

# THE AFRICAN UNION AT 10 YEARS OLD

## A Dream Deferred!

By Thabo Mbeki

In his famous poem, 'Harlem', first published in 1951, the eminent African American poet, writer, thinker and activist, Langston Hughes, asked challenging questions when he wrote:  
What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore -  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over -  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

### Meaning of the birth of the African Union

The birth of the African Union a Decade ago in 2002 promised all Africans on our Continent and the African Diaspora that they would at last realise their sustained dream for genuine all-round emancipation.

Ten years after the AU was formed, the question must be answered - has the dream been realised, or has it been deferred?

The very 1st Ordinary Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union launched the Union in Durban, South Africa on July 9, 2002. Accordingly, its 10th anniversary fell only six days before the convening at its Headquarters in Addis Ababa of its 19th Ordinary Assembly of Heads of State and Government, on July 15, 2012.

All Africans, and others beyond our shores, expected, naturally, that this 19th Assembly would take advantage of the fact of the 10th Anniversary of the Union to engage in a serious, systematic and strategic review of the road that Africa has travelled over the last decade, assess where we are today, and chart the way forward for the Second Decade of the Union.

Sadly, this matter of decisive importance with regard to the future and welfare of the billion Africans and their Continent, as well as the African Diaspora, was not even set down as part of the Agenda of the 19th Ordinary Assembly of Heads of State and Government!

Instead, at least as this relates to what was communicated to the African masses at home and abroad, the principal and especial focus of the 19th Assembly was the election of the Chairperson of the AU Commission (AUC), arising from the embarrassing and debilitating failure of the 18th Assembly, six months earlier, to elect this Chairperson.

Both the 18th and the 19th Assemblies, the only ones that will be held during the year of the 10th Anniversary of the AU, were consumed by the eminently subsidiary matter of who should chair the AU Commission, reflecting the *malaise* that is poisoning the African body politic.

The very obvious fact, in terms of the Statutes of the AU, is that however potentially powerful, the Chairperson of the AUC is merely the most senior civil servant of the AU, which is of course important. However, this Chairperson cannot determine AU and therefore African policy, as this is decided by the

Foreign Ministers' meeting as the AU Executive Council and the Heads of State and Government, meeting as the AU Assembly. Of course, it is possible for the AU Commission, led by its Chairperson, to present policy initiatives or interventions to the constitutional structures of the AU, and thus to act as more than a mere administrative structure.

We are also mindful of decisions that have been taken to review the mandates and functioning of the AU organs created by the Constitutive Act.

The 18th Assembly did not take the necessary decisions to prepare for the appropriate celebration of the 1st Decade of the AU.

The 19th Assembly said absolutely nothing about helping to determine what Africa's view is concerning where our Continent should be a decade hence, relating to the complex and integrated vision spelt out in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, its binding law.

The failures of these Assemblies we have indicated communicate the hard and painful message that whereas Africa's political leaders inspired the African masses with new and renewed hope when they launched the AU, in reality, as Africans, we made yet another false start!

### **Historic tasks of the Union**

The significance of the Constitutive Act as the supreme law of the Continent, approved by all parliaments of the people of Africa, in meeting the challenges facing Africa today was emphasised at the public launch of the AU. This Act represented a moment of hope for our Continent and its peoples, an unequivocal commitment to African Unity. Participants looked forward to working together - governments, parliamentarians, trade unions, private sector, civil society, religious communities and cultural workers – to build a better future for the peoples of Africa, based on the realisation of genuine independence and sustainable development.

And indeed, because of what we had done in the preceding decades as Africans, we had every reason to imagine that we had arrived at the long-awaited season of hope for our Continent and its peoples.

This was because we were convinced that we had developed the necessary and required strength and determination:

- to defend our right to determine our future and thus to liberate ourselves from all external dictation;
- to identify the serious mistakes we had made during our years of self-rule after our liberation from colonialism;
- to develop a consensus about how to correct and avoid these mistakes;
- to guarantee a common Continental commitment to respect such strategic objectives as African unity and solidarity, democracy, peace and stability throughout Africa, cooperation to achieve sustained economic development which would benefit the ordinary people of our Continent, focused on the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment, and African dignity which would position Africa and Africans as equals among the global community of nations; and
- to build a united front consistently to act together to achieve these goals, and thus give true meaning to the objectives of Africa's liberation and her renaissance.

However, the concrete reality we confront is that 10 years later much has happened which suggests that the proclamation of the promise of a better and brighter future for Africa amounted to little more than allowing a legitimate wish to parade as a credible prediction.

### **The central right to self-determination**

In this regard, all the strategic reverses which Africa has experienced during the first decade of the AU have centred on fundamental weaknesses with regard to our exercise of *the right to self-determination*, the very right that stood at the very heart of the historic struggles to liberate Africa from imperialism, colonialism and apartheid, which cost many African lives.

Eight years into its existence, in 2010, the AU celebrated the anniversary of the adoption by the UN General Assembly, on 14 December 1960, of the historic "*Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*", whose objectives thereby became an integral part of international law

and the international value system.

Among other things, in this Declaration, the Peoples of the World, speaking as and through the UN General Assembly, said they were:

- “conscious of the need for the creation of conditions of stability and well-being and peaceful and friendly relations based on respect for the principles of equal rights and self-determination of all peoples, and of universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion”; that they were
- “convinced that the continued existence of colonialism prevents the development of international economic co-operation, impedes the social, cultural and economic development of dependent peoples and militates against the United Nations ideal of universal peace”; and that
- “all peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

We must therefore answer the important question – what happened during the first decade of the AU which justifies our conclusion that during this decade there was a failure to honour *the right to self-determination*?

To respond to this question I would answer that this failure has reflected itself in three areas. These are:

(i) our failure as Africans significantly to advance “the social, cultural and economic development” of the African masses, as visualised in the UNGA Declaration;

(ii) our failure in many of our countries to ensure “universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion” again as visualised in the UNGA Declaration; and

(iii) disrespect by various world powers for the principle and practice prescribed by the UNGA Declaration that “all peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

But whence the generic failures we have suggested?

### **Failures of the liberation coalition**

The UNGA Declaration “(welcomed) the emergence in recent years of a large number of dependent territories into freedom and independence, and (recognised) the increasingly powerful trends towards freedom in such territories which have not yet attained independence.”

The national movements which organised for, led the struggle and took power when “freedom and independence” were realised, constituted an alliance, or a united front, of various social forces united around the strategic and historic objective to achieve ‘national freedom and independence’.

In this regard, experience during the first decade of the AU has strongly suggested that the *liberation coalition* indicated above is virtually incapable of achieving the post-independence objectives suggested in the UNGA Declaration, of achieving, for instance, ‘fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion’, and the ‘the social, cultural and economic development’ of the African masses.

At the same time, experience during this first decade of the AU has also strongly suggested that some of the world powers, especially the former colonial and imperialist powers, in pursuit of their own interests, have made the determination that they are at liberty completely to ignore and repudiate the principle and imperative that the formerly colonised peoples should exercise the right ‘freely (to) determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.’

With regard to all the foregoing, there is a palpable feeling throughout our Continent that especially Africa’s collective political leadership capacity has weakened considerably, creating the possibility for us to suffer significant reverses with regard to many of the gains we made during the first decade of the AU.

Obviously the question must be answered as to why the sentient to which we have referred has emerged and taken root on our Continent.

With regard to the *liberation coalition* we have mentioned above, it is clear that by and large this coalition came to be dominated and led both by an unprincipled fraction committed to abuse its access to

political power to enrich itself, and a social ideology favouring this view, that state power is only meaningful and should be sought after if it enables its holders to use such power to enrich themselves.

This has entrenched in much of Africa the pursuit of political power by a so-called 'political class' merely to use such power to extract *rent* from society as a whole.

The wealth thus acquired would be used for the self-enrichment of particular individuals and their related families and factions, and provide the possibility for a portion of that wealth to be used to dispense the patronage which would sustain their hold on power.

This 'political class' has acquired its ability to impose *rent* on all and sundry, including the poorest even on its own countries, because of its sole, exclusive and temporarily inalienable hold on political power.

This gives it the possibility to charge *rent* for access to this power by all citizens and interested foreigners, to acquire the legal permission to carry out any of their wishes, from the lowly need to acquire permission to use a small plot to build a shack, to more costly objectives such as obtaining the right to invest in building a mine to extract and export a valuable mineral.

In this situation, much of the indigenous political contest in our countries, regardless of the forms it has assumed, has amounted to little more than an unprincipled contest for the ability to access power for the exclusive purpose of personal access to ill-begotten wealth, acquired at the expense of the national and social development visualised in the UNGA Declaration and the Constitutive Act.

Thus, complex immanent social processes have transformed the former *liberation coalition* into a 'political class' whose distinguishing feature is *rent-seeking*, and therefore permanent and inevitable conflict among *rent-seeking* individuals and factions.

This political class has the absolute possibility to demand rent from all and sundry because of its exclusive ownership of national political power.

The social and historical reality which provided the feedstock for the corruption of the erstwhile *liberation coalition* into a *rent-seeking cabal* was, and is, the capitalist value system in which members of this *coalition* grew up, achieved the liberation of its peoples and inherited the privilege to govern its countries.

That value system prescribed, and prescribes, the successful private accumulation of profit and wealth, at all costs, as the very epitome of human and individual achievement, and indeed the very purpose of all human endeavour.

It is this, which has even been accompanied by bloody conflicts within the *liberation coalition* in a battle for supremacy, which lies at the base of the failure of many African countries during the first decade of the AU to meet the objectives of African human development and political empowerment correctly prescribed in the 1960 UNGA Declaration and the Constitutive Act.

This represents ***the first strategic failure*** to respect and advance the exercise of our right to self-determination.

Inevitably, in this regard, and given the objectives stated in the Constitutive Act, which define the nature and purposes of the AU, and echo the 1960 UNGA Declaration, we have no choice but to conclude that the AU has failed to achieve one of the strategic objectives for which it was established.

This includes the decisive advance towards the achievement of the goal of African integration and unity, based on acceptance by all our countries of the common strategic perspective spelt out in the Constitutive Act.

### **Contemporary contours of imperial power**

The ***second strategic failure*** follows the repudiation especially by the Western powers of the prescription in the 1960 UNGA Declaration that we too, as Africans, must have the freedom to exercise our "right...freely (to) determine our political status and freely pursue (our) economic, social and cultural development."

There are three fundamental reasons for this repudiation.

The ***first*** is that the Soviet Union and the world socialist system had collapsed more than a decade before the birth of the AU.

This meant that the US and its allies, all of them capitalist countries, did not have any countervailing force to counteract and limit their drive for global hegemony.

The **second** is that the ideas, ideology and world view – the *weltanschauung* - they represented, seemed to represent the correct and inevitable perspective for the construction of human society, given the perceived failure of the socialist experiment.

With hindsight, it is possible to say that, as did happen, it was inevitable that these developments would, at least, result in:

- the global domination of an ideology or an intellectual paradigm, including neo-liberalism/conservatism, which would seek to eulogise or legitimise the capitalist system; and
- the collapse or significant weakening of political formations whose outlook and programmes were based, philosophically, on an opposed anti-capitalist, then socialist, perspective.

Inevitably, this resulted in the radical weakening of all progressive forces throughout the world, including the African movements for national liberation, which had led our various national struggles for independence, understanding that the absence of independence was but an expression of an unacceptable world order imposed on all peoples by imperialism.

The **third** reason is that especially financial capital further strengthened its impact and hold on the global economy, leading, among others, to the emergence of financial conglomerates that became '*too big to fail*'.

This has imposed the imperative especially on political power in the countries of domicile of these conglomerates, the US and other major capitalist countries, to reinforce their obligation to act in a manner that would ensure the sustenance of such a '*global order*' as would not disturb the functioning of the global financial and economic system, and consequently threaten the conglomerates that had become '*too big to fail*'.

This has become an inalienable part of the process of globalisation from which no country, however powerful, can extricate itself.

Necessarily, what we have said has resulted in an enhanced aggressive posture on the part of the governments of the major capitalist countries which, effectively, seek to transform all other countries into their neo-colonies, wherever and whenever this is possible. The AU has failed to develop and implement a strategy to counteract these moves.

Given Africa's own unhappy experience of subjection to externally imposed 'development programmes', whose anti-development bias notoriously favoured stabilisation and debt repayment, the African agenda the AU needs to follow must necessarily be an antidote to the exercise of hegemonic practices of the West. These practices aim to secure the perpetual subjugation of Africa to Western political and economic interests.

### **Summary of the achievements of the African Union**

All the foregoing would suggest that in reality the AU was established to fail. This would be a fundamentally wrong conclusion. As a matter of fact the Union achieved much during its first ten years.

Below, and briefly, I list only some of the important achievements of the AU during this period.

The base for the historically high and sustained economic growth rates which Africa has enjoyed for some years, up to now, are, in good part, due to decisions and actions taken by the AU, as well as decisions taken in the period immediately preceding the birth of the Union.

This includes the decision taken by the AU in 2003 that all our countries should pay particular attention to investment in agriculture. In this regard the AU sought to implement the provisions in the NEPAD Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), which the AU adopted at its 2nd Assembly in Maputo in 2003.

To increase its public accountability and access to the African masses, the AU ensured the existence of and launched the Pan African Parliament, which represents all elected African national legislatures. This body still needs to be empowered to become more politically effective.

Through its Political Department the AU acted consistently at least to monitor elections thus to signal to all our countries the obligation that they should respect the democratic processes to which they

committed themselves when they ratified the Constitutive Act. This has further been reinforced by the adoption and coming into force of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

Earlier, these processes had been underwritten by the decision to establish the pioneering African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) which has acted to assist those of our countries which have acceded to the Mechanism to improve their performance with regard to Political, Economic and Corporate Governance.

With regard to the issue of justice and human rights, the AU formed the African Court of Human and Peoples Rights, which remains operational.

Concerned to achieve the objective stated as early as when the UNGA Declaration was adopted, concerning 'the social, cultural and economic development' of the peoples of Africa, the AU adopted a number of important decisions about such matters as the emancipation and empowerment of women, youth development, education, culture, the environment and corruption.

The AU also established the Peace and Security Council, whose existence has marked more determined action by the Continent to intervene to ensure peace and stability in Africa.

The AU also adopted the new Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which spelt out an African-designed programme for the development of Africa, to be implemented through an African partnership, especially represented in and through the Regional Economic Communities.

The AU succeeded in securing the agreement of the rest of the international community that it would redesign its development cooperation with our Continent to ensure that it was consistent with the objectives defined by NEPAD.

In this context, the AU also succeeded in placing the task of the development of Africa, as defined by the Africans, as one of the major issues on the global political and economic agenda.

We assumed that this had finally broken the more than 500-year-old 'tradition' in the ordering of global human affairs, including the periods of slavery, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, during which we, as Africans, served as nothing more than the objects of history as dictated by (in particular) the European nations.

All these represent important achievements which Africa should have celebrated and assessed if it had taken the necessary decisions and action to mark the 10th Anniversary of the AU.

### **A strategic assessment of these achievements**

Needless to say, that assessment would have made the determination that much more had to be done to build on these achievements.

Inevitably, that assessment would also have pointed to actual and potential reversals we have and could have experienced during the first decade of the AU.

Below we will make very brief remarks about a few of these.

It is clear that one of the biggest failures has been the inability of the Union to ensure that all its Member States integrate within their domestic policies all the decisions they adopt at the Continental level as binding African policies.

This has weakened the impact of many progressive all-Africa policies in terms of the transformation of our Continent as visualised in these policies.

It is also obvious that the AU did not succeed in obliging all its Member States to respect the imperatives for democratic rule as spelt out in the Constitutive Act, and related decisions, centred on the strategic perspective that the people - the African masses - must govern.

Related to this, as well the important matter of peace, security and stability, it is also obvious that despite all the existing and historic decisions in this regard, the AU did not develop the capacity to forestall impending military seizures of power, and therefore the overthrow of democratically elected governments and the imposition of undemocratic rule.

Part of the explanation to this is that despite the correct decision of the Union to establish an effective Early Warning System, this was not done because the bulk of the budget of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) was financed by Western powers which have their own unique interests relating to our Continent.

Because we have had no choice, as the African States have been unable fully to finance the operations of

the AU Peace and Security Commission, it has proved unavoidable that our Union has mainly undertaken such operations as would secure the approval of the non-African funding authorities.

Thus, in many respects, the failure of the AU to achieve what we visualised when it was established had little to do with the absence of will, but more to do with who would provide the resources to express Africa's will in practice.

Neither did the AU establish its authority with regard to its decisive role in terms of the resolution by peaceful and legal means of electoral disputes.

### **African solutions for African problems**

In this regard, and for this reason, the AU and our Continent has paid a high price in the context of the handling of the entire process following the 2010 Presidential Elections in Côte d'Ivoire, which will in future inevitably create new problems of conflict and instability in this important African country.

This leads directly to yet another failure of the AU we must acknowledge.

This is the failure of the AU to ensure respect by the entire international community of Africa's right and duty to resolve its problems – to respect the aspiration that as Africans we should devise the solutions to our problems.

This was expressed in its most acute form in the 2011 conflict in Libya during which the Western powers brazenly arrogated to themselves the unilateral right to decide the future of this African country, determined to treat the decisions of the AU with undisguised contempt.

To add insult to injury, all three African members of the AU ignored the decisions of the AU on Libya, and voted for the treacherous UN Security Council Resolution 1973 which the Western powers used to justify what was effectively the imposition of imperial *diktat* both on Libya and Africa as a whole, which we allowed to succeed.

In this regard Africa had warned that an incorrect resolution of the Libyan conflict would create new problems with regard to peace and stability for our Continent as a whole.

This made no impression on the agenda of the Western imperial powers, determined to pursue their strategic objective we have mentioned, which is *to transform all other countries into their neo-colonies, wherever and whenever this is possible.*

Among other things, this has resulted in the recent disastrous developments in Mali, many important elements of which can be traced directly to the self-interested manner in which the Western powers dealt with the internal conflict in Libya.

Undoubtedly, these Western imperial powers will do their best to use these developments further to entrench their intervention in Africa, arguing, especially, that the reinforcement of "Islamist and jihadist terrorism" in northern Mali is a direct threat to their national security!

### **Independent African economic development**

Earlier we indicated the strategic importance for our Continent of the adoption by the AU of NEPAD (and the APRM), and the consequences of this development.

In particular we mentioned the fact that we understood that what happened with regard particularly to the approach of the West towards Africa was that finally we had broken the frame of mind and practice according to which the West dealt with Africa and Africans as a permanently subservient fraction of the world and of humanity as a whole.

However, the hard fact is that our hopes in this regard have proved to be little more than a mirage, thanks, in good measure, to our own weaknesses.

The challenge of African development, as defined by Africans, has disappeared as an important part of the global political and economic agenda.

Even a cursory examination of the proceedings of the UN, the G8 and the G20 will confirm this assertion.

African representation at meetings of the G8 and the G20 has become little more than a meaningless charade intended to delude all Africans so that they become blind to the reality that the former substance has been replaced by the merest empty shadow of that substance.

As a representation of this, the G8 Africa Action Plan which was firmly based on NEPAD, and was solemnly adopted by the G8 at its Summit Meeting at Kananaskis, Canada, in 2002, after extensive consultation with Africa and within the G8, has completely disappeared from the agenda of the G8 and its annual meetings with African leaders!

When the G20 was reconstituted to meet at the level of heads of State and government, and formally assumed primacy over the G8, instead of the G20 adopting or amending the Africa Action Plan as might have been necessary, effectively it prescribed that the then globally agreed agenda to respond to Africa's development challenges would disappear within some meaningless 'development programme' for all developing countries.

The disappearance of the African development issue from the global agenda has manifested itself in many other ways.

These include the collapse of the WTO 'Doha Development Round' whose success as a truly 'development round' would have helped greatly to address Africa's development challenges.

They also include the obdurate insistence of the European Union to impose on a fragmented Africa, contrary to its own deeply held objective to achieve integration and unity, its beloved neo-colonialist Economic Partnership Agreements.

It is clear that in the context of the foregoing, a critical issue which has come to inform the approach of the West towards the challenge of African development is its undisguised fright about the possibility of the development of a real strategic political and economic partnership between Africa and China.

In this regard it is concerned about the possibility of the development of an equitable and mutually beneficial economic relationship between Africa and China, based on the existing agreements negotiated through the Africa-China Forum, FOCAC, which is not only possible but is also in the direct and objective interest of both Africa and China.

It is therefore not interested to see the independent economic development of Africa as visualised in NEPAD, which would give us the strength to negotiate equitable relations with China, India, Brazil, the West and the rest of the world.

Given the underlying imperatives we have indicated above, relating to the contemporary process of globalisation, including what we have just discussed with regard to China etc., it is inevitable that the West will do its best to exploit its historical relations with Africa, using its so-called 'soft power', further to tie Africa to itself as its dependency.

As it has demonstrated with regard to the Libyan conflict, where this fails or does not work, the West will intervene in Africa as it wishes, taking advantage of our weakness, wilfully to remove any African government it does not like and thus position itself as the real determinant of the destiny of Africa!

Thus do we come full circle back to the issue of vital strategic importance to ourselves as Africans of the fearless defence of our right to self-determination so firmly represented by the establishment of the African Union.

### **The Sarkozy promise**

The former President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, delivered a very instructive Lecture to the African Youth at the eminent Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal, five years ago on 26 July, 2007.

Quite correctly, this lecture inspired much justified anger throughout Africa because of various offensive remarks that Sarkozy made. As a result of this justified anger, as Africans we lost the opportunity to hold Sarkozy to account to work with us for the implementation of the correct things he had said in the very same Lecture.

In the passages I cited below, reflecting concerns relevant to us that have never been publicly acknowledged by any other Western leader, he said things about the so-called 'free capitalist market' and globalisation which should have been an important part of the review and assessment by our political leaders of the first decade of the AU. In these passages he said:

"Youth of Africa, globalisation such as it is, does not please you. Africa has paid too high a price dearly for the mirage of collectivism and "progressisme" to yield to that of *laisser-faire*.

“Youth of Africa, you believe that free-trade is beneficial but that it is not a religion. You believe that competition is a means but not an end in itself. You don’t believe in *laisser-faire*. You know that if Africa is too naïve it would be condemned to become the prey of predators from all over the world and you don’t want that. You want a different globalisation, with more humanity, more justice and more rules.

“I came to tell you that France also wants this. France wants to fight along with Europe, along with Africa and along with all those in the world who want to change globalisation. If Africa, France and Europe together want this, we shall succeed. But we cannot give expression to this desire on your behalf.”

The ‘free trade’, the ‘competition’ and the ‘*laisser-faire*’ Sarkozy mentioned constitute essential elements of the Western neo-liberal/conservative agenda which he advised we should not accept as though they are a religious prescript.

They constitute the ideological framework of the EPAs so beloved to the EU.

They are an immanent part of the globalisation Sarkozy advised we should struggle to change, so that the process of global socio-economic integration gives birth to a just world order that advances the humanity of all, governed by such rules that no country, people or individual would fall ‘prey (to capitalist) predators’ regardless of their nationality, as well as predator nations.

Fundamental to the challenge the AU has faced during the first ten years of its existence, effectively to defend our right as Africans to self-determination, has been the ascendancy within Africa and the rest of the world of the *laisser-faire* and particular expression of globalisation which Sarkozy urged we must oppose.

His gravest offence with regard to ourselves as Africans was that he wilfully betrayed the solemn pledge he made voluntarily to us, to be a loyal partner in *the exercise of our right to self-determination*, as happened during 2011 relating to the conflicts in Côte d’Ivoire and Libya.

In this regard, in addition to what we have already cited, and framing his thoughts in words and images we understand very well, he said:

“I have come to tell you that you don’t have to be ashamed of the values of African civilisation; that they do not drag you down but elevate you; that they are an antidote to the materialism and the individualism that enslave modern human beings; that they are the most precious of legacies against the dehumanisation and the “uniformisation” of the world of today.

“It is by drawing from the African imaginary world that your ancestors have left you; it is by drawing from their stories, their proverbs, their mythologies, their rites, by drawing from all these forms that, since the dawn of time were transmitted to and enriched generation after generation; that you will find the imagination and the power to invent a future for yourselves – a unique future that does not resemble any other, where you will at last feel free, free youth of Africa to be yourselves, free to decide for yourselves.”

### **Will the dream explode?**

All this is surely what we thought of our future as we engaged in countless struggles throughout our Continent, for many centuries, to reclaim our right to be ourselves, free to decide for ourselves, to exercise our right to determine our collective destiny, not relying on any permission from anybody.

It is the sacred task of the African Union, acting within the context of the partnership of all motive forces within our Continent, to mobilise us to use our united strength to achieve this dream, not allowing petty conflicts to divide us.

If this dream is deferred for much longer, surely, it will explode! ☹