

Speech of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission at the International Peace Institute

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Africa is today at the centre of attention and keen interests of all kinds. It is the object of increasingly strong and competing desires. The number of powers and international groups seeking to establish partnerships with it continues to grow. It is said 80% of the United Nations Security Council meetings on peace issues focus on Africa.

This growing interest does not always translate into convincing dividends in terms of peace and development for the Continent. The effective solidarity with Africa, in its attempts to respond to COVID-19, has made it possible to measure the vanity of the fiery impulses and other professions of faith in favour of the Continent. Faced with this situation of disenchantment and disappointment of the peoples of the Continent in those who only talk of support, partnership, solidarity, what response can the Continent and its representative tool present, at the international level, for taking their own destiny in hand?

It is in relation to these three issues that I would like to make brief remarks.

As regards our disappointments with respect to international solidarity in our fight against terrorism and for peace and security, I call upon to look at the expansion of this phenomenon across Africa.

In the Sahel, this territorial belt of more than five million kms covers, in the broad sense, the territories which stretch from Djibouti through The Sudan, Chad, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Senegal. This vast space, particularly the G5 Sahel, is exposed, in a very disturbing way, to terrorism, in its deadliest form: jihadism.

What has been done to support this vast region in its resistance efforts? Of course, we have organised meetings, brought together Experts, convened

Summits, which ended up with beautiful and warm Statements of support and solidarity. Of course, Strategies, more than fifteen for the Sahel, have been adopted. Of course, astronomical aid and investment figures have been promised. But, of course, the populations of the Sahel, in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso continue, every day, to die by the dozen, indeed in the hundreds, by the bullets of terrorists. Thousands of schools closed down and hundreds of thousands of young people are missing their opportunity to be educated.

Health facilities are destroyed and children continue to moan, thrown lying on the ground, and women give birth in pain, behind closed or burnt doors in such facilities.

When the countries of the G5, mobilise and set up a Common Defense Force, the response given here in New York, to their legitimate request to obtain funding for this Force from the assessed contributions of the United Nations, there is constant and unruffled denial. Where are the study, strategy and research institutes which are the activists for good causes? Where are the think-tanks dedicated to humanism and cooperation between peoples? Where have the NGOs with noble goals and ideals of world peace and security gone? It is hard not to conclude that when it comes to Africa, all these voices become muted, silent, absent from the concert and the field which they otherwise animate with pomp.

What is observed in the Sahel is seen *mutatis mutandis* everywhere in the theatre of expansion and resistance to terrorism.

Open your eyes and consult the maps: The Lake Chad Basin where Boko Haram continues to sow death and desolation, Somalia where the Al Shabab defies the authority and the African Mission suffering from lack of financial resources, Libya, where the same scenario prevails and where the cancer of all extremism continues to eat into the body and damage the soul of this people. The spread of terrorism is now reaching Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, and further East, Uganda, Mozambique and Tanzania.

The picture is particularly hallucinatory. New hotbeds of terrorism allied with drug, arms and human trafficking gangs are springing up everywhere and growing with impunity in the deafening silence of most Governmental and Non-Governmental actors in the world.

Consider other areas, such as the COVID pandemic. How can we give credit to the partnership with Africa and solidarity with it, when every day the media are attacking us with our vaccination rate of less than 6% while that of the rest of the world has exceeded 70%? Which justice, solidarity and partnership are we talking about?

The resistance of the world to Climate change offers no consolation. While the very limited responsibility of Africa for the significant and continuing deterioration of the environment is not disputed by anyone, its share in the universal financing of the fight against Climate change remains frankly disappointing. Which solidarity, which justice are we still talking about here ?

We can multiply the examples endlessly. Let us stop at this stage to spend a few minutes talking about our strategy to face this great challenge of abandonment in matters of peace, security and development.

Several mechanisms are involved, not without difficulties, I must admit.

At the doctrinal level, the AU developed and adopted in 2013 a Strategic Plan for Fifty Years. It is the Agenda 2063 that embodies the main aspirations of the African peoples for change and building their future.

If this doctrine has served and still serves as a theoretical framework for our fight for sustainable well-being, it must be recognised that its translation into daily deeds and experiences still requires immense efforts in planning, prioritisation and, above all, Continent-wide application by the Regional Communities, the pillars of the AU.

The emergence of these as a supplement to the Continental instrument and in application of the principle of bringing the Union closer to the peoples has gradually asserted itself and has become a real fact by making them the real poles of development and Regional integration.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) came to give a powerful acceleration to the history of African economic integration, an old dream, beside the liberation from the colonial yoke and the Apartheid system, of all the Founding Fathers of the Union, the Continental Free Trade Area, today, presents itself as a real promise of development and prosperity.

Currently undergoing substantive reforms, the AU is preparing to be what Africa wants it to be: A true leader in building peace and security, eradicate violence and transform the Continent.

Obviously, such a role cannot be decreed. It has to be done in practical terms. To do this, we have to overcome mountains of obstacles, both endogenous and exogenous.

The endogenous obstacles relate to the classic duality of the sovereignty dogma of national powers and the imperative need of freedom of action to be

given to the Continental directorate. This is a problem that is not unique to Africa. The establishment of supranational groups all faced with the same challenge. The European example is, in this respect, enlightening.

Exogenously, the external interference of yesterday has not disappeared and the African crises that are erupting here and there across the Continent bear evidence to this every day.

African solution to African problems has still a long way to go. Our determination to apply it and impose it is unwavering. This is a central issue in the reform of our Strategic Partnerships, whose development I recalled earlier.

In this quest to take charge of the African destiny, our priorities are known.

Human and financial investment in peace and security, infrastructure, energy, agriculture and the blue economy, digitization, environmental protection, human resource training and the creation of jobs for our youths and women are the sectors where the expectations of the African peoples are the most pressing.

Good governance, the fight against corruption, bribery, embezzlement of public funds, nepotism, waste of resources and their mismanagement are at the centre of the political philosophy in Africa and improvements in public policies.

Observance of human, civil and political rights, the adoption of rules of devolution of power ensuring the balance of powers and establishing the chances of inclusive and lasting stability in a situation of rule of law, worthy of the name, is a project that remains to be executed.

Is it superfluous to stress, here with force, the importance of fundamental progress in all these areas is the best guarantee for an African world of peace and security, peaceful relations between all citizens and all communities of all African States?

Our Strategy of Silencing the guns, this flagship project of our Union, is in this path of political, economic and social reforms. It is nowhere else.

The problem here, I hasten to underscore, is not so much in the narrow and biased observation of a form of democracy imposed by certain elites or imported from outside, but more in the invention of a system of government ensuring observance of human rights and guaranteeing stability conducive to development and prosperity.

Africa is certainly not an island, isolated from the rest of the world. For this simple fact, it cannot turn its back on the universal system of political values if there really is one and only one. However, it cannot accept to endure, head down, like a blind man, systems that are foreign to its own cultural, spiritual and political systems. This duality of the national and the universal is a dialectic that, for decades, Africa has sought to adapt and stick to, with all its might.

If Africa convinces itself that it cannot challenge the world, much less taunt it, the latter must learn to understand and domesticate Africa rather than dominate or enslave it.

This dimension of our existence is inconceivable outside new forms of multilateralism, which is of freedom, respect, generosity, inclusion and solidarity between men. This must be for us, as for all peoples on earth, the foundation on which should rest the civilisation of the universal of which every man must dream intensely and bring his building block in the construction of its immense pyramid.

I thank you.