Statement at the Friends of Zimbabwe Roundtable

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Good morning Friends,
Excellencies,
Minister Tendai Biti,
Ambassadors,
Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I begin by welcoming you all to Tunis and thanking you for accepting my invitation.

Many of you have travelled from quite far to be present here and I express our deep appreciation.

We have one objective – to work with our Zimbabwean Friends to see that great country return to prosperity, find its place as one of the economic engines in the SADCC Region – and for the improvement of the welfare of its People, who have gone through an unprecedented difficult period.

In 2008, the GPA laid a foundation, it was a good beginning. We have all been witness to the positive outcome in particular on the economic field.

Nonetheless, the country still has a long way to go. We are disappointed at the slow pace of implementation of key aspects of the GPA.

We share the view that Zimbabwe’s economic objective must be to attract investment. That is why it is necessary to create a climate of confidence, reduce uncertainties and bring about policy predictability.

As partners and Friends of the country, all we ask for is the full implementation of the GPA, which is a framework agreed by Zimbabweans themselves, not one imposed from outside.

We are committed to stay engaged with the Government of National Unity, provided the roadmap in the GPA shows signs of progression, not stagnation.
Today, Minister Tendai Biti will walk us through the recent developments and current situation on the economic, social and political front. We are very keen to hear from you Minister.

Later in the day, we will hear from partners, the IMF, World Bank and the Paris Club on the state of play especially in relation to the Staff Monitored Programme, and prospects for reaching the HIPC eligibility.

While Zimbabwe faces many challenges, a particular obstacle the country must overcome is the 8.8 bn $ external debt.

I commend Minister Biti, the Government, for agreeing on a framework around the debt issues, and we are keen to hear from you as to your expectations.

As you will recall, members of the ADF set aside ½ a billion $ for the arrears clearance (and I believe 900mn $ at IDA), thus a total of 1.4 bn $ for Zimbabwe, Sudan and Somalia on a first come first serve basis from the IFIs.

In the meantime the country faces many other challenges, of recovery and rehabilitation. We at the AfDB have continued to provide modest support through the Fragile State Facility and the Africa Water Facility.

I am pleased about our collective efforts via the Zimbabwe MDTF. Some of the countries present here today have generously contributed.

I wish to thank you all. I am keen to hear from you as to whether you are satisfied as to how the Trust Fund is doing. I hope the trust you put in us has delivered fruits. If not I would like to hear what is it that we can do better.
As Friends of Zimbabwe, we acknowledge the progress made. We congratulate Tendai Biti and his team, but we also are realistic enough to know how complex the issues are and Minister we admire your tenacity.

This Roundtable is a forum for the Minister and his team to update us on their strategy going forward. It is also an opportunity for him and his team to hear issues of concern to us. I look forward to a frank exchange so that by the end of today we have a shared better understanding of the situation in Zimbabwe and the way forward.

In particular, I hope we have a clear strategy as to what happens to the ADF (and I suppose IDA) set aside for arrears clearance in case progress on the ground is slower than our original projections and we are thus not able to utilize the resources by the sunset date.

I hope, together we can explore a number of options in a pragmatic way bearing in mind the complexity of issues in Zimbabwe:

- Pull our weight behind the reform program,
- Support an SMP that builds on the remarkable progress made so far,
- Arrears clearance.

In the end of course much will depend on the People of Zimbabwe themselves. We can only help and support. We have chosen to stay engaged positively with the People of Zimbabwe knowing the risks and uncertainties. But it is a noble commitment – and I hope we can stay the course.

Thank you.