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Remarks on the Threat of Artificial Intelligence in Africa

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Excellencies,
distinguished guests,
ladies and gentlemen,

Artificial Intelligence is often described as the future of progress. But in Africa today, it is also becoming a force multiplier of risk. Not because AI is inherently dangerous, yet it is being deployed in environments marked by fragility, weak regulation, and unresolved conflict.

First, AI is transforming information warfare. Deepfake videos, synthetic news, and automated bot networks are already capable of distorting reality at scale. In fragile political systems, this is not just a technological issue; it is a trigger for electoral violence, a driver of ethnic tension, and a direct assault on public trust.

Second, AI is lowering the barrier for terrorism and insurgency. Groups such as Al-Shabaab and ISIS are no longer confined to rudimentary propaganda. They can now tailor messaging, translate across languages, and potentially integrate AI into surveillance and drone operations. In effect, AI allows non-state actors to behave like sophisticated state entities.

Third, we are witnessing a surge in AI-enabled cybercrime. From voice cloning to advanced phishing attacks, Africa's fast-growing digital economies, especially mobile money ecosystems, are increasingly vulnerable. This threatens not only financial systems, but confidence in the digital transformation itself.

Fourth, there is the risk of AI-powered surveillance. Without strong governance, these tools can be used not to protect citizens, but to monitor, intimidate, and suppress them. The line between security and repression becomes dangerously thin.

Fifth, AI is reshaping the nature of conflict. Low-cost drones, semi-autonomous systems, and improved targeting capabilities are accelerating asymmetric warfare, particularly in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa.

Sixth, we must confront the reality of digital colonialism. African data is fueling global AI systems, yet the continent captures only a fraction of the value. Control over infrastructure, standards, and governance remains largely external.

Seventh, AI risks deepening economic inequality. While some hubs advance, many communities face job displacement and exclusion from the digital economy.

And finally, underpinning all of this is a stark reality: our regulatory frameworks are not keeping pace.

Excellencies,

The defining insight is this: AI does not create new conflicts; rather, it amplifies existing vulnerabilities. Where institutions are weak, AI deepens instability. Where societies are divided, AI sharpens those divisions. Where governance is absent, AI fills the vacuum, and often dangerously so. The question before us is not whether Africa will adopt AI. It is whether Africa will shape it, or be shaped by it.

Thank you.