

Director of Ceremonies;

Vice President and Minister of Health and Child Care

Hon. Gen (Rtd) Dr. C. G. D. N. Chiwenga

Honourable Deputy President of Costa Rica, Madame Epsy Campbell Barr;

African Union Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, Madame Amira Elfadil;

Minister of Defence and War Veterans Affairs and Chairman of ZANU PF, Hon) O. C. Z Muchinguri- Kashiri;

Minister of State for Harare Metropolitan Province; Hon. Sen. Eng. O. Chidawu;

Minister of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage, Hon. K. Kazembe;

Other Honourable Minister here present;

President of the Chief's Council, Chief F Charumbira and other Traditional Leaders here present;

The Acting Mayor of Harare, His Worship Cllr. S. M. Mutizwa;

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Senior Government Officials;

Chairman of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Dr. S. Guramatunhu and Board of Trustees:

Director of the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe, Mr. N. Moyo

Distinguished Presenters and Members of the Academia here present;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Comrades and Friends

Allow me to preface my address, by stating that the Constitutive Act of our Continental body, the African Union, underscores the importance of unity, cohesion, solidarity and cooperation between and among Africa, and its people.

Today, this International Conference on African Cultures presents an opportunity for us to reflect on our culture and consolidate the aspirations envisioned by the Founding Fathers of Independent Africa and other Pan- Africanists, which now constitute the legacy bequeathed to us. The Conference, is therefore, most opportune as it coincides with a stage where Zimbabwe, and indeed Africa as whole, remains focused on deploying the rich cultural heritage for the realisation of Continent's economic growth and transformation.

On behalf of the Government and people of Zimbabwe, and indeed on my own behalf, I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all, the Conference delegates. Zimbabwe is humbled to host the 3rd Edition of the International Conference on African Cultures.

I commend the Culture and Creative Arts Industry, stakeholders and other partners in being true to the spirit of Pan-Africanism by holding this event in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, and within the set protocols. The African Union's 2021 theme "**Arts, culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa we want**" is apt and befitting of the deliberations that the International Conference on African Culture 2021 will undertake.

Ladies and Gentleman;

In 1962, the then National Gallery of Rhodesia, now National Gallery of Zimbabwe, held the first International congress of African Culture. In that year the congress discussed matters around the control of African Knowledge Systems and Traditions of Indigenous populations and demonstrated the influence and contribution of African culture to world culture. Ironically, that Congress was held at a time when most African Countries, including the host, then Rhodesia, were still under the heavy shackles of colonialism.

In 2017, this platform was rebranded as the International Conference on African Cultures and became more alive to the fact that Africa does not carry a homogeneous culture; it is indeed diverse, but one.

It was accordingly deemed rightful that it facilitates the building of the new African narratives, told by Africans themselves, under a running theme of 'Mapping the Future'. This rekindled the discourse on decolonization, infusing within it, multipronged socio-economic and cultural dimensions. With this background, it is therefore imperative, that Africa and other progressive forces in

the global south heighten this agenda with renewed tenacity in the context of present realities.

I applaud the organisers of this event for the deliberate decision to hold this Pan-African Conference after every two years. This must see us take practical steps to realizing the fundamental objectives of this noble initiative. In unity and through deepening the consciousness of the African people and its institutions, we shall build ‘the truly liberated Africa We Want’.

It is critical to note that Liberation Movements over the Continent did not solely fight for the realisation of political and economic independence. At the core of the struggle was the socio-cultural emancipation and ownership of the means of production. The International Conference on African Cultures is challenged to continue to unapologetically speak about and amplify the ideals and ideologies of our Founding Fathers. These must propel the restoration and preservation of our rich heritage as well as advance the modernisation, industrialisation and prosperity of our great Continent.

To this effect, my Administration, remains committed to strengthen, bolster and entrench the shared ideology and values of the armed protracted liberation struggles that swept across the breadth and length of Africa. As we do so, we are building on this rich foundation and playing our role towards the realization of Agenda 2063.

I exhort the peoples of Africa and the Diaspora to remain vigilant and to dismantle neo-colonial interferences in its various, subtle guises, often designed to deny, expropriate and denigrate. In every circumstance, protecting and safeguarding our Continent’s collective memory and common vision must remain an area of high priority and concern.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Conference of African Cultures is an important and strategic forum through which the return of our cultural artifacts, archives and human remains estranged in foreign lands and jurisdictions must be vigorously pursued. It is commendable that this Conference is themed “**Africa Speaks: Confronting Restitution and Repatriation of Cultural Objects from an African Perspective**”.

We must, therefore, leverage this platform to rally the rest of Africa along with its Diaspora, to speedily resolve these residual issues towards the full enjoyment

of our hard won independence, dignity and our identity. As an African people, we strongly reject attempts to alienate us from our rich heritage and material culture. Under my leadership, and together with the current generation of African leaders, there is unflinching determination to ensure that Africa's identity is restored, promoted, preserved and safeguarded.

On its part, Zimbabwe stands ready to receive its cultural heritage estranged to the West. The urgent repatriation of expropriated archives, museum objects, and human remains, is our unequivocal demand. These include national artifacts and materials which relate to our heroes such as Chief Chinengundu Mashayamombe; Chief Chingaira Makoni and Chief Chiwashira, among others. These are sacred and feed into our broader national collective heritage.

There are similar cases across the Continent. Namibia, Tanzania, Ghana, Benin and Egypt, among other sovereign African states, face the same predicament as with Zimbabwe. Going forward, I exhort this Conference to examine the issues at hand with thoroughness and renewed resolve. I challenge you to boldly proffer solutions and modalities for common action, as one Continent.

Our peoples' heritage must be freed from the 'hostage' of Western museums, public spaces and private institutions. Within the purviews of the rights based discourse, Africa and its people continue to unreservedly pronounce that Cultural Rights are Human and People's Rights, too'. In light of this, Africa must reunite with that which belongs to it.

The concerned museums and institutions in the West are urged to facilitate and cooperate with Africa in the ongoing repatriation and restitution efforts. The use of pseudo-measures and terms such as "Digital Repatriation' and 'Permanent Loans" further infringe on the do no harm philosophy and sphere standards of development, thus delaying the closure of this sad chapter of our history.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I challenge the academia, heritage experts and professional institutions across the Continent to resolutely pursue '**Chimurenga chepfungwa**'/ '**the liberation of the mind**' informed by our strong African cultural belief systems and identity. African traditional leaders and institutions must be wary of some so called civic society organisations that are bent on capturing our traditional systems to enable perpetual pilferage of our rich heritage, while curtailing the economic growth

prospects of our communities. This is more pertinent and urgent as we continue on our journey towards delivering the economic, social and cultural aspirations of our people as envisioned in the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Finally, it is through Pan- African forums such as this one that African thought, vast body of knowledge must be harnessed and deployed to accelerate sustainable heritage based development. I therefore implore this Conference to ensure that your deliberations during these three days, proffer concrete actions towards the promotion of African Renaissance and asserting the future of Pan-Africanism. The Realisation of our aspirations as a united African people and Continent is our responsibility together. Let us all play our part.

With these remarks, it is now my honour and privileged to declare the 3rd Edition of the International Conference on African Cultures officially opened. I wish you fruitful engagements and that you enjoy your stay in Zimbabwe.

God bless you all.

God bless Zimbabwe

I thank you.