some 1800 decisions have been taken by AU and many of them are still lagging behind in implementation.

Agapito Mba Mokuy from Equatorial Guinea said that Africa is sick as it experiences worst forms of gender discrimination and most importantly 80% of AU budget is financed from external sources rather than by AU member states. Similarly, Abdoulaye Baithily from Senegal emphasized deep reform of AU,

regional integration, strengthening relation between AU civil society and Diaspora abroad and also relation with external partners.

Dr. Amina C. Mohammad from Kenya is believed to one of the strongest candidate with an extensive experience in multilateral organizations on a wide spectrum of issues. She believes that Africa needs hope for youth and women. It needs a cultural renaissance. There is also a need to increase mobility, with increased intra-African trade. She admired the recent issuance of E-passport for heads of the State to freely travel across Africa. Such initiatives need to be open for common man as this will open new opportunities for youth.

As legal scholar Dr. Solomon Dersso writes, “The AU Commission chair is more than just a secretary of the policy bodies of the AU.” The main role of the AUC chair, as articulated by the African Union five years ago, is to realise Africa’s Agenda 2063, mobilise finances, and oversee peace and security on the continent. The criterion for selection is based on six major elements: level of education, experience, leadership, achievement, vision and strategy.² With rising Chinese investment and businesses in Africa, the new African leadership is tasked with the socio-economic uplift of Africa and restoring its competitive edge in world economy. Moreover, the leadership will carry out the important task of institutional reform and match the policy framework with infrastructural amenities.

Notes and References:

¹ “Twenty- Eighth Ordinary Session of the Summit of the African Union expected to elect a new Chairperson for the AU Commission”, African Union, Accessed date January 18, 2017.

² Rebecca R, “The race to be the next African Union Commission Chairperson”, This Is Africa, Published July 13, 2016.