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**2016 African Transformation Forum:
Welcome and Opening Remarks**

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Transformation**

Welcome, dear friends and respected colleagues, to what we hope is a milestone event in the pursuit of Africa's economic transformation. We have bold expectations for this forum – expectations heightened by the amazing depth of knowledge, experience, and influence gathered among us.

Allow me to begin by offering my profound thanks and gratitude to His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Rwanda, Mr. Paul Kagame, and to his

government for agreeing to host this event in conjunction with the African Center for Economic Transformation.

President Kagame is an outspoken advocate for transformation strategies and policies. Under his leadership, Rwanda has proven to be one Africa's most inspiring growth and turnaround stories.

The President also is personally invested in the success of our forum and its outcomes. A few months ago he co-wrote with me an op-ed that introduced the African Transformation Forum to a broader audience while making the case for Africa's agricultural transformation.

Simply put, we would not be here today without the unwavering support of President Kagame.....

We look forward to the President's address later this morning.

I also wish to thank the Minister of Finance and Planning, the Honorable Claver Gatete, and his colleagues at the Ministry for their outstanding contributions and collaboration in making this event possible. Their work accurately reflects the competence and efficiency with which the Rwandan government functions – a model indeed for the continent.

Thank you again, Minister Gatete.....

Additionally, Carlos Lopes and his colleagues at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa deserve recognition for their solidarity with ACET in convening this conference. I had the invaluable opportunity to once hold the same position that Executive Secretary Lopes holds now. The decade I spent at ECA bolstered the Pan-African passion that continues to inspire me. Carlos, thank you for your personal support and for carrying on the traditions of

our august institution with such eloquence and enthusiasm.

And of course, to all our participants, thank you for joining us. Your willingness to share unique ideas and experiences over the next two days is the foundation of this Forum. In particular, I'd like to thank our distinguished panelists and speakers, many of whom have gone to great lengths to be here. Because of you, I'm confident our deliberations will be vibrant, thoughtful, and goal-oriented.

Finally, I want to recognize the sponsors whose generous contributions made this gathering possible: our two Convening Partners – the MasterCard Foundation and the Ford Foundation – as well as our two Presenting Partners – The Coca Cola Company and the Overseas Development Institute.

In addition to these fantastic ATF partners, many other institutions and organizations that have collaborated with ACET over the years are with us

today: the Government of The Netherlands, the Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the World Bank, to name a few. We are grateful for your support.

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

From the earliest days of this forum's planning, we have had a single goal: that the African Transformation Forum will *not be just another conference.*

That goal has informed not only our list of invited participants but also the exciting annotated agenda that has been circulated to all of you. We are not here just to talk, or exchange business cards, or have a few good meals and go on our way.

We are here to *act*.

We are here to accelerate Africa's transformation.

That's a goal shared by the African Center for Economic Transformation, which began operations in 2008 as a "think and do" tank, determined to help equip African countries with the knowledge and tools to pursue transformative growth.

We work at three levels.

- **At the institutional level, we help policymakers build capacity and strengthen the bodies charged with implementing a transformation agenda. For example, in Liberia we assisted the government in creating a new Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. And here in Rwanda, we worked with officials to develop a national framework for investing in public-private partnerships.**

- **At the country level, we work with governments, the private sector, and other stakeholders to chart a transformation course and help solve country-specific challenges. One recently completed study involving five countries – Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda – aims to increase smallholder productivity and agriculture value chains.**
- **And at the continental level, we strive to provide intellectual leadership and influence the development dialogue in support of transformation policies.**

On this point, let me briefly call attention to ACET’s inaugural African Transformation Report, which was published in 2014. An overview of the Report has been made available for all of you. That report provided, for the first time, a quantifiable definition of economic transformation. We called it “Growth with

DEPTH” – DEPTH being an acronym for the multidimensional process of turning the concept of economic transformation into a practical policy agenda.

- **The D stands for Diversification of production and exports.**
- **The E for Export competitiveness in international markets.**
- **The P for Productivity increases of all resource inputs, especially labor.**
- **T for Technology upgrades throughout the economy to make production more efficient and cost-effective.**
- **And H for Human well-being improvements, such as better jobs, higher incomes, and shared prosperity.**

The report generated great enthusiasm, and in some ways it provided the impetus for this forum. It was chock full of country lessons and recommendations for transformation strategies, but recommendations only go so far.

Transformation cannot take place without committed and ethical leadership. It cannot take place without sustained engagement between the public and private sectors. It cannot take place without improved coordination between key organs of government in strategy formulation and implementation. It cannot take place without the mobilization and judicious allocation of both domestic and external resources.

In all these areas direct peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing should become the norm. And given Africa's rapidly shifting development paradigm in favor of transformation, the timing of an event such as this has never been more urgent.

Since ACET started its work in 2008, a remarkable consensus has formed both within and outside Africa that economic transformation holds the key to sustained growth and prosperity. It is a key component of long-term strategies endorsed in recent years by the African Union, African Development Bank, and the Economic Commission for Africa. Last year, African Heads of State and Government identified economic transformation as the first of six pillars to support Africa's post-2015 development agenda and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Why is transformation such an urgent priority? There are several, but we can all agree that the recent developments in the international economy is one. The sharp fall in commodity prices, or the slowing of the Chinese economy has once again shown how vulnerable most African economies remain to external factors outside their control. Transformation has the power to change that dynamic.

A lot of thought and effort have gone into crafting the agenda for this Forum, because there's so much to consider in a very limited time. But the end result is a series of sessions that will delve into the most important topics for transformation, with moderators, panelists, and researchers that will challenge us to consider pressing questions and help us arrive at workable solutions.

And what makes our forum so exciting is how we will be tackling these questions *together*.

- How do we best upgrade skills among African youth to increase our human capital and generate long-term employment?**
- How do we increase access to finance for SMEs and smallholders so that these vital cogs in local economies are able to grow their businesses and create jobs?**
- How do we raise our collective focus on manufacturing, and how do individual**

- countries best develop coherent strategies to promote it?**
- **How do we improve trade facilitation in ways that take full advantage of Africa's regional markets?**
 - **How do we actively promote local content and value addition strategies as a means to increase the value of extractive resources?**
 - **How do we solve Africa's energy problems so that we close the power gap and light up our continent once and for all?**
 - **And how do we unlock the full potential of African agriculture – the bedrock of any successful transformation strategy?**

These are among the biggest questions on our agenda. And the main reason I can't wait to get started is

because I know that we have the right people in this room to help answer them.

Ladies and gentlemen, the African Transformation Forum is not just any conference – not because I, or any of us say so, but because of our motivations, our objectives, and our actions.

It's not just any conference because of the diversity of the stakeholders assembled.

...because our discussions will focus on some of the essential drivers and pathways to transformation.

...because we will not only identify problems but share lessons and experiences on what is working and what is not.

...because our work will not end here.

The Coalition for Transformation, to be launched at this forum, will continue the momentum established here in Kigali. It will take us forward.

The Coalition will be the first post-2015 platform to drive the transformation agenda in Africa. It will include a small number of Chapters, each focused on a separate area of economic transformation and comprised of core members with relevant expertise, interest, and knowledge.

Chapters will function as small, nimble networks of like-minded countries, organizations, and sponsors to coordinate joint action around a specific issue or sector, such as modernizing agriculture or developing youth skills. These networks will share valuable knowledge among their membership, and ultimately, to the rest of Africa to promote successful, proven, transformation strategies.

The last plenary session tomorrow afternoon will be dedicated to how the Coalition will get off the ground,

how individual Chapters will form, and how we all can play a role.

In other words, our deliberations and discussions over the next two days will allow us to flesh out these ideas further, and to obtain the personal, professional, and political commitments to what I am confident will be a great leap forward in Africa's transformation journey.

Let me conclude with one of my favorite African proverbs: If you know the beginning well, the end shall not trouble you:

I am confident that together we can make our gathering here in Kigali a new beginning to propel Africa's economic transformation.

Now lets get to work!