



RETHINKING AFRICA CONVENING

RAC ON PEACE, DEMOCRATIC VIOLENCE, MIGRATION, AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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Warmest greetings to you all from Accra, Ghana!

When I was asked to make a keynote address for this convening, I was first elated because when you work normally with politicians you get accustomed to celebrating an opportunity to speak to people. However, that ecstasy soon turned to dread because I asked myself what do you say to so many highly engaged people who want to know what Rethinking Africa is all about.

Is it just a fancy word we say to excite you all into coming for yet another online workshop?

Is it a clarion call to change the way we have been thinking about Africa – its opportunities and challenges?

Or is it a reaction to the context in which we must see an Africa that responds differently to emerging global challenges such as the pandemic that we are all aware of, or the SDGs that we work towards, or the African Union and its many ambitious plans?

And for me, this is the first challenge for you all as participants.

Ask yourselves why is it necessary to rethink Africa...

As you consider the many possible responses to this, let me deposit a few of my musings on the matter. For a long time, Africa has been viewed as the continent that needs curing and less, the continent that cannot provide a cure.

Some of us grew in a time when coups and civil wars were severely trending.

This convening has chosen to focus on four interlinked challenges:

1. the pursuit of a holistic and sustainable peace,
2. challenging the deficit of democracy and electoral violence,
3. coming to terms with different forms of migrations and their implications,
4. and confronting the scourge of human trafficking.

These four topics have been discussed extensively at various GLAC activities and will further be deliberated upon during this 2-day workshop. Due to the organization I represent, I view these through a corruption lens. For if our continent was able to plug the holes through which the peoples of this continent lose resources due to corruption there would be no need for our youth to migrate in highly dangerous and illegal ways to seek better economic opportunities.

There would be fewer bloody elections based on a need to assess state resources.

There would be other options than resorting to armed conflict to feel included in governance systems.

And hopefully, there would be less desperation that human traffickers can exploit.

The story is not as simple but for so long in our era, we have focussed on how bad corruption is and its negative effects. Important as this may be, we have not paid as much attention to how much better our societies would be if we managed to address corruption. We have not shared enough on those who have managed to resist corruptive tendencies and stood firm for accountability and transparency.

We have acknowledged our heroes in a way close to how we can name our villains.

This is how I see this convening making a difference.

This is how I look at rethinking/reimagining as a strategic change in our responses to both our challenges and opportunities.

It means seeking inspiration and averting frustration.

It means focussing on building rather than dismantling.

It refers to the Africa we want as opposed to the Africa that needs to be cured.

And so, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and colleagues,

What could be done?

Five key conditions should be met to guarantee the integrity of our actions:

1. The rule of law to substantiate claims to human rights and electoral justice;
2. Professional, competent electoral management bodies (EMBs) with full independence of action to administer elections that are transparent and merit public confidence;
3. Institutions and norms that promote multiparty competition and division of power that bolster democracy as a mutual security system among political contenders;
4. Removing barriers (incl. legal, administrative, political, economic, and social) to universal and equal political participation; and
5. Regulating uncontrolled, undisclosed, and opaque political financing.

So what are the values we can leverage?

Africa has a rich culture and strong values such as respect and honor for elders, self-control and courtesy, virtues of forgiveness, harmony and peaceful co-existence, diligence and indulgence, truth and honesty, unity and cooperation, humanity, morality, integrity are cornerstones that can be used in the prevention and resolution of conflicts in Africa.

Now together, let us look at The way forward

Elections offer the opportunity especially to emerge democracy to build strong institutions and promote good governance of which the result will be economic growth and the much-awaited development.

African countries stand to gain much from transparent, credible, and fair electoral processes and can achieve the goals they have set themselves through it.

Free and fair elections conducted regularly are only one component of a healthy democratic society.

A robust civil society, independent media, a sound public administration, and an independent judiciary can help to manage the underlying tensions and grievances that elections bring to the surface. There is also the need to highly promote trust, truth, and transparency when it comes especially to cooperation.

Africa has made tremendous progress during the past couple of decades, both normatively and in practice, in developing principles of democracy and good governance as well as developing more sophisticated economies.

Our youth have been leading the way in innovations but sadly remnants of Africa needing to be saved narrative still exist. It cannot be ignored that during the pandemic there have been serious threats to stability in Ethiopia, Mozambique, DRC, and others, there have been electoral practices that defy the spirit of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance and there have been instances of corruption and malfeasance even in the distribution of COVID-19 relief finances.

So how do we rethink the continent?

We have to hold firm on the positive stories of people who are risking their lives to defend their rights and freedoms, to the youth who are offering new and novel solutions, to the women who charting a new and unlimited path for their daughters.

We have to balance the narrative so that we are not inhibited by the negativity that may surround our perspectives of Africa but we are also inspired by the possibilities and opportunities within our continent.

We must be able to rid ourselves of what Wangari Maathai, described as a “legacy of woes” which shackles our thinking and limits our ambitions.

We should certainly now bequeath such limitations to our future generations but groom them to be audacious in their aspirations.

And in doing so we must look to act rather than the only talk about being a more inclusive and prosperous continent.

Allow me to land here by quoting the great Kwame Nkrumah in his famous appeal “Africa Must Unite”:

“For this end, Africa needs a new type of citizen, a dedicated, modest, honest, and informed man (or woman). A man (or woman) submerges self in service to the nation and mankind. A man (or woman) who abhors greed and detests vanity. A new type of man (or woman) whose hard work and determination is his character; whose humility is his strength and whose integrity is his greatness.” in “Africa Must Unite” by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, 1963.

At this juncture, I challenge you...

To rethink Africa. To paint a picture that is attractive and fight for that picture.

To write a new narrative for the continent and use our collective energies to bring that narrative to life.

This is not to ignore the challenges and the frustrations but to shift our starting point to where we want to go rather than where we don't want to be.

So rethinking and reimagining Africa to me is adjusting our thinking so that we can improve our actions with a clear focus on a better continent.

Asante Sana...!