

It is a great honour to welcome you to this pivotal event on "Mainstreaming the African Union into the G20." Today, we acknowledge a historic milestone achieved in 2023 during India's G20 presidency when the African Union (AU) was admitted as a permanent member of the G20. This inclusion is not merely symbolic but a transformative step that positions Africa at the heart of global economic governance. The G20, comprising the world's largest economies and representing around 80% of global GDP, is a critical platform for addressing major international issues and shaping global economic policies. The AU's membership signifies a profound shift in acknowledging Africa's growing importance on the global stage, providing a unique opportunity for African nations to advocate for their interests and address the continent's specific challenges, including sustainable development, climate resilience, and trade inequalities.

Africa's inclusion in the G20 enhances the continent's ability to present a unified voice on critical global issues and forge stronger economic and strategic partnerships with other major economies. These partnerships can lead to increased investment, technology transfer, and collaboration in crucial areas such as infrastructure development, renewable energy, and digital innovation. Moreover, this membership underscores the importance of fostering greater economic integration within Africa through initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB), facilitating a more cohesive and robust economic stance on the global stage.

As Africa transitions from observer to active participant in the G20, it is imperative to develop a strategic and coordinated approach to ensure effective engagement in G20 processes. This involves building the necessary capacity within AU member states and the AU secretariat, enabling them to advocate for policies that support sustainable development and address the continent's unique challenges. Africa's

presence in the G20 also allows the continent to play a more active role in addressing global challenges such as climate change, economic inequality, and health crises, ensuring that African perspectives are considered in the formulation of international policies.

India has shown a strong commitment to strengthening its relationship with Africa and supporting the latter's involvement in the G20 process. This commitment is supported by civil society and business in both India and Africa. India's G20 presidency aimed to make the forum truly representative by realising the AU's desire for permanent membership. This move reassured Africa of the international community's commitment to its interests, especially in these challenging times.

The AU, at its 2013 summit, adopted Agenda 2063—a blueprint for the long-term transformation of the continent. Notable steps have been taken to institutionalise collective action and representation in areas such as climate change through the AU Committee for Climate Change. The AU is also working on implementing the AfCFTA agreement to create a single market in the continent. Despite these efforts, Africa's vulnerability during globally disruptive events like the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing Ukraine war has been laid bare. Africa has been disproportionately impacted by these events, highlighting the frailty of the existing international order in addressing such disparities.

To enhance Africa's global participation, it is critical for countries like South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, and Kenya to focus on sustainable growth of their economies and invest in strategic partnerships. India can play a vital role by raising the level of bilateral engagements with these countries. Investing political capital in bilateral partnerships with key states will help India in its pursuit of deeper engagements in Africa.

From the outset, India maintained that its G20 presidency would accommodate the concerns of the Global South to steer an agenda that is inclusive, impactful, and action-oriented. With the AU now a permanent member of the G20, the forum has become more representative. The AU, representing 55 countries and 20% of the world's population, now has a significant platform to voice Africa's perspectives in major multilateral fora.

The idea of the AU's G20 membership had been attracting global attention. US President Joe Biden and China had both expressed support for the AU's bid to join the G20. With its permanent membership now realised, it is essential for the AU to leverage this opportunity to influence global economic policies that promote sustainable development and economic growth across the continent. This membership is a call to action for African leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders to work together, leveraging this platform to advocate for Africa's interests and ensure that the continent's potential is fully realised on the global stage.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to a fruitful and engaging discussion.