

Africa has to fight against the "cancer of corruption"

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia - African Union chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat has emphasised that the union is ready to tackle corruption, saying that the Pan-Africa body should have financial independence.



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Corruption has held Africa back for far too long and it's time to nip the scourge in the bud, says Vera Songwe, the executive secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

In a robust inaugural address to the 32nd Ordinary Session of the African Union executive council this past week, Songwe said Africa's economic potential can be unlocked by ending the "cancer of corruption".

"The injustice of corruption brought to life within our institutions is more powerful than any other injustice we as Africans could face," she said.

"But it is within our remit to repair this cancer, that is why I applaud the African Union for taking on this theme as the main battle cry of the union for the next year."

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The AU summit will be held under the theme: *Winning the Fight against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa's Transformation*.

The ECA Chief said the only logical and winning formula for true independence and for a transformed Africa was that the continent collectively conquered corruption.

Broken social contract

“Where is the Africa we want when our youth do not believe their leaders and their institutions to deliver what they need most, when that social contract is broken?” Songwe asked.

“How can we get the Africa we want when women in rural Africa cannot get access to land and collateral to feed their families and ensure good health for their kids, because of corruption?”

She continued: “How can we get the Africa we want when we let billions leak out of the continent only to spend time begging for minimal sums because of corruption?”

“We are at a cross roads – the youth are waiting, desperate and anxious for what path the leaders gathered here today will allow them to chart. That is why the topic of corruption or anti-corruption is so appropriate.”

The ECA Chief said the successful implementation of Agendas 2030 for sustainable development and 2063, Africa's 50-year development plan, required substantial financial resources, most of which must be mobilised from within the continent.

“What this means is that the continent cannot afford to continue to suffer from the kinds of financial leakages it has had to contend with over the past several years through various forms of corrupt acts and practices,” Songwe reiterated.

She added: “Placing the fight against corruption at the top of the agenda of our continental organisation is a step in the right direction considering that nearly half of the population on the continent believes that our governments have either failed or been unable to properly address the complex and wide-ranging impacts of corruption on resource mobilisation, resource allocation and development outcomes on the continent.”

Despite inroads, she said, corruption remained endemic - threatening the region's transformation and sustainable development.

ECA efforts to help Africa combat graft

Songwe said the ECA has over the years worked with the African Union and the African Development Bank to design and support anti-corruption programs.

“We continue to support the APRM process and the work on Illicit Financial flows. We are also working increasingly with governments to improve their tax and customs processes,” she said.

ECA dedicated its fifth edition of its flagship report, the African Governance Report on the measurement of corruption, with a particular focus on the international dimensions of the scourge. Following this publication, ECA has partnered with the African Union's Advisory Board on Corruption (AUABC) to initiate a conversation on developing an African-led and African focused measurement of corruption.

This has been within the framework of the longstanding collaboration between ECA and the AU Advisory Board on Corruption, which saw the two institutions develop and roll out a five-year anti-corruption program. The program produced a

number of outputs, including a Model Anti-Corruption Law, and a youth essay competition, intended to groom youth ambassadors to champion the fight against corruption on the continent.

“On behalf of the ECA team we pledge to support the African Union Commission and all the member states in enacting policies which could address the issue of corruption,” she said.

These includes working with member states to strengthen their legal and institutional frameworks in the fight against corruption; improving fiscal transparency and good financial governance, including improving the public procurement system, contract regime, tax system, and strengthening institutional audit and oversight capacity; supporting citizens’ participation in areas like budget tracking and monitoring, performance of public enterprises, and the delivery of social services should be encouraged; and supporting the implementation of the AU Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, including strengthening the capacity of the AU Advisory Board on Corruption.

African Union chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat emphasised the union was ready to tackle corruption, adding the Pan-Africa body should have financial independence. Songwe and Mahamat also spoke about AU reforms, self-financing and the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA).

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