

Lecture at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs

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In his book *Does America need a Foreign Policy?*, Henry Kissinger writes:

“African countries have a high propensity for civil war. And if tribal and ethnic loyalties extend across national frontiers, as they do in an extraordinarily large number of cases, civil wars turn into international wars. In this manner, what started as a civil war in Zaire – abetted by the Western powers in the name of democracy – had led to the disintegration of much of the central authority. Now renamed Congo, the country has become an arena for the competition of other African states...”

Later he goes on to write that

“the (African) continent is a tragedy: it is also a challenge. Africa’s variety inhibits concerted action: the scope of its crises nevertheless demands a significant response. The idealism of the American people- its Wilsonian commitment and its basic decency- is being tested here, as well as its practical creativity. Realism should illuminate America’s understanding of the underlying problems. But without the moral commitment of the American people and the international community, Africa’s tragedy will turn into the festering disaster of our age.”

But commenting about the United States and the international community to which Kissinger referred, Ngugi wa Thiongo in his book: *Writers in Politics* says:

“And really we cannot expect that those who benefit from our crippled positions will come and say unto us: throw off those crutches and walk. On the contrary, when we complain too much, they are more likely to give us golden ones and want to replace those made of wood. But surely it is unto us to have the will to say: away with all crutches of whatever make or model. We have to summon the collective will to decide that, if we shake hands with others in whatever forms of cooperative ventures and exchange, it will be on the basis of our standing on our two feet, however wobbly, rather than firmly leaning on any crutches. But what have we done as opposed to what has been done to us? What lessons have we really learnt from our ancestors who fought so resolutely against slavery and colonialism.”

Ngugi says:

“We have actually made a mockery of the gift (of independence). At a glance our post independence period has seen the devaluation of our African unity and pan-Africanism, the devaluation of intellect and intellectual achievement, and worst of all, the devaluation of African lives. This situation raises the inevitable question: what gift shall we, the living, bequeath to the unborn? What Africa shall we hand over to the future?”

These are two diametrically opposed approaches to the future of our continent. According to Dr Kissinger we as Africans can do nothing to ensure that our continent ceases to be what he calls a tragedy. Rather, we should rely on the idealism and moral commitment of the American people and the rest of the international community to take us out of our misery.

None of us could ever accept this proposition. However poor we may be we will never lose pride in ourselves as Africans and human beings. The task we face is to respond to the critical remarks made by Ngugi wa Thiongo. I think we must accept that in good measure we have made a mockery of the gift of independence. I also think we must accept that we have allowed the devaluation of intellect and intellectual achievement and worst of all, the devaluation of African lives.

We must therefore answer the questions honestly- what gift shall we, the living, bequeath to the unborn.? What Africa shall we hand over to the future?

In this regard I believe that we should first of all make a determination that we shall be our own liberators from poverty and underdevelopment, from dictatorship and tyranny, from war and instability. We must together take the decision that we shall determine our future.

Secondly, we must reaffirm the fundamental truth that as Africans we share a common destiny. This means that we cannot but be concerned about one another. It means that we must recognise the reality that none of us can prosper in peace if our African neighbour is weighed down by misery. It also means that we must understand that what each one of us does has an impact on the other. Thus should we respond to Ngugi's cry that we have devalued African unity and pan- Africanism.

Henry Kissinger has described our continent as a tragedy because of what we and others have done to the peoples of our continent. He says it is a tragedy because we have had a history of military coups and dictatorships. He says it is a tragedy because we have waged the most merciless wars against one another, including the commission of the crime of genocide, as though African lives were worth nothing. He says that Africa's tragedy will turn into the festering disaster of our age because he sees a continent that is steadily getting more and more impoverished. Because we have failed ourselves in the past he has come to the conclusion that we will never succeed in future unless those who benefit from our crippled positions extend a helping hand to us, enabling us to walk.

Our own experience must therefore tell us what we need to do. It is clear that we have to order our political and constitutional systems so that, as a historic document of our liberation struggle puts it, the people shall govern. We have to act together to ensure that our continent becomes a continent of democracy and human rights.

This has nothing to do with prescriptions handed down to us by those richer and more powerful than us. The struggle for democracy is a struggle to enable every African to play a role in deciding the future of our countries and continent. It is driven by the commitment we must all make to respect and promote the dignity of all Africans.

We have to ensure that we end the scourge of war on our continent. In this regard, because of our interdependence and indeed because we share a common destiny; we have to agree that we cannot be ruled by a doctrine of absolute national sovereignty. We should not allow the fact of the independence of each one of our countries to turn us into spectators when crimes against the people are being committed. It is true that each of our governments derives its mandate and legitimacy from its electorate. This would seem to suggest that everybody else should therefore stay out of the business of each of our states. But again if we are to deny the perspective projected by Dr Kissinger, that we will turn into the festering disaster of our age, we will have to proceed from the position that we are each our brothers and sisters keeper.

We must act to end poverty and underdevelopment on our continent. What this requires first of all, is that we must think for ourselves. We should never allow this situation again that others prescribe for us what we should do. We must elaborate our own development programmes and take responsibility for their success.

This must include ensuring that our states have the capacity to play a developmental role, from the local to the national sphere of government. We have to inculcate a different ethos among the public servants informed by the principle expressed in our country as the People First. I know that this is easier said than done. But critically important in this regard is the fact that the political leadership itself must lead by example.

In this context it is also vitally important that we fight and defeat the scourge of corruption. We cannot speak of African renewal and allow the situation to persist that some among us abuse their positions of authority and power to steal from our countries and the masses of our people. So long as we allow this to continue, so long will the victory over poverty and underdevelopment elude us.

It is perfectly clear that our continent is not entirely bereft of the human and material resources we need to address the challenge of poverty and underdevelopment. Accordingly it cannot be true that there is nothing we can do to promote our own development. Rather than wait for the helping hand of another, we have to draw on our capacities for self reliance; self reliance in the design of our development programmes, self reliance in their implementation, self reliance in ensuring that they benefit the poor. This by no means implies that we repudiate mutually beneficial partnerships with others. What it means is that we should not, even mentally, turn ourselves into slavish dependents of foreign aid.

I am certain that we all agree with everything I have said so far. The challenge is determining what we should do together to disappoint the prediction that we will turn into the festering disaster of our age.

I genuinely believe that we have taken the first steps towards the renaissance of our continent. I am convinced that if we sustain the initiatives represented by the African Union and its development programme NEPAD, as we must, we will advance towards meeting the goals I have already stated. A central point to keep in mind in this regard is that both of these initiatives have been ratified, confirmed and accepted by all African countries. They therefore constitute a pledge we have made to one another that we will act together to reaffirm African unity and pan- Africanism, and promote the common goal of a democratic, peaceful and prosperous Africa.

The African Union was established on the basis of the Constitutive Act. This law was approved by all our parliaments and therefore has the force of any other law. The Union is proceeding to elaborate and approve a protocol that will enable the establishment of an African Court of Justice. It must surely be one of the tasks of this court to ensure that all of us implement and respect the Constitutive Act which was approved by our Parliaments.

To illustrate the importance of this matter, let us cite some of the objectives of the Union spelt out in the Constitutive Act. It says that among others, the Union shall:

“Promote peace, security, and stability on the continent;
Promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance;
Promote and protect human and peoples rights in accordance with the African Charter on Human and People`s Rights and other relevant human rights instruments.”

The Principles contained in the Act include such provisions as:

“Promotion of gender equality;
Respect for democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law and good governance;
Promotion of social justice to ensure balanced economic development;
Respect for the sanctity of human life, condemnation and rejection of impunity and political assassination, acts of terrorism and subversive activities;
Condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of government”.

All of us have accepted that these are legal and binding obligations on all of us singly and collectively. The seriousness of our intention to ensure that we live up to our commitments is not only reflected in the decision to establish the African Court of Justice. It is also reflected in the provision within the Constitutive Act for the imposition of sanctions. The relevant article reads as follows:

“ Furthermore, any Member State that fails to comply with the decision and policies of the Union may be subjected to other sanctions, (other than denial of the right to participate in the

proceedings of the Union) such as the denial of transport and communications links with other Member States, and other measures of a political and economic nature to be determined by the Assembly.”

But I also believe that we have to make certain that our peoples are mobilised to ensure that the Union honours its commitments. It is therefore very important that we should do everything possible to popularise the Union and sensitise the masses of our people to the new opportunities that have emerged which signal that nobody will ever be abandoned again to suffer in silence from a domestic tyrant.

The Pan- African parliament originally provided for in the Abuja Treaty, and incorporated in the Constitutive Act is scheduled to have its first session in February in Addis Ababa. We look forward to the work of this continental body of our elected representatives itself to play a critical role as a guardian of the Constitutive Act, the Charter on the Human and Peoples Rights and other instruments that relate to freedom and democracy for the people of our continent.

We will all have to ensure that the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the Union is convened as soon as possible, the preparatory work having been completed. This ECOSOCC will be composed of different social and professional groups of the Member States of the Union, the so called civil society. This will give the opportunity to this important voice of our people to impact directly on the decision that the Union will take affecting the future of our continent.

Of the greatest importance the Act observes that “the scourge of conflicts in Africa constitutes a major impediment to the socio-economic development of the continent and of the need to promote peace, security and stability as a prerequisite for the implementation of our development integration agenda.” In this regard, and given the importance of this matter the Principles contained in the Constitutive Act include:

“Prohibition of the use of force or threat to use force among Member States of the Union;
The right of Member States to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security;
The right of the Union to intervene in a Member State as pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.”

In this regard, perhaps responding to Ngugi’s denunciation that we have devalued African lives, the Union has taken a formal decision reflected in law, that none of our countries, relative to the Union enjoys unlimited sovereignty and is therefore free to do with its people what it wishes.

The Protocol that will be approved to establish the Peace and Security Council contains provisions for an early warning system. This is natural given the attention the Union is correctly paying to the matter of peace, security and stability. However this also has implications with regard to the matter national sovereignty.

The early warning system will be instituted to create the possibility for the African Union to intervene in situations where it feels that there is a threat to peace and security. It is therefore an important part of a system of preventive interventions that we need, to ensure that tensions in any one of our countries do not necessarily escalate into conflict. However this means that the Union will have the duty and possibility to make determinations about what we might consider to be domestic matters but which the Union might see as a potential source of problems about which it should be concerned.

As independent states we have developed in the context of a largely unbridled respect for the notion of national sovereignty. We must therefore foresee somewhat of a struggle to ensure that the approach adopted by the African Union towards African integration and unity wins the day. But clearly this will not be an easy struggle.

Of course the second major development with regard to the first steps we have taken towards the renewal of our continent is the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad). The critical point we must emphasise in this regard is that this is a partnership in the first instance among the Africans themselves. It has to be a partnership within countries and a partnership among countries, in pursuit of the agreed development goals.

This comes back to the point we made earlier about the need for us to ensure that the masses of our people are mobilised to participate in the process of change. The development we seek to achieve should not treat the people as mere beneficiaries of such progress as we will make, but as actors to bring about that progress. Indeed, this progress may not be possible without their participation.

But as we have said this must also be a partnership among our countries. It is obvious that the regional economic communities such as ECOWAS are important instruments to help us cement this inter-African partnerships. Necessarily therefore we have to pay the greatest attention to strengthening them because without them, it would never be possible to achieve the goal of African economic integration. However, the reality with regard to this matter is that the regional economic communities are at different levels of development. Nevertheless all of them require one kind of intervention or another.

The third leg of this partnership obviously relates to the rest of the world outside our continent. We are in the fortunate situation that now and perhaps for the first time, the rest of the world has accepted that we have a right and duty to determine our own path of development. Therefore the international community as a whole has accepted the Nepad programme, including its priorities. The Nepad structure has also been accepted by that international community as a legitimate interlocutor, truly representative of the developmental aspirations of the peoples of our continent.

That international community has also accepted that we must redefine the relations especially between ourselves and the developed world. As we had to, we have said that the relationship of donor and recipient must become a thing of the past. It must be replaced by the partnership of which we have spoken, which must both respect our right to determine our future and impose a common obligation on our partners to implement what they would have agreed, and be mutually accountable to one another.

These positions have been agreed. But of course the taste of the pudding is in the eating. Practice will tell the extent to which all of us have internalised the concept of the new partnership. It would not surprise any one of us if that practice confirms the saying that old habits die hard. But we too will have to overcome any habit in terms of which we might have become accustomed to being the recipients of the magnanimity of others.

As a token of our seriousness to ensure that our development programmes succeed, we have instituted the African Peer Review Mechanism. This will enable us voluntarily to assess one another's progress with regard to the matters that are fundamental to the achievement of our development goals. I refer here to the questions of good political, economic and corporate governance.

This peer review system is not intended to serve as an instrument for exclusion or punishment. We are fully aware of the reality that these matters of good governance require time and resources. The intention of the peer review mechanism is to supply the information and establish the systems which would make it possible for us as African countries to advise and support one another as we build the institutions and systems that would make it possible for us to achieve the goals set by the African Union.

From all of this, it is clear that we shall have to pay the greatest attention to the strengthening of the continental structures of both the African Union and Nepad. I am certain that of critical importance in this regard, we would be well advised to ensure that we finance these structures ourselves. It will not do that for the viability of these important institutions we depend on donor support.

Ngugu wa Thiongo asked the questions what gift shall we, the living, bequeath to the unborn? What Africa shall we hand over to the future? Henry Kissinger answered that we had no possibility to redefine ourselves as other than a continent that is a tragedy.

If we do the things we have said we will do, we will say to Ngugi wa Thiongo that the Africa that we will hand over will no longer be an Africa of dictators, of war, of poverty, and of petrified masses, terrified of the power that should serve their interests. If we do the things we said we will do, we will show Dr Kissinger that rather than being the festering disaster of our age, Africa the cradle of humanity, will emerge as the hope of all humanity.

Thank you.