Quest for new causes of pan-African solidarity

Re-defining pan-Africanism for the 21st century

By Mehari Taddele Maru (Ph.D.)

An extension of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the AU, will celebrate its 50th year anniversary next May 25. In this article I attempt to answer the question what is Pan-Africanism for the 21st Century Pan-Africanist? In a bare outline style the last five decades of the OAU/AU could be divided into three eras:

the Era of Pan-African Solidarity, that mainly mobilized the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggle of Africa; the Era of Confusion and Division in which the Cold War brought ideological struggle between supporters of the West and the East that led to conspiratorial and undemocratic political mobilizations, dictatorial governance styles, bloody political changes through military coups, revolutions and civil wars. Since the North African uprisings of 2011, Africa is now in the Era of Popular Uprisings and Democratic Progress.

By re-inventing Pan-Africanism for the 21st century Africa, the AU at this moment in time needs to move to a new era of delivery and democracy. By emphasizing the re-definition of Pan-African solidarity, poverty eradication and constitutional democratization should constitute the new frontiers of Pan-African progress. The era of delivery and democracy should be based on strict adherence to the AU Constitutive Act and a shift of mission from norm-setting to effective norm implementation of the various instruments and the overhauling of existing AU institutions and building of effective and functional institutions. In this regard, the North African uprisings are what some social scientists call “markers of change” for this era of delivery and democracy. Despite having some, but fewer, dictators and other leaders with contested mandates and diminished legitimacy due to election-related violence, evidently Africa has experienced what the author calls “generational progression of democracy”. The composition of the leadership of the 2013 January AU Summit is significantly more democratic than the early years of the AU.

During the Era of Pan-Africanism, Ethiopia’s historical background served as the seedbed from which the Pan-African solidarity movement drew inspiration that culminated in the creation of the OAU in 1963. The OAU, through its founding members, various committees and bodies, extended enormous political support for various anti-colonial and anti-Apartheid struggles in Africa, including in military training, material and diplomatic support to liberation movements in many countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia. As the first independent black African nation to be a member of the League of Nations and also as a founding member of the UN, Ethiopia promoted and defended the interest of Africa in various global forums of the UN. Together with Liberia, Ethiopia indicted the South African Apartheid Government at the International Court of Justice.

During the Era of Pan-Africanist solidarity, the OAU, which established the famous Co-ordinating Committee for the Liberation of Africa, had the singular role of mobilizing all resources including political, diplomatic, judicial and financial for the independence of African countries. Since 1957, Ethiopia, with other founding countries, played a significant role in the establishment and development of, first the Organization of the African Unity (OAU) and later, the African Union.
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independence and self-rule. Eras don't end abruptly; they just wither away through time. Thus,
with the emergence of a changing political climate and their failure to democratize internally, the
Pan-African Era ended in the killing, death or removal of the founding fathers, including
Emperor Haile-Selassie, Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah, Prime Minister Ahmed Ben Bella, and
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The transformation from OAU to AU came with the beginning of what may be called Era of Intervention and Integration. The end of the Cold War offered African leaders an opportunity to seek African solutions to the various African problems. In the early 1990s, Africa was no more a proxy for the superpowers. Africa Civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Central African Republic and Guinea Bissau; genocide in Rwanda; state failure in Somalia; and secessionist movements in Sudan became real challenges to the new and old African leadership, demanding urgent attention and action. African conflicts became more intra-state and less inter-state with localized manifestations and coverage, rather than civil wars that engulfed an entire country. As a result, Africa witnessed three times more internal displacement than refugees. The humanitarian crises in Somalia and Darfur were the worst, with more than six million deaths and forced displacements. To meet these challenges, the institutional transformation of the OAU into the AU began with the declaration of the OAU Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Governments in September, 1999, in Sirte, Libya. Indicative of the purpose, the title and theme of the Summit, “strengthening OAU Capacity to enable it to meet the Challenges of the New Millennium,” was to amend the OAU Charter in order to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the OAU. This extraordinary summit, and later the AU Constitutive Act, shifted the mission and vision of the OAU, mainly from an organization of anti-colonial solidarity, to the more interventionist and integrationist AU.

Nonetheless, a silent character of this era of intervention and integration is the composition of Africa’s leaders. The first AU summits were composed of long-serving dictators, some of them from independence liberation movements such as Mr Robert Mugabe, new generation rebel rulers such as Mr Yoweri Museveni who waged decades of protracted civil wars that toppled military dictators, and democratically elected leaders such as Mr Thabo Mbeki. In this era, while we have witnessed political struggles for amendments that would extend constitutional terms of office, many elections were marred by election-rigging and post-election disputes and violence, fragmented political parties and mandates, in contrast to grand coalitions and smooth transfers of power. Since the establishment of the AU, we have seen more than 35 countries exercise democratic elections that resulted in half of them experiencing a peaceful takeover of power by victorious opposition parties.

The transformation of the OAU into the AU in a way constituted an attempt to answer a quest for new causes and redefining Pan-Africanism. With the transformation of the OAU into AU, the AU came up with a new vision and mission for Africa’s renaissance. Based on the AU Constitutive Act, the first AU Commission Strategic Plan declared that the vision of the AU is “to build an integrated, a prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena”. The shift from collective security of states to human security was articulated in detail in the AU Constitutive Act, the AU Strategic Plans and the various instruments. With the ultimate purpose being the eradication of violent conflicts and poverty from Africa, APSA and NEPAD as part of the AU architecture for poverty eradication and development took pride of place in the work of the AU. With these architectures, the AU and its member states endorsed the Millennium Development Goals, a reinforcement of the need to re-define and establish new Pan-Africanism that serves the Era of Intervention and Integration. The AU Constitutive Act, APSA and NEPAD could be considered as primarily an unofficial attempt to re-define Pan-Africanism as new milestones.

The AU thus is an extension of the OAU, albeit with substantive and substantial discernible
differences. By endorsing the right to intervene, the AU resolved the tensions between sovereignty and responsibility that paralyses the OAU. The shift of mission of the AU lays on its success in combining three elements: 1) the sovereignty of its member states, 2) their responsibility to protect their nationals, and 3) African solidarity expressed by the duty of the AU in assisting states with internal grave crises. In the past ten years, the AU has responded to urgent crises in more than 21 countries. The North African uprisings revealed the vulnerability of Africa to revolutions and violence that are symptomatic of the undemocratic nature of exercise of power, weakness in peaceful and constitutional means of changes of government. The slow but comparatively well formulated response of the AU to the uprisings exposed the dearth and impotence of the AU in challenging leaderships like Muammar Qaddafi who rule countries for decades without legitimacy of any kind. The uprising initiated a useful introspection about the need for AU to insist on democratic reform of governance and peaceful democratic transition. By not demanding democratic reform of governance in countries like Libya, ruled by one person for more than four decades, Africa and the AU by de-fault helped the flawed military intervention by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on Libya. More terribly the AU missed an opportunity of being the primary promotor of democracy and driving democratic transformation in Africa. Democracy without delivery faces serious challenges of social stability; delivery without democracy devalues the dignity of being a human and diminishes the capability for growth. A vital deterrence effect and message particularly to newly elected and emerging political leaders is that power exercised solely dependent on performance legitimacy through delivery of services would prove difficult to sustain. Accordingly the AU needs to identify new frontiers of Pan-Africanism for the 21st Century. States are the key drivers of change in Africa, without which efforts towards peace and development remain futile. The 21st Century Pan Africanism should stem from poverty eradication and democratization through capacitating states to deliver and democratize more.

Ed.’s Note: Dr Mehari Taddele Maru is an independent consultant. A former fellow of very prestigious programmes at Harvard and Oxford Universities, he holds Doctorate of Legal Sciences (DSL) from JL Giessen University, Germany, MPA from Harvard and MSc from University of Oxford and LLB from Addis Ababa University. The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views of The Reporter. He can be reached at mehari@post.harvard.edu.