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**“Claim no easy victories”**

**Keynote Address by**

**Carlos Lopes  
UN Under-Secretary-General and  
Executive Secretary of ECA**

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Your Excellency, President John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana  
Professor Ernest Aryeetey, Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana  
Professor Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Director of the Institute of African Studies  
Professor Esi Sutherland Addy, of the Institute of African Studies,  
Professor Etienne Ehouan Ehile, Secretary General of the Association of African Universities  
Professor Atukwei Okai, Secretary General of the Pan African Writers Association  
Dr. Ebrima Sall, Executive Secretary of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research (CODESRIA)  
Dr. Luke Hodgkin

Let me begin by congratulating the Institute of African Studies on the occasion on its fiftieth anniversary. In October 1963, when Kwame Nkrumah opened the gates of this institution, having earlier on the same year participated in the creation of the OAU, he professed a vision for it- not just a place that studies past history and cultures of Africa, but one destined to be many sided, fertilizing the entire Africa with new ideas, and inspiring its future.

I therefore feel particularly honored to have been invited to address this gathering of Pan-Africanists from across the globe. It is befitting that on this occasion you are also setting up the African Studies Association, a major milestone for scholarship in the continent.

Excellency, Dear friends,

I met Mario de Andrade, then Minister for Information and Culture of Guinea Bissau, when I was 16. Mario de Andrade remains one of the foremost Pan-African intellectuals. A founding member of Angola's MPLA and its first President, he was associated with all the major events of the 50s and 60s that shaped Africa's independence movement. I became his assistant, thanks to the crisp reality of the time that made us actors early on. I remember being given the task of reorganizing his private library. Most of the books were a journey of discovery about Africa. Names that were to become referential for me were being revealed amidst dust and hard decisions on where to find space to make them fit with each other. Each time Andrade needed to write an article, or prepare for a presentation somewhere around the world, he would rely on my good memory to first locate the books in the maze. Often times, he would ask for my opinion on further reading or to help identify which relevant chapters or pages he should focus on. For a 16 year old it was a difficult, overwhelming, but always rewarding exercise. The exchanges that ensued were about understanding what I missed, what I needed to know or about valuing African authorship. This was my real University. This was also my introduction to Pan-Africanism.

It was amazing to realize that this Angolan, turned dissident of his own MPLA, in the meantime in power in Luanda, could be a Minister in another African country on the strength of his Pan-African credentials. Mario de Andrade, in the course of his life, had

to travel with many African passports, and end up being recognized as an Angolan citizen only after his death. Similarly, Diaspora Pan-Africanists like W.E.B. DuBois or George Padmore became Ghanaian citizens, entrusted with high responsibilities. Not to mention Frantz Fanon who amongst its many FLN responsibilities became Algerian Ambassador in Accra.

One of the greatest things I learnt from Mario de Andrade was to not simplify African reality. We need to understand the details, our past, our present, intentions and values. The absence of complexity would leave Africa without a compass, tantamount to the absence of ideology, understood in its purist sense. As Amilcar Cabral, my outmost hero put it: we should 'claim no easy victories'

Pan-Africanism has been an enduring ideal in our continent with the degrees of engagement ebbing and flowing over the years. We are certainly in a period of revival of the Pan-Africanist spirit, as shown by the fact that the theme of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the African Union has been dedicated to "Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance".

It is useful to review the various manifestations of Pan-Africanism to tease out what they represented in real terms. The pertinence of past strands of Pan-Africanism must also interest us for they impact on our current thinking and approaches. Indeed the mutual interaction of all these elements and provide the basis for the current discourse on the Pan-Africanist ideal.

One finding seems certain. Pan-Africanism has exerted a butterfly effect. As we all know when a tiny butterfly flutters its wings in one part of the earth, this seemingly innocuous event can bring about a storm on the other side of the world. The need for identity that sprang up in the era of slavery in the "New World" has motivated waves of change that supported decolonisation, the defeat of racism, and unity of purpose in a continent that has been plundered, exploited and so easily divided by pompous sitting old men drawing artificial lines on inaccurate maps.

The Pan-Africanist journey was not easy. It started with assertions of identity, dignity, equality and inalienable rights in the late 1800s. Indeed, observers have pointed out that It was precisely the capture and uprooting of millions of Africans and conditions of slavery which laid the foundations for Pan-Africanism and blacks affirmation in the United States and West Indies. The Africa Diaspora public intellectuals of the early XX century were the interpreters of a will for a more developed and structured movement to give pride and honor to all Africans. In the absence of geo-locator of their origins they constructed an ideal Africa, psychology and politically. They envisaged the need for the union of all Africans around a unique and integrated struggle against all forms of discrimination. It was not immediately a political ambition of independence but the elements of such a purpose and goal were easily identifiable in the statements of these progenitors of a Pan-African cause. Africans should remember the debt they have to these precursors, originally from the Caribbean and the US.

Three names from the Diaspora are referenced by most: W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey and Aimé Césaire. Each of them would be linked to a particular brand of the Pan-African ideal. All were active in politics, members of the established political parties of their countries, and the three were involved in the construction of the Pan-African or the Writers and Intellectuals movements and Congresses. Their names are behind more or less radical views of what African Unity and its links to the Diaspora meant.

Another interesting element to retain from the Pan-Africanism genesis is the aesthetic preoccupation of identifying the role of blackness and the definition of an African identity countering the discriminatory views of Africa dating from the famous Hegel proclamation that Africans had no History. Or, the until quite recent schoolbooks version that History starts with the written word; with the accompanying myth that the written word was absent from Africa.

Without taking the time for a longer incursion into the history of Pan-Africanism genesis, it is fair to consider its official birthday as the Manchester Congress of 1945. Obviously this is an important year. Before the end of the II World War most of the Pan-African activities were actually held in Europe and to a lesser extent the US. From the communist movement influences of the 1930s to the agitation of the students associations in London, Paris and Lisbon, the action was geographically far from the continent. A remarkable exception was precisely the African National Congress, founded in South Africa in 1912, the oldest African political party. While the ANC was following closely developments abroad, in its first decades the level of its exposure to outside ideas was minimal, networking then not being easy. The ANC focus was more on the struggle against the most sophisticated institutional architecture of discrimination: apartheid, the ideology that became synonymous to racial separation in the contemporary world.

More than any other Kwame Nkrumah is the symbol of the repatriation of Pan-Africanism to mother Africa. His own political career and personal trajectory personifies the shift from rights to independence. Although his home country Ghana became independent only in 1957, his leadership was already exercised during the indirect rule transition. He was from the time of his studies abroad closed involved in the independence movements. It is curious to note that in his quest for the integration of Africans across the board he eventually would welcome back home, in Accra, some of the Pan-Africanism forefathers, from the Diaspora.

Nkrumah was much influenced from a Marxist reading of reality. His vigor and enthusiasm betrayed a less grounded knowledge of socio-economic reality. His classic Marxist class struggle views lacked the more comprehensive understanding and sophistication of the likes of Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral. He designed then, nevertheless, the most ambitious agenda for Pan-Africanism.

Although some Northern African countries were already independent at the time of Ghana's independence, and Egypt's Nasser and Tunisia's Bourguiba, together with Morocco's Mohamed V, were at the forefront of a new definition of nationalism, it was

Nkrumah that launched the most serious political and diplomatic effort for the establishment of a continental organization.

Soon independent African countries became divided between various groups, each with a different reading of what should be the nature of the relationship with the external powers. The most known groupings of the time are obviously the more radical Casablanca group and the softer Monrovia Group. In fact there were many others such as the Lagos Chart, the Conakry Declaration, the Brazzaville group and other loose configurations, all fighting for protagonism.

Here the role of Emperor Hailé Selassié, and Ethiopia, the only land not colonized in the entire continent, deserves to be fully recognized. It was the skill of the Emperor that allowed for a conciliatory process that brought African leaders under one tent. The establishment of the OUA in 1963 has many fathers –and mothers-, and indeed many intermediate midwives. The declaration that was eventually adopted is a compromise, actually far from the original proposal from the Emperor. But the significance of that 23<sup>rd</sup> May is to be found more on the agreement about the key objectives for a total political liberation of the continent, solidarity, and integration, all of which came straight from the common body of the Pan-African ideology.

Despite the mixed record attributed to the OUA, the organization did deliver on its most important objective with remarkable efficiency. It was to no small degree thanks to the Liberation Committee -the most important body emanating from the OUA- that the continent kept the focus on the desire for total liberation from colonialism and racism, including getting rid of the apartheid regime.

Many forms of solidarity can be traced to the OUA record, including some less fashionable, because they were offered by African strong men. They were testimonies of the appeal of the Pan-African ideology both at national, sub-regional or regional level. Pan-Africanism remained a critical identity factor for political actors across the continent.

Integration was also attempted in many forms, including obviously Nkrumah own push for Ghana to join Guinea and Mali, Nyerere's successful integration of Tanganyika with Zanzibar, and Amílcar Cabral movement for the simultaneous liberation of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. On the account of integration one can mention the successful economic model of Côte d'Ivoire, based on demographic integration, or Nasser's Arab nationalist ideology. Curious historical point though, in this regard, is the Western Sahara controversy going back to the birth of the OUA.

Most admit that the OUA democratic credentials were questionable and its clarity in international politics did not extend to a consequential development agenda. Here resides the difference between Africa, and, say Asia. In turn this difference serves to argue that may be the Pan-African ideology did not necessarily work for the betterment of Africa, from a development point of view, given its over-emphasis on least common denominators that did not levitate Africa's voice, internationally. It may have been too focused on the colonial nemesis to do justice to the development intricacies, beyond

just talking of imperialist threats and neo-colonialism. The issues of true African identity became synonymous to being or not a neo-colonialist lackey. The identity issue ended up in the wrong side of the spectrum: proclamations of Pan-African commitment used for external and elite's consumption while, in some cases, brutally oppressing diversity and blocking regional mobility.

The process that led to the establishment of the African Union (AU), the successor of the OUA, represents a very important evolution in the history of Pan-Africanism. Many of the victories being commemorated today in Africa, assembled under the umbrella of a Renaissance metaphor, are a true achievement of the reflections, competent political process and renewed ambition, embodied by the AU's birth, ten years ago.

Many factors contributed for a new moment for Africa. None was more important than the end of the apartheid regime and the historical arrival of Nelson Mandela to the presidency of South Africa. It coincided with a new moment in international relations: the end of the Cold War, the glasnost and perestroika movement, the fourth big wave of independent states (with the dismantling of USSR and the Yugoslavia), the failure of a prescribed universal approach to the development ideology, the ascendant of new emerging South engines of growth, and the erosion of traditional forms of multilateralism.

In the African context the last two decades of the previous century, the so-called lost decades, were marked by some of the worse forms of intrusion since the independence era, made possible by colossal debt, proliferation of conflicts and civil wars, and rapid deterioration of political legitimacy by authoritarian states, struggling with a social pressure cooker and external influence towards democratization of the states. Structural adjustment programmes ruled the day in the 1980s and 1990s. Africans found themselves defenseless in the absence of their own interpretation of priorities and development objectives.

It is important to remember that the key discussion in the 1990s was about "good governance" and the strongest link made that aid should only go to deserving countries with a proven record of good performance. It is critical to assess what factors made the African moment possible and how Africa responded to a dramatic change in the international context at the turn of the century.

It was also a time in which Africa was beset by despotic military rulers whose treatment of their people was sometimes no better than that of the colonialists. Indeed, the African 'big man' of this era became the unacceptable face of leadership on the continent. Within this period, Ki-Zerbo speaks of the 'silence of the Africa intellectual'. Moreover our treatment of one another which showed its worst face in the Rwandan genocide was often a cause of despair. This quite fortunately was not the end of the story.

Whilst it's predecessor, the OAU had stressed the need for political independence, the African Union put more emphasis on the 'rapid acceleration of social and economic

progress in Africa'. It is a return to the protection of individual dignity over the assertions of sovereignty. This is evident from African leaders' commitment to improved governance through mechanisms such as the African Peer Review Mechanism, signed-off by 33 African states. It is also clear from the African Union's shift from the doctrine of non-interference to non-indifference.

Another clear signal that we have entered a new phase of the Pan-Africanist journey was the resumption of the debate on the nature of unity, suspended in the 1960s, in favor of a common front against colonialism. This propelled a shift in perception with the myth of the hopeless continent, plagued by the unholy trinity of poverty, ignorance and disease recanted by its protagonists in less than a decade. Indeed, the Pan-African trail has been an upward and consistent trend of consolidation of gains made in dignity, independence, unity and now economic progress.

Lest, I be accused of putting too much of a gloss on our trajectory thus far, let me state we should let ourselves be carried away. Indeed, questions could be asked about Pan-Africanism relevance today. The obvious answer is that the nature and form of Pan-Africanism has, and continues to change with time. This is where there is a distinct role for African intellectuals. They should not simplify Africa, as done by Hegel, nor generalize our problems and the solutions, as done by the Washington Consensus, and rather through painful, careful and detailed studies, offer us grounded knowledge.

Let me quote: *'your meeting here today as Africanists from various countries of the world is truly historic. It emphasizes the idea that knowledge transcends political and national boundaries. It is incumbent upon Africanist scholars all over the world to work for a complete emancipation of the mind from all forms of domination, control and enslavement'*.

I just quoted directly from a Kwame Nkrumah's speech to the Africanists who gathered at the first International Congress of Africanists in 1963. This call for the complete emancipation of the mind is as relevant today as it was more than 50 years ago.

As much as today's Africa look so different from the independence years we have a backlog to address. Indeed, we continue to lag behind other regions which have not had the benefit of a common sense of purpose such as ours. How can we justify the continued restrictions on the movement of our people and the goods they produce within the continent? Or the increasing levels of inequality and segregation within our countries. Have we as yet solved the identity crisis between citizens and subjects? Or the political agency that democratization brings? What about the dilemma of wars and insecurity based on lack of inclusiveness?

We can make this the 'African Moment' if we seize the day and respond in a clear sighted and determined manner. African Intellectuals need to examine and clearly understand what the 'African Moment' entails. African Union's Agenda 2063 which seeks to bring about the structural transformation of the continent should be premised

on us controlling the narrative and creating the opportunities for Africans to really industrialize, control their natural resources with value addition and creating jobs that are required by the youngest workforce in the world.

We cannot hide behind the simplicity, and be content to just proclaim an African Renaissance as the new wave of Pan-Africanism. We have to give it content. To conclude, permit me to quote Amilcar Cabral in an extraordinary exhortation that is as relevant today as it was more than 40 years ago,

*'We must practice revolutionary democracy in every aspect of our life. Every responsible member must have the courage of his responsibilities, exacting from others a proper respect for his work and properly respecting the work of others. Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories...'*

If we can dream it, we can do it.

Thank you for your kind attention.