

Generation of Change: Africa Tomorrow

Thank you, Chair,

It is a great pleasure for me to participate in this celebration and join their Excellencies and distinguished personalities in this seminar. Fortuitously, today is also my home country Eritrea's Independence Day. Eritrea fought a 30-year war to win liberation from Ethiopia. So, it is a double celebration for me and I invite you to join our celebrations later this evening.

Let me begin by thanking the Africa Students' Community at *Vrije Universiteit Brussel* (VUB-ASCOM) for organising the **African Liberation Week** and today's commemoration of the **African Liberation Day 2018** under the theme **Generation of Change: Africa Tomorrow**.

Let me also express my deep appreciation to Prof. Caroline Pauwels, the Rector of VUB, for encouraging the African students here at the University to found ASCOM, pursue their studies in earnest and prepare to shape the future of Africa. For Africa's future depends surely on its youth, the continent's rapidly growing population of young men and women.

To set the tone for the discussion, I will focus on: (1) the significance of Africa Liberation Day; (2) Africa's major achievements and challenges; and (3) the role of Africa's youth in shaping **Africa Tomorrow**.

1. Significance Africa Liberation Day

Africa Liberation Day commemorates the founding of the OAU in Addis Ababa in 1963. We are gathered here on the eve of the 55th Anniversary of that historic day, a remarkable achievement of the Pan-Africanist movement.

The idea of Pan-Africanism originated in the black communities of African descent in the Caribbean and the USA in the mid-19th century as the path to unravel the deracination wrought by slavery and attain emancipation from the enduring scourge of racism via a return to the roots in Africa. As we commemorate Africa Day, it is important to remember and honour some of the most prominent early proponents of Pan-Africanism: Edward Blyden of the West Indies; Marcus Garvey of Jamaica; Cyril James and George Padmore of Trinidad; and Martin Delany, Alexander Crummell and William Du Bois of the USA.

Driven by a shared vision of unity and common purpose among the peoples of Africa and the African Diaspora, Pan-Africanism has evolved in different forms at different historical moments and geographical locations into a movement with overlapping cultural, political and ideological dimensions.

In its cultural manifestation, the Pan-Africanist movement inspired, among others, the Black Power Movement as an extension of the civil rights movement in the US which advocated for black people to “politically get together and organise themselves so that they can speak from a position of strength rather than a position of weakness”. In its political manifestation, Pan-Africanism advocates that peoples of African descent scattered the world over have common interests and should unite in a unified Africa. In its ideological manifestation, Pan-Africanism signifies ‘the existence of groups of thinkers who try to elaborate systematic ideas about how the continent should be liberated and reorganised and what the relations of its peoples should be with other continents.’

The Pan-Africanist idea gathered prominent Africans from the continent and descendants of Africans from the Diaspora and, taking an institutional form, gave birth, in succession, to the Pan-African Conference, the Pan-African Congress, the Organisation of African Unity and the African Union, each of which aimed to address the main issues facing Africans at home and in the Diaspora at the specific period of time as a result of marginalisation in their global dispersion and European colonial domination of most of Africa.

Overtime, the idea was embraced by African nationalist leaders, most notably Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Ahmed Sékou Touré of Guinea, Modibo Keita of Mali, Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt and Julius Nyerere of Tanganyika, who championed the cause of African liberation from European colonial rule and advocated the unity of African states upon accession to independence. The Pan-African project gradually spread and gained traction in response to the continued underdevelopment of Africa and ‘in recognition of the fragmented nature of the existence of Africans, their marginalisation and alienation whether in their own continent or in the diaspora’.

Driven by the desire to liberate the continent from European colonial rule and build unity among the newly independent states, Pan-Africanism evolved towards a project for the economic integration and political union of Africa. There was general agreement on the concept of unity in independence among the principal advocates of Pan-Africanism. However, there were conflicting visions of the future of Africa and on the question of whether to retain or redraw the colonial boundaries following independence. Differences of opinion and personality divided the new states into the Casablanca, Monrovia and Brazzaville groups.

The formation of the OAU and the adoption of its charter came as a result of an eventual compromise reached between the principal rivals, the progressive Casablanca Group and the conservative Monrovia Group, and the acquiescence of the lesser Brazzaville group. While accepting the compromise, the ardent Pan-Africanists (Casablanca Group) continued to call for the immediate political union of the continent.

In a passionate address to the first gathering of Heads of State and Government on the eve of the establishment of the OAU, exactly 55 years ago today, President Kwame Nkrumah pleaded for an African Union to lay the foundations for a continental Union of African States. Describing the border problem, quite prophetically, as the ‘fatal relic of colonialism’ that will drive Africa to constant interstate wars, he advocated the political unity of Africa to ‘render

existing boundaries obsolete and superfluous’ and heal the ‘festering sore of boundary disputes between our various states’. In Nkrumah’s conception, the complete liberation of Africa required the formation of a ‘continental government’ to ‘forge a political union based on defence, foreign affairs and diplomacy, and a common citizenship, an African currency, an African monetary zone, and an African central bank’.

In the end, the Summit decided to sustain state sovereignty and maintain the colonial borders intact among the emerging independent states of Africa. The OAU Charter enshrined territorial integrity within the colonial border as a cardinal principle of the organised community of sovereign African states. Considering that “border problems constitute a grave and permanent factor of dissention” and that “the borders of African States, on the day of their independence, constitute a tangible reality”, the First Ordinary Session of the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government resolved that Member States “respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence” (Resolution AHG/Res. 16(1) on Border Dispute among African States, Cairo, July 1964).

The OAU was thus a product of the Pan-Africanist movement and herein lies the significance of Africa Liberation Day.

2. Africa’s Major Achievements and Challenges

Africa is a large continent, endowed with vast natural resources, diverse cultures and hardworking people. Despite its vast natural and human resources, however, a combination of historical factors, aggravated by, among others, malgovernance, wars and conflict, political instability and rampant corruption at all levels of government affecting the day-to-day life of society have hindered its development and the progress of its people. A significant democratic deficit has provoked violent conflicts in many parts of Africa, feeding underdevelopment and poverty.

Politics and economics of exclusion have generated vast *income disparities and limited access* to essential public goods and services, including quality education, adequate healthcare, and human security for the great majority of the people. Moreover, Africa must grapple with the effects of climate change, accelerating desertification and environmental degradation, gender inequality and youth unemployment. Africa needs to work out creative solutions to its pressing challenges in the framework of democratic governance, economic integration and political union.

What has Africa done to address these challenges? There have been some significant achievements. The OAU (1963-2002) and the AU have worked to:

- (1) Promote unity and solidarity among the states and peoples of Africa;
- (2) Defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its Member States, in the context of non-interference in their internal affairs;
- (3) Eradicate all forms of colonialism, including apartheid, from the continent;

- (4) Transform the OAU into the AU: the Abuja Treaty creating the African Economic Community (3 Jun 1991) followed by the Sirte Declaration (9 Sep 1999) and the Constitutive Act (Jul 2002);
- (5) Adopt Agenda 2063 (50th to 100th anniversary) aimed to attain the Pan-Africanist vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa driven by its own people to play a dynamic role in world affairs;
- (6) Establish RECs as the building blocks of the AEC;
- (7) Establish the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Customs Union & Monetary Union;
- (8) Establish the APSA (African Security Council, Continental Early Warning System and the Panel of the Wise) as well as the African Standby Force, with its regional brigades affiliated with the RECs, to prevent, manage and resolve conflict; promote, make and build peace and contribute to post-conflict reconstruction;
- (9) Adopted the African Charter on Democracy and Governance and the principle of the R2P to enable the AU to apply the principle of non-indifference in situations of mass atrocity, even against the will of the government in question.

All these are fine declarations, but implementation is slow or absent. For instance, the realisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area requires a conducive regulatory framework, physical infrastructure, such as adequate supply of energy; network of transport, communications and financial services), which are lacking. APSA and its various components, such as the African Standby Force and its regional brigades face problems of overlap, ownership and viability, given the heavy dependence on external funding.

To be able to ‘walk the talk’, African states must embrace democratic Governance. There is no commonly accepted definition of democracy. It means many things to many people. There are, however, certain principles that distinguish a democratic from a non-democratic system of government. These principles include *rule of law*; *respect for fundamental freedoms*; *protection of basic rights*, including *minority rights*; *popular participation in the governance process*; and *transparency and accountability in public policy and decision making*, including in the *management of State assets and national resources*. The elimination and/or minimisation of the democratic deficit in much of Africa and the concomitant spread of democratic governance throughout the continent would respect the social contract between the state and citizens.

A strong, independent and vibrant civil society, including a free press, is essential for democratic governance. African governments must enable autonomous civil society to thrive. Given the space of freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, civil society can countervail violations of democratic values, such as rule of law, justice, freedom, equality, human rights and dignity. It can help promote and/or preserve the rule of law and adherence to the social contract as well as mediate conflicting interests in society and find common ground for joint effort to improve people’s lives.

Sustainable development requires a healthy and educated population. Africa is home to 1.2 billion people, over 60% of whom are under the age of 25. By 2050, the population is projected

to double, making Africa the second most populous continent. Africa's rapid population growth is expected to have hard-hitting socio-economic and environmental impacts, putting greater strain on scarce resources and limited services. Providing for universal quality education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, adequate public healthcare delivery and gainful employment are thus among the key challenges facing the continent.

African states must invest in Africa's youth, the continent's most valuable resource, and develop their education and healthcare systems to equip a healthy youth with the skillset needed to manage and operate the knowledge economy now and in the future. Ensuring quality education, gainful employment and meaningful engagement would help minimise irregular migration, put an end to the brawn and brain drain and accelerate Africa's development.

3. Africa Tomorrow

Africa's youth bore the lion's share of the burden and sacrifices of the anti-colonial struggle for independence. They also bore the lion's share of the burden imposed by the East-West rivalry that turned Africa into a battleground for proxy warfare during the Cold War. It is young men and women who fight and die in Africa's interstate, intrastate and internecine wars and violent conflicts. It is now about time that African youth be enabled to actualise their potential through universal access to meaningful education to acquire the knowledge, skills and knowhow to build, develop and integrate African economies and achieve the political union of Africa. Africa's youth must be put at the centre of Africa's development agenda.

As Africans and, especially, as Pan-Africanists, we would like to see Africa on the move: a dynamic Africa that conquers its challenges, puts its destiny in its own hands, and attains economic integration and political union. Surely, the future of Africa lies in the hands of its people, especially its youth, at home and in the Diaspora. Overcoming the present internal fragmentation and external marginalisation of Africa, the pace and scale of its economic development, social progress and political transition would depend on the continent's ability to enable its generation of change to build tomorrow's Africa. It is imperative that its large and growing youth population be trained, equipped and empowered to lead and drive Africa's transformation into a peaceful, united, democratic and prosperous continent.

Thank you for your kind attention.