THE ADDIS ABABA DECLARATION

ESTABLISHING THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL LEADERS COUNCIL

Adopted in principle at the Headquarters of the African Union
Addis Ababa, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia | 13 November 2026

ENGLISH TRANSLATION
Translated from the French founding Declaration and approved for publication.

PREAMBLE

We, natural and traditional Sovereigns, Kings, Queens, Chiefs, Sultans, Emirs and representatives of indigenous traditional institutions of the five regions of Africa, gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 13 November 2026, acting on our own initiative and in the exercise of our respective traditional mandates, in a spirit of Ubuntu, pan-African solidarity and shared responsibility towards present and future generations of Africa;

RECALLING the historic struggles of the African peoples for freedom, dignity, unity and self-determination, as well as the founding ideals of the Organisation of African Unity and the African Union;

RECOGNISING the role of the African Union in promoting continental cooperation, peace and security, regional integration, public health, sustainable development, trade and common African positions in international affairs;

MINDFUL of the importance of ensuring that the benefits of continent-wide policies, programmes and cooperation initiatives reach communities in villages, localities, towns, pastoral areas, islands, urban neighbourhoods and cities throughout Africa;

AFFIRMING the enduring contributions of African indigenous and traditional institutions as custodians of cultural heritage, customary knowledge, community identity, social cohesion, mediation and the responsible management of local resources, while recognising the diversity of their histories, structures, practices and sources of legitimacy;

BEARING IN MIND the Constitutive Act of the African Union, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance, Agenda 2063 and other relevant African Union instruments relating to culture, heritage, human rights, peace, development and the participation of African peoples;

RESPECTING the sovereignty and territorial integrity of African States, their constitutional orders, the rule of law, human rights, democratic participation, gender equality and the equal dignity of all persons;

CONVINCED that inclusive and effective governance is strengthened by constructive cooperation between constitutional institutions, elected representatives and legitimate traditional institutions, in a manner that complements, without supplanting, constitutional government, independent judicial systems or the rights of citizens;

DETERMINED to strengthen the contribution of traditional institutions to African unity, peacebuilding, reparative justice, cultural renewal, sustainable development, intra-African mobility and the realisation of the aspirations of Agenda 2063;

WE HEREBY DECLARE AND DECIDE AS FOLLOWS:

1. Recognition of the role of traditional institutions

We reaffirm the historic and enduring role of African traditional institutions in the life of their communities. Their contributions include the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge; the promotion of social cohesion and intergenerational responsibility; community dialogue, mediation and conflict prevention; and support for inclusive development rooted in local realities. The authority and functions of each institution remain subject to the constitutional and legal framework applicable in its State, as well as to the freely expressed rights of the populations concerned.

2. Establishment of the African Traditional Leaders Council

We hereby establish the African Traditional Leaders Council (ATLC) as an independent, voluntary and continental platform bringing together natural and traditional Sovereigns and representatives of Africa's indigenous traditional institutions. The Council is founded on the collective initiative and agreement of the participating traditional leaders. It shall provide a common framework for cooperation, consultation, advocacy and the expression of common positions, while respecting the diversity and autonomy of its member institutions.

3. Nature and guiding principles of the Council

The Council shall be guided by African unity, Ubuntu, solidarity, mutual respect, inclusion, cultural diversity, peaceful coexistence, responsibility, transparency, gender equality, youth participation, respect for human rights and adherence to the constitutional and legal orders of African States. Its activities shall be non-partisan and shall not seek to replace or exercise the functions of elected public authorities or authorities established by the Constitution.

4. Objectives and functions

The objectives of the Council shall be as follows:

(a) to bring together traditional leaders and institutions from the five regions of Africa within a structured continental platform;

(b) to make the collective voice of participating traditional institutions heard within appropriate consultations with national governments, the African Union, regional economic communities and regional mechanisms, as well as relevant international and regional organisations;

(c) to promote and protect Africa's tangible and intangible cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge systems, languages, customary practices and traditional economies, in accordance with human rights and applicable law;

(d) to advocate for appropriate constitutional and legal recognition of traditional institutions, their protection and their effective participation in public life and development processes;

(e) to contribute to peacebuilding, conflict prevention, mediation, reconciliation, social cohesion and community resilience;

(f) to support inclusive and sustainable development, including community-led initiatives and the implementation of relevant African Union and Agenda 2063 priorities; and

(g) to strengthen cross-border cooperation and exchanges between traditional institutions, including through cultural, educational and people-to-people initiatives.

5. Representation, inclusion and regional balance

The Council shall ensure equitable participation of Africa's five geographical regions: North Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa. Its founding and permanent structures shall promote balanced regional representation and the effective participation of Kings, Queens, women traditional leaders, young people and other custodians of indigenous institutions. The Council's Charter shall define transparent procedures for membership, representation, selection of leaders, decision-making and accountability.

6. Drafting and adoption of the Charter

We mandate the establishment of a fifteen-member Charter Drafting Committee, tasked with preparing a draft Constitution or Charter of the Council within ninety (90) days of the adoption of this Declaration. The Committee shall be composed as follows:

(a) five members from the Thematic Area 4 Panel, including its Moderator, who shall serve on the Committee; and

(b) ten additional members, comprising two representatives from each of Africa's five regions.

The Committee shall consult participating traditional leaders and institutions as appropriate. It shall submit the draft Charter to the founding assembly or to a duly convened meeting of participating traditional leaders for consideration and adoption. Until the Charter is adopted, the Committee's mandate shall be limited to the preparatory work necessary to establish the Council's governance framework.

7. Relations with the African Union and other institutions

Following the adoption of its Charter, the Council shall transmit the Charter and relevant founding documents to the African Union Commission, accompanied by an official request for observer status or any other appropriate form of consultative or institutional relationship that may be granted in accordance with the applicable rules and procedures of the African Union. This Declaration is not intended to confer upon the Council any status within the African Union. The Council shall seek to establish relations with the African Union and other institutions in accordance with the procedures and criteria defined by those bodies.

8. Reparative justice

We affirm that traditional institutions and the communities they represent have an important role to play in the pursuit of reparative justice, including with regard to the recognition of historical harms, the preservation of historical memory, the restoration of dignity and the promotion of measures responsive to the needs and aspirations of affected communities. We therefore decide to establish an African Traditional Leaders Working Group on Reparative Justice. This Working Group shall seek to establish structured cooperation with the African Union Commission and relevant African Union organs and initiatives, including, where applicable, the African Union Commission on Reparations (AUCER), as well as with other relevant regional and international partners. Its work shall be guided by consultation with affected communities, historical integrity, inclusion and respect for the applicable processes of the African Union.

9. Tourism, cultural exchanges and a more connected Africa

We commit to mobilising traditional leaders and institutions to become leading actors for a more connected, welcoming and culturally vibrant Africa. Drawing on cross-border cultural, historical and kinship ties, we shall support the objectives of the African Continental Free Trade Area and relevant African Union frameworks by encouraging the lawful, safe and orderly movement of people, goods, services and cultural products across the continent. We shall advocate for progressive measures to facilitate intra-African travel and mobility, including the implementation of applicable African Union commitments on free movement, in accordance with national legislation and regional arrangements. We further call for the effective participation of traditional institutions in the design and implementation of relevant African Union and State tourism initiatives, particularly those relating to cultural heritage, community tourism, heritage routes, festivals and the sustainable management of cultural and natural sites.

10. Cooperation and implementation

We call upon traditional institutions, African States, the African Union, regional economic communities, civil society, academia, the private sector and development partners to cooperate constructively with the Council in areas of common interest. The Council shall pursue its objectives through dialogue, partnership, research, advocacy, capacity-building and practical programmes, in accordance with its adopted Charter and applicable laws. No provision of this Declaration shall be interpreted as undermining the sovereignty of any African State or the rights and freedoms guaranteed by national, regional or international human rights instruments.

ADOPTION

This Declaration is adopted in principle by the natural and traditional Sovereigns and representatives of indigenous traditional institutions gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 13 November 2026. It constitutes the founding declaration of the African Traditional Leaders Council and expresses the collective intention of its participating signatories to establish and develop the Council in accordance with the Charter to be prepared and adopted under paragraph 6 above.

ADOPTED AT ADDIS ABABA, FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA, ON 13 NOVEMBER 2026.

SIGNATURES

Signed on behalf of the natural and traditional Sovereigns and representatives of indigenous traditional institutions participating in the founding meeting:

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