

Pan Africanism and Global Transformations: the past, present and future of an idea

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“The Quest for Dignity, Freedom and Unity”

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Appreciation:

I like to thank the organizers of this important conference in general and Dr. Alem Hailu, a friend for many years, and Ato Tamirat, the chair of this session in particular. Over the past couple of hours, I have learned a great deal from distinguished speakers and look forward to more. Knowledge is fundamental to meaningful change. I am heartened by the fact that the history of Pan Africanism traces its roots in Ethiopian history, culture and identity. This ancient country whose evolution and history have come to be questioned by some quarters is a symbol of black history, identity and resilience.

The topic I have been asked is vital not only for Ethiopians and other Africans, but also for people of African origin around the globe: here in the United States, in the Caribbean and in Central and South America where millions of people of African origin live and work.

Pan Africanism is an idea. I believe that it should be a destiny. As in the past, Pan Africanism and the ongoing struggle for African unity are about control of our destiny, including mastery over Africa’s vast natural resources. I will tell you the reason why? I start with the premise that Pan Africanism is still an unfinished business. The vast majority of Africans do not yet enjoy their own natural resources. There

is a consensus that Africans are nowhere closer to genuine continental unity today than they were when I was in elementary school. For example, indicators show that the African Union initiated transformation for the region by 2025 or the Millennium Development Goals of the UN by 2015 are not likely to be reached. It is not because Africans do not work hard or do not aspire to achieve economic prosperity that others have or will soon achieve. It is primarily because of repressive and poor governance. This is not the narrative that is compelling to me; and I am sure to you. It is also some of the progress that is taking place in the region. It is increases in incomes and the middle class. We need to note progress where this exists without forgetting hurdles where they also persist.

Enormous physical and social changes have taken place throughout the continent and the rest of the world that defy the imagination. I know. In travelling and working in a number of African countries, I am amazed by the rapid physical and social changes throughout the region. The formation of larger and larger middle classes in countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Botswana, Cape Verde, Kenya, Mauritius, Tunisia, Egypt, Ethiopia etc. are among the indicators of these changes. For sure, progress is uneven. There is income and wealth concentration in some countries that is shocking. These divergences and anomalies can be traced to history and the distortions that emanate from slavery, colonialism, the Cold War and multinational corporate and elite greed.

What are the roots of these changes?

I like to take you back to history and try to connect the dots in the march for human dignity, freedom, equality and social justice in Africa. These principles and values are fundamental in the formation of Pan

Africanism. There were powerful political, ideological and economic forces that shaped history at the time. Equally, **there were imaginative and visionary leaders behind these ideas.**

When I was in elementary and secondary school in Ethiopia, there were only two independent countries in Africa: Ethiopia and Liberia. Ethiopia had established a continuous independent identity, culture and sovereignty spanning thousands of years. It is ironic though that this glorious past that black people around the globe also share, has been assaulted by external and internal groups that do not wish to see a unified, prosperous, multiethnic, multi-religion, fair, just and pluralist Ethiopia that will continue to serve as a symbol of African identity and pride. Ethiopia served as a beacon or at least a symbol of African and black independence and dignity. This cannot be denied regardless of how one feels about the history of political and social governance in the country.

Let me turn to the forces that shaped Pan Africanism

1. Slavery and the presence of blacks in North America and the Caribbean; and to some extent central and South America. The roles of intellectuals such as Marcus Garvey, Frantz Fanon were pivotal. Africans had its global advocates and still does.
2. The Berlin Conference sponsored by Bismarck that carved African like meat into pieces. Africa's continued ethnic, religious and other sectarian based conflicts that cost billions of dollars per year and keep millions destitute and poor and intractable to resolve emanate from this division. Interests linger and divisions baffle outsiders.

- 3.** The Cold War and intense rivalry between the USSR and the West led by the United States. Independent and liberation movements as well as newly independent countries played the Superpowers against one another; and the Superpowers tried to use their military and financial muscles to influence events in Africa. Hidden behind the façade of support is national interest. I remember, while at Johns Hopkins University, a heated argument with a Professor who almost derailed my doctoral program. The contention was this. Does Portugal have a right to occupy Angola and Mozambique by force using NATO weapons? His response was of course, yes. Mine was no. The debate on legitimacy to occupy and hold a nation against its will was part of the Western legal argument at the time. Razing villages and killing innocent people and exploiting their resources were accepted. In some measure, this is also the case today; except it comes from African governing elites. This is why I suggest that Africans need to commit themselves to be masters of their own national resources and destiny.
- 4.** The intellectual left in many Sub-Saharan African countries that rejected colonialism and Imperialism and sided with liberation movements across the globe was critical. It boosted the confidences of nationalist leaders in places such as Guinea Bissau, Algeria and numerous others. There were more interfaces of knowledge and experience than before. A sense of belonging prevailed over a sense of division.
- 5.** The Second World War and the brazen invasion of Ethiopia, the only independent African country. The atrocities inflicted on

civilians, napalm etc. enraged Africans and people of African origin everywhere. International public diplomacy is largely rooted in the atrocities committed by fascism and Nazism. The League of Nations failed to prevent aggression. It is this naked aggression and Emperor Haile Selassie's enduring plea that history recalls.

6. Here, I like to highlight the roles of African intellectuals and emerging leaders. People can differ on Emperor Haile Selassie's domestic and national legacy for a variety of reasons. What is incontestable is that his vigorous diplomacy following Italian invasion is a turning point. In 1936, he addressed the League and said this: "I am here today to claim justice which is due to my people....There is no precedent for a people being victim of injustice—the systemic extermination of a nation by a barbarous means." He then warned thus. "Apart from the Kingdom of the Lord there is not on this earth any nation that is superior to any other." He continued, "Should it happen that a strong Government finds it may with impunity destroy a weak people, then the hour strikes for that weak people to appeal to the League of Nations to give its judgment. God and history will remember your judgment."

Collective security failed to respond to the weak. Aggressors exercised their superiority over the weak, this time involving others in the superior camp. The world was soon after engulfed in one of the most brutal wars ever fought.

7. The key theme that I gain from this appeal to the League is that “weak people” all over Africa and the rest of the colonized world suffered unimaginable atrocities physically, emotionally; and lost decades of opportunity to advance their own development.

8. The struggle against colonialism and for national liberation and independence started in earnest after the Second World War. Ethiopia regained its independence and immersed itself in global diplomacy and collective security: sending troops to Korea in the 1950s and the Congo in the 1960s. Its participation was not solely based on the ideals of collective security. It was principally driven by national interest and close ties to the United States and the West. This has its own pluses and minuses **that I do not wish to** diagnose or speculate. It is vital though to remember that Ethiopia’s technological backwardness and material poverty did not prevent it to exercise a determined effort in support of African dignity, honor and soul. The African spirit of Pan Africanism is ultimately about the African soul that no one can take away. **It is** this soul and spirit that people of African origin took with them to Argentina, Brazil and many other places.

Emerging Africa and Transformation

Following the end of the War, the wave of decolonization accelerated. Independence of African is among the most substantial transformations of the 20th century. What colonialists designed and imposed on the peoples of Africa crumbled in succession not because colonial powers saw the injustice they caused; but because of the determination of

oppressed people everywhere to free themselves from the yoke of colonialism and regain their honor and soul.

Between 1958 and 1960 alone, 16 African countries had achieved independence. By the late 1960s, 48 countries had become independent. Between 1974 and 1990, another 12 African countries joined the family of independent nations. A few such as Algeria, Angola and Mozambique gained freedom after bloody wars that cost the lives of millions. The latest addition is South Sudan. External factors helped too. For example, newly independent African nations helped others that were still under colonial domination. Given the Cold War, the Socialist camp was instrumental in supplying arms and logistics to numerous liberation fronts.

Leftist orientation among a few newly independent African countries was pivotal in influencing attitudes from ex-colonial powers and the US. Rivalry has its own pitfalls and merits as I will show in the last part of my presentation. The ideological rifts among newly independent African countries forced different alliances: market and Western oriented countries such as Ethiopia, Liberia, Kenya and others had strong ties with the West; while left leaning and ultra nationalist countries such as Egypt, Somalia, Ghana under Nkrumah and others has closer ties to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. One thing common that I deduct from these orientations and alliances is that African countries did not establish indigenous based socioeconomic and political governance that mirrors their own cultures, history and aspirations.

African countries have yet to develop indigenous culture and blend it with the best from any other country or region to serve their interests.

Military Dictatorship

These tendencies and the slow pace of development within newly independent African countries led to another phenomenon from which many countries have not recovered. This is emergence of an era of military dictatorship. This form of dictatorship is not much different from others forms in that new African countries were not able to achieve peace that would in turn lead to sustainable and equitable development for their populations. I will be specific. In post-independence, 33 countries experienced some form of military dictatorship. The consequences are immense. I will mention only two:

- i) Massive resources were squandered through corruption and illicit outflow of precious foreign exchange; and,
- ii) Military dictatorships undermined the formation of civil society and civic and democratic culture.

The expectations of Africans were dashed by their own leaders. Foreign domination was replaced by domestic oppression. The most educated people left their countries and immigrated mostly to the West.

Africans suffered from another equally devastating phenomenon—this one a legacy of the colonial past. I refer to civil wars that emanate from the colonial inheritance of ethno-linguistic fragmentation and divide and rule. At least 20 countries (40 percent of Sub-Saharan African nations) experienced horrific civil wars, including genocide in Rwanda and Darfur. It is this phenomenon that led to the formation of South Sudan as an independent state.

When there is oppression and discrimination, there is a huge price to pay. Oppression and discrimination are not cost neutral.

The “Lost Decade.”

Political instability, constant civil strife, dictatorship and corruption led to what is called the “Lost Decade” in Africa. Let me mention a few attributes of this devastating period. These include “political instability, violent civil strife, economic and social stagnation, unbelievable destitution and hunger, failed states, total economic collapse.” Africa’s nascent middle class was hit hard. Gold, diamonds and other resources were smuggled out. People resented their governments and wanted out. This led to one of the largest immigrations of social capital in the world and compounded the devastating impact of slavery that took out millions of Africa’s ablest sons and daughters. This is institutional and social capital de-capitalization—a source of dependency.

Between 1960 and 1987, 100,000 of the most highly educated and best trained Africans left the continent. Between 1986 and 1990 alone, 60,000 middle level managers followed. Africa’s brain drain is central to this decade and to the struggle for sustainable and equitable development. No country can achieve sustainable, equitable and indigenous development without human capital. What did African governments do? They went to the IMF and the World Bank for bailouts and received a hard pill to swallow. This is the so called structural adjustment program that created more havoc, reducing budgets for schools, teachers, health facilities, sanitation and electricity and so on. The panacea became the problem. It seems that it was acceptable to treat the African continent as perpetually dependent and an experiment of all sorts of development programs dictated by donors. **Political elites exploit this condition to advance their interests.**

What are the financial and economic consequences?

African corruption is legendary as is the plunder of the continent's natural resources by multinational corporations. It is not the forum to dwell on how much is stolen in the past and how much capital flows out of Africa through smuggling and other illicit means. It is tens of billions each year. The 2011 Global Financial Integrity data shows these staggering sums by country. These country based findings pale small compared to total known and unknown capital outflow from the entire continent. Africa is now a net exporter of capital. How does the African Union accept or tolerate this? Strange as it may seem, Ethiopia is too.

The African Union (NEPAD), UNDP, Global Financial Integrity and others revealed that between 1970 and 2008, the continent lost US\$700 billion. If invested, the amount would reach US\$900 billion, almost equivalent to Africa's aggregate GDP of US\$997 billion. The latest data on capital flight out of Africa is even more frightening. GFI estimates that the region lost US\$358 billion through corruption, trade **mispricing** and other illicit activities between 2000 and 2008. One of the two poorest countries in Africa, Ethiopia, lost US\$11.7 billion between 2000 and 2008. Illicit outflow from one of the two poorest countries in Africa and one of the least developed on the planet; the largest aid recipient in Africa and one of the largest in the world is simply scandalous. In 2009, the country lost US\$3.26 billion in illicit outflow. These monies are stolen from children who should be fed; mothers who need medical care; youth who need employment; farmers who need inputs such as better seeds, fertilizers and credits etc.

These sums do not include what is smuggled out through money laundering and so on. The primary source of this astronomical illicit

outflow that drains investment capital is trade mispricing and theft by government officials. Imagine the immense potential use of this capital in improving health, education, sanitation, safe drinking water, shelter, roads, bridges, factories and industries. Africa has become a net exporter of capital rather than the other way around. This illicit capital outflow does not happen without collusion of foreign banks, corporations and in some cases governments. The old colonial and new ties that emanate from globalization continue to create havoc. This is not the whole story of an Africa that is changing faster than anyone imagined.

Africa is the last frontier with enormous potential for investments and to improve the lives of its almost one billion souls. It has vast amounts of arable farmlands. It is this that has made the continent the center of what is called “land grab.” For those interested in an in-depth **analysis** of the phenomenon, I would like to encourage you to read my latest book, “The Great Land Giveaway.” This research based book documents the pitfalls of land giveaway to domestic allies and foreign investors without conditions, transparency and consultation with the population. The region possesses immense mineral resources such as diamonds, gold, uranium, cobalt, iron-ore and natural resources such as timber; fuels such as petroleum and gas. It is these resources that attract competitive forces from outside. A look at the change in mindset among investors tells the story. The question is who is taking advantage and what is the value-added for Africans.

There is consensus that the dramatic changes in Africa today are driven by new economic forces that are replacing old colonial relations: a manifestation of the emergence of China, India and others as global competitors. In particular, China is fast becoming the single most

important game changer in Africa today. It operates in almost all African countries; especially those with vast natural resources including petroleum gas, minerals and fertile farmlands. The “Chinese are coming” has replaced old colonial norms and ties. Some fear that Africa may be subjected to a new form of “colonialism.” I am doubtful that this is the case. The reason for my doubt is that there are internal dynamic social and economic forces at play too. I will give one example. I will use IT that the Ethiopian governing party denies to Ethiopians.

The information revolution as a catalyst and democratizing force

Of all the positive things in globalization, one technology stands out as enabler and democratizing force. We saw this in the Arab Spring in North Africa and the Middle East. The enabling role of IT technology—the internet, mobile phones and satellite television—is now deeply rooted in countries such as Kenya, Botswana, Nigeria, even war-torn Somalia. It is changing relations and economics. Those who use it add at least one percent in GDP. Those that fear it penalize their societies. In sum, IT is one of the transforming technologies in Africa. The “Dark Continent” is no more. This too is likely to contribute to the next phase of Pan Africanism and greater unity across countries, regions and cultures. It will take commitment, courage and farsighted leadership among Africans and push from civil society and supporters across the globe. This conference is a testimony to the push.

New dynamics in African relations

During the Cold War, African nations relied on the Soviet Union in securing alternative aid, principally military hardware. The story today is different. Relations with the West and the now defunct Soviet Union are now replaced by economic and trade relations with powerful

emerging economies: China, India, Brazil, Russia (BRICS) and others such as the Middle East and Malaysia. China leads the new arrivals in Africa. The Chinese approach to Africa is radically different from that of ex-colonial powers and the US. China treats African nations as equals; although this is contestable. It provides generous grants and commercial credits to Zimbabwe, Zambia, Ethiopia and others without conditions. It emphasizes two way trades.

Last year, Africa-China trade exceeded \$115 billion; and is expected to grow by 44 percent per year. If this trend continues, China will be the dominant and most transformative external power in Africa for decades to come. The excitement in Africa concerning this growing relationship with China is linked directly to Chinese willingness and readiness to provide finance (soft loans, lines of credit); to build huge infrastructural projects such as railways, schools, hospitals, highways and bridges, hydroelectric power generation plants, manufacturing, mines and so on. Observers say that nothing done by Western countries compares to what China is doing in Africa. This new relationship is therefore transformative. It has enormous impact—both positive and negative, on populations and the lives of people.

On the positive side, new infrastructure strengthens domestic capabilities and improves social and economic capital; upgrades domestic and regional markets; and creates social cohesion. It opens up new opportunities for domestic private enterprises and so on. Poor infrastructure is among the biggest constraints to real African integration. Therefore, rail and other physical infrastructure will, in the long run, break physical barriers and promote greater and rapid African economic integration. In turn, infrastructure is most likely to improve the chances for advancing the illusive African unity, the ultimate

objective of Pan Africanism that Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyrere, Jomo Kenyatta, Emperor Haile Selassie and others promoted by establishing the Organization of African Unity in 1963.

On the adverse side, there is a growing perception that China is blind to human rights violations by dictatorial regimes—Sudan, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, for example. It is keen to secure commodities at the expense of Africans. It establishes strong ties with top elites but has no regard for the poor or African middle class. This point is the most serious in that it aggravates the widening gap in incomes and wealth between elites and the rest of the population. There is widespread perception that China strengthens corruption and illicit outflow. The social side is equally troublesome. Evidence in Zambia and Senegal shows growing resentment among ordinary people. China brings imports its own workforce, and replaces domestic labor. This crowds-out employment opportunities. As the Japan of the 21st century, China floods African markets with cheap goods and undermines domestic manufacturing. Evidence in Sudan (Darfur) and Zimbabwe and Ethiopia show that China does not wish to interfere in the internal affairs of African countries. Accordingly, it has no regard for human rights violations anywhere or for the advancement of democratic institutions.

The Africa of the 21st century is completely different from the Africa of the last century; and different from the “Lost Decade.” Huge foreign direct investments from non-traditional sources such as China, a growing middle class and educated work force, better governance in a dozen countries; and leadership have all contributed to unprecedented growth rates in numerous African countries averaging 7 percent per annum over the past few years. Africa’s middle class is growing at a faster rate than India. Its youthful population is more involved in

creating new enterprises and competing than the old generation of Africans. Good and democratic governance will go a long way in advancing a responsible government that is accountable to the people; and in accelerating sustainable and equitable development.

Africa's emerging educated and middle class and youth is demanding good and accountable government and leadership. There are more democratic governments today than there were during the "Lost Decade." This trend will continue. Some argue that, where there are dictatorial and authoritarian governments, an "African Spring" is inevitable. I am not at all sure whether this will happen. Country conditions differ from place to place. Further, African societies are not as homogenous as Arab societies. However, the era of repressive governance and elite economic and financial plunder is on the way out.

Terrorism and instability

Here I would like to draw your attention to another development that should worry us and the rest of the world. I refer to religious conflicts that lead to failed states such as Somalia; and the breakup of the Sudan into two. Unabated, terrorism has the potential to destabilize countries and to undo the positive developments of numerous countries in the region. Ethnic elites and governance reinforce the phenomenon.

Unfortunately, Western governments, including the US, prefer authoritarian and repressive governments. They prefer stability over the overriding and long-term interest of accelerating the democratization process that will guarantee durable peace, stability and sustainable and equitable development for all.

Concluding remark points

I have offered insight into the powerful political, social and economic forces that are transforming Africa. The lead for change resides with Africans, especially its youthful population. This takes me to my last point, Pan Africanism and the illusive quest for African Unity. Africa's founding fathers were wise enough to establish the Organization of African Unity in 1963. In doing this, they tried to give meaning to Pan Africanism. However, this vision has not gone further than setting up and organization that meets annually and vents. The OAU experiment did not advance integration.

In light of the failure, heads of states established the African Union (AU) in 2002 in place of the OAU. They gave it an intellectual, democratic and philosophical content by initiating the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), with emphasis on human rights, democratic institutions, the rule of law and overall good governance.

I am not among the numerous African cynics who see no real benefit in this transformation in form and not substance; there are some identifiable positives. For example, there is greater emphasis in capacity building and human capital formation; disclosure and transparency; and regional integration and regional trade. At the same time, these positives in advancing Pan Africanism to its next logical level, namely actual economic and political integration similar to the European Union (EU), are marred by failures on the political side. I will mention three that are critical.

- i) The AU failed to mediate conflicts in Darfur and Somalia and allowed further disintegration in countries such as Ethiopia relative to Eritrea and Sudan, with the separation of Southern Sudan from the North. Was there an alternative? Did the AU

play a constructive role to mediate conflicts such these? Does it recognize that further ethnic based disintegration will act as a barrier to greater economic integration?

- ii) AU failed to advance the cause of democratization in countries still governed by authoritarian and dictatorial elites. African intellectuals question the extent to which heads of states are committed to human rights, the rule of law and democratic institutions. Peer review is a joke in that heads of states are reluctant to question their peers. This is why I contend that ‘thieves cannot monitor and critique their kind.’
- iii) I will strengthen the above point further. Rightly, many African academics question the AU’s ability to critique members with regard to endemic corruption and illicit outflow of capital from the region. The route to wealth is through political capture.

For sure, Africans have come a long way toward being masters of their own destiny. My sense is that the future will be brighter than the past. The engine of this transformation will not be external forces but Africans themselves. In this sense, Pan Africanism is still alive and kicking. The challenge over the next decade is to promote real African unity that will serve the hopes and aspirations of Africans. The push must come from civil society. It is the only force that will change Africa in fundamental and meaningful ways.

Thank you.

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