



Embassy  
of the Federal Republic of Germany  
Addis Ababa

## Statement by Matthias Schauer, Deputy Head of Mission, German Embassy

### Official Opening Session of the 2017 Conference on Land Policy in Africa on November 14<sup>th</sup> 2017

Your Excellency, Dr. Eyasu Abraha,  
Dr. Abdalla Hamdok,  
Mr. Gabriel Negatu,  
Ms. Rachail Mwikali,  
— Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the African Union, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the African Land Policy Initiative for organizing and hosting this important second African Conference on Land Policy.

Today I am not only representing the Federal Republic of Germany but I am also speaking on behalf of the European Union and Switzerland –all three support the Land Policy Initiative and sustainable land governance on the African Continent significantly.

As we could all see in the video introduction: Land is absolutely essential – also for African development.

The overarching topic of this conference is: “The Africa we want: Achieving socioeconomic transformation through inclusive and equitable access to land by the youth.” A very lengthy title – but it captures two of the most challenging and most promising topics on the continent: **youth and access to land.**

I would like to start with “Youth”: Today there are more than 1.2 billion young people in the world, never before has there been such a large number. Africa is the youngest continent of the world, more than 70 % of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa is younger than 30 years. When you come from Europe and enter any African country the most striking feature are the many, many young people. This is an enormous potential: The AU had organized a conference on Skills and Employment two weeks ago. And I very well remember that young lady from Nigeria who had set up her own enterprise. She and her team are teaching disadvantaged young people in soft skills to improve their employability. This young lady was a person full of energy and charisma – very impressive and a true role model.

On the other hand during the same conference a young man from Burkina Faso raised a very challenging question: Why are we as young people excluded from political and economic power? Why are especially young people unemployed, why is our voice neglected?

There are many answers to these questions – from a political, historical, sociological and economic angle. Today’s conference addresses one answer to this difficult question: inclusive and equitable access to land. Access to land can be one solution to the pressing demands of a



young and growing continent; access to land means access to production facilities; access to land means economic empowerment.

“Access to land” – that sounds so easy but it is extremely difficult to implement. From our European experience we know that “access to land” has caused wars, civil wars and has been one of the reasons for the rural support to the Russian October Revolution 100 years ago. As a consequence of this revolution and in an understandable attempt to distribute land evenly among the population the aristocratic land-owning elite was expropriated. Every kind of private ownership of land was banned.

— After World War II this model of land use was exported to other communist countries, e.g. to Eastern Germany. In Eastern Germany this model of land use which was forced upon the population against its will and traditions and caused a long-lasting negative economic impact. In fact, it can still be held accountable for some of the economic disadvantages Eastern Germany is still struggling with today.

This historic example shows the devastating consequences of land reforms which did not take into account traditions, culture and economic preconditions. They have also neglected one of the most important realities: you need incentives to cultivate the land. Would any of you invest into a piece of land if the profit is taken by others? Would you build a factory with the risk that somebody else will claim that piece of land? And why put in an extra effort if I cannot pass on this land to my children and grand-children?

This example from our own history shows what it is all about: investment needs clarity and reliability. Without clear ownership and responsibility there will be no investment.

Access to land involves so many actors and competing interests – but sustainable access to land is also the solution for pressing development issues. To come up with tailor-made approaches for each specific situation on the continent is one of the targets of our development programmes. Germany supports the establishment of scientific hubs, centres of excellence, in all five African regions. These centres in Morocco, Ghana, Cameroon, Tanzania and Namibia fulfill the following functions: improving research, knowledge and data exchange on land governance on the one hand and bridging the gap between research and science and policy making on the other hand. With this support we strengthen the implementation of the AU agenda on land with the ultimate aim to come to durable solutions for access to land and land tenure.

To conclude I would like to quote from the Kagame report which had been approved by the Heads of State and Government in January 2017: “Tens of thousands of young African bodies have been swallowed by the sea or abandoned in the desert, in pursuit of a decent life for which they are prepared to risk everything, because they believe there is no hope at home. They testify to the urgent need to act. Continuing to defer necessary reforms to the future is an implicit decision to do nothing. It means giving up on ourselves and our people, tolerating our conditions as inevitable, and accepting Africa’s subordinate place in the community of nations as natural.”



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These are very harsh and sobering words!

BUT: this conference and the AU agenda of Land show that many on this continent are not willing to accept these conditions as inevitable. Therefore I congratulate UNECA, LPI and AUC for convening this conference and encourage each and everybody to come up with creative, convincing solutions and strengthened partnerships to offer the young and creative African population the perspectives for a decent life here on the continent.

Germany, the EU and Switzerland are ready to support you. Thank you very much!

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