

THE RISE OF AFRICA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Jacob G. Zuma

Africa will write its own history, and it will be, to the north and to the south of the Sahara, a history of glory and dignity.

— Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961)

MUCH has been said about the rise of Africa in the twenty-first century. As home to seven of the 10 fastest growing economies in the world, the continent has in the past few years received a slew of attention from investors, commentators, developers and philosophers alike. With an abundant store of virtually every resource in the world (land, oceans, minerals, energy) and a population of over a billion people, the interest in Africa today is not surprising. From an economic perspective, Africa is now the second most attractive investment destination in the world, according to Ernst and Young. Dubbed “the Quiet Revolution” by G. Pascal Zachary, a well-respected professor at the Cronkite

School of Journalism and author of several authoritative books on Africa, there is no disputing the fact that in eight of the 10 years between 2000 and 2010, sub-Saharan Africa grew faster than Asia.

Over the past decade, the growth of the African continent has been, to put it modestly, remarkable. What is more, the advances being made in Africa are not limited solely to economic growth, but have been spread across the board. The current spike in education, standard of living, health, and governance is set to keep increasing over the next 30 years and beyond. What the new Africa epitomizes is the old adage that the cream will rise above the water. Indeed,

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President Jacob Zuma delivers a lecture as part of the ANC centenary celebrations at the Fort Hare University on May 24th, 2012

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in the words of a Mexican proverb, “They tried to bury us; they didn’t know that we were seeds.”

Although Africa has recently been deemed to be “the next big thing,” what the world has forgotten is that the rise of Africa is not a new phenomenon. Africa has indeed been rising—and at times it has experienced moments of inspiring economic progress—for quite a number of centuries. Allow me to explain. Africa, known also as the cradle of humankind, is home to some of the world’s most impressive archeological, architectural, literary, and artistic achievements. From the great pyramids of Egypt and the Mapubungwe Caves

of South Africa, to the ancient libraries of Mali and the Church of Lalibella in Ethiopia, the evidence proves beyond any doubt that Africa is a continent that has always been on the rise. There can be no question as to the contribution of Africa to the world, not only when it served as a conveyor belt to build the economies of the West during the time of the slave trade and colonial rule, but also in periods long before.

History confirms that through her buildings, rich culture, jewelry, art and texts, Africa was at a point in time at the forefront of modernization. With a well-developed inter-Africa trading system, our continent has long

laid the foundation stones of an interstate commercial enterprise for the rest of the world to enjoy.

Humankind has always been intrigued by the multiple riches that Africa has to offer. Her advancement in the gold trade, as well as in architecture and mathematics, resulted in the world having much more than a mere enthrallment with her. It had a desire to own her. Certainly, as this desire matured and subsequently culminated in actual political and economic domination, Africa was condemned to remain in the economic backwaters.

This leads me to yet another of Africa's seldom spoken about accomplishments—that is Africa as a military powerhouse, courageous enough to defend its territorial integrity against external threat. This underscores the notion that the state of Africa's success must be viewed with the hindsight of its previous successes or courageous steps taken in battle during the time when it was seen by outsiders as the Dark Continent—a term that is far from being synonymous with civilization.

In response to the colonization of her lands, the subjugation of her peo-

ple, and the exploitation of her wealth, Africa's warriors stood at the forefront—ready to fight for the future of the continent. King Shaka of Zululand, Mohamed Ben Abu Bekr of Timbuktu, Queen Ann Nzingha of Angola, King Jaja of Nigeria, Queen Amira of Zaria, the Sultan of Sokoto, Shehu Usman dan Fodio—the list of these heroes is long and inexhaustible.

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As the initial scramble for Africa took form in the fifteenth century—albeit under the pretext of advancing the global trade enterprise and/or spreading the principles of the European Enlightenment—men and women from across the plains, hills, valleys and great lakes of Africa readied themselves to defend her peoples against the foreign onslaught.

Across the continent and over a period of two centuries in the wake of the advent of colonial rule, these great men and women rose up against what they correctly foresaw as the intention of the white man in Africa to take away the liberties, wealth, and pride of the peoples of our great continent. They were instrumental in leading a second rising of sorts—one which fought courageously against colonial forces and left them, in some instances, sorely defeated.

Battles were fought and won by both sides. The success of some of these battles inspired the quest to further prevent the demeaning of Africa and its peoples through the slave trade and colonialism. For example, the great Queen Nzinga of the Mbundu (now Angola) led her armies in a 30-year war against the Portuguese by forging strong cordial relations with the Dutch. Having eventually suffered her army's defeat, Queen Nzinga waged a guerrilla war against the Portuguese that laid the foundations for the armed resistance movement that resulted in the toppling of the Portuguese in Angola in 1975. Her story is far from unique. All of the great kings and queens mentioned above, and many more besides, played their part in protecting Africa from those who were bent on keeping her at the bottom of the global ladder. Sadly, history has taught us that, at times, an unfaltering human spirit and the fight for integrity are no match against gun powder. And yet, the second rise of Africa, far more aggressive than the scramble for Africa, was by and large a success.

Therefore, the knee-jerk reaction of many current-day analysts who do not hesitate to talk of the rise of Africa as if it has risen from the ashes—as if it had no history to speak of—is both unfair and untrue. The destruction of Africa

had been purposeful. It had been systematic and it had been devastating to countries individually, and collectively as a regional and continental group. I agree with those who assert that the underdevelopment of Africa was intentional and planned. I fully subscribe to the thesis put forth by Walter Rodney who argued in his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) that a combination of power politics and economic exploitation of Africa by Europeans led to the poor state of African

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political and economic development in the twentieth century. This leads me to what in my view was the third rise of Africa.

The Pan Africanist Movement inspired the liberation of the continent. Ghana's declaration of independence in 1957 saw, what was for many, the realization of the dreams of the fathers of Pan Africanism. The calls of Pixely ka Seme, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Dubois—later joined by Malcom X, Kwame Nkrumah, Muammar Gaddafi and others—finally appeared to have been heeded. From the declaration of independence in Ghana in 1957 to the formation of Zimbabwe in 1980, country after country was liberated. This served to bolster the hopes and dreams of the continent, and reinforced the concept of African nationalism and

pride. Although the influence of former colonialists was known from as early as the Central Intelligence Agency's plot to assassinate Patrice Lumumba in 1961, this period in Africa's history was a watershed. Infrastructure development, healthcare and education spiked significantly within that period. This was truly a shining example of Africa rising. For the first time in centuries, the majority of African countries could claim to be truly independent and take charge of their own vast resources. The effects were felt both by the liberated countries themselves as well as by those still under the shackles of imperialism, colonialism and racial oppression in the form of apartheid—as was the case of South Africa.

The belief that African peoples, both on the continent and in the Diaspora, share not merely a common history, but also a common destiny, was finally bearing fruit. The support given across colonial borders in order to ensure the freedoms of their comrades in other countries was nothing short of spectacular. It can be argued, that outside of the two World Wars, nowhere else in the twentieth century could one find an example of cross-country solidarity that led to the liberation of so many subjugated men, women, and children. Although South Africa only got its independence in 1994, it was in the early 1960s that the then Commander-in-Chief of Mkhonto we Sizwe—the late

Nelson Rolihlala Mandela—inspired by the success of African liberation movements, left for military training in Algeria. This trip also saw him visit many African countries on a fund-raising drive for the African National Congress in general, and its armed wing MK, in particular. This could not have been done in an Africa that was not on the rise. This is one of many examples of how the continent played an integral role in assisting liberation movements to gain their independence.

It would be foolhardy, in my view, not to see this period as one of the zeniths of Africa's rise, and certainly a cornerstone that explains where we are today. It was not merely the goodwill of individual leaders, such as Sam Njonah, Kenneth Kaunda, Julius Nyerere, Ben Bella and others, which resulted in the liberation of so many African countries. This era saw the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which was inspired by the following primary aims:

- To promote the unity and solidarity of the African states and act as a collective voice for the African continent. This was important to secure Africa's long-term economic and political future.
- To coordinate and intensify cooperation between African states in order to achieve a better life for the people of Africa.

- To defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of African states.
- To eradicate all forms of colonialism and white minority rule as, when it was established, there were several states that had not yet won their independence or were white minority-ruled. South Africa and Angola were two such countries. The OAU proposed two ways of ridding the continent of colonialism and white minority rule. Firstly, it would defend the interests of independent countries and help to pursue the independence of still-colonised ones. Secondly, it would remain neutral in terms of world affairs, preventing its members from being controlled once more by outside powers.
- To establish a Liberation Committee to aid independence movements and look after the interests of already-independent states.

Africa has undoubtedly transformed from where it was in 1963, when we formed the OAU to chart a new path for the continent, laying the foundation for the establishment of the African Union (AU), of which we are proud members today.

In 2013, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the OAU/AU. We looked back with measured satisfaction at the road we had travelled. However, it also made

us realize that we need to do more over the next 50 years—we needed to make a renewed commitment to take Africa to new heights. In making this commitment, our leaders during the May 2013 African Union Summit resolved to prepare a vision and roadmap of where Africa should be five decades from now. This vision, now consolidated into a framework document, is what we know today as Agenda 2063. What we are talking about here is not a wish list, but a carefully thought-out plan with identified drivers and an implementation strategy in order to achieve our vision of a better Africa.

Agenda 2063 is about the Africa we want to build for the future. It connects the Africa of yesterday to the Africa of today and the Africa of tomorrow. The 'Africa of yesterday' is the indispensable lessons we have learnt since the days of independence. The 'Africa of today' is our destiny that is firmly in our hands with every action we take. The 'Africa of tomorrow' is the future we are creating through what we do today.

Agenda 2063 is people-centered and people-driven. The June 2014 African Union Summit requested Member States to consult domestically and ascertain the views of all our people and across all sectors, regarding Agenda 2063. In South Africa, our government's Department of International Relations and Cooperation convened consultations with other government minis-

tries in South Africa, as well as with representatives of youth, academia and think-tanks, women, civil society and the business sector over the past few months. In these consultations, stakeholders welcomed the AU's decision to develop Agenda 2063. Among other things, the consultations confirmed the urgency with which our domestic stakeholders want the AU to strengthen the implementation of policies aimed at bettering the lives of ordinary Africans.

In short, we found that a consensus has emerged on the need for sustained political will, as well as bold and transformational leadership across all sectors of our society and nation.

We Africans have recognized the need for strengthened cooperation and coherence in the formulation of policies at the national, regional and continental levels. This would ensure clarity and complementarity in resource allocation and management, including for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

The phase of conceptualization and consultations over the base program of Agenda 2063 is expected to be concluded at the January 2015 African Union Summit where, among others, the first of the 10-year implementation plans for this vision will be considered. AU Member States and the regional economic communities will be required to include the elements of the Agenda

2063 Plan in their respective national and regional programs.

The evolving Agenda 2063 is currently premised on seven aspirational pillars, which at the AU level we have defined as representing the Africa we want:

- A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development;
- An integrated continent, politically united, based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance;
- An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law;
- A peaceful and secure Africa;
- An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics;
- An Africa where development is people-driven, relying particularly on the potential of women and youth;
- An Africa that is a strong, united and influential global player and partner.

In highlighting the above aspirations, the African people unequivocally expressed a collective desire to uplift the continent from the morass of underde-

velopment and degradation to which I referred earlier. With Agenda 2063, the African Union is rallying all Africans to continue the march for the rebirth of the African continent in all aspects, by extending our political liberation to encompass economic and social liberation. Agenda 2063 is, thus, a program for Africa's full and lasting emancipation. It is a vision of a continent at peace with itself in every corner—free from war and conflict, disease, hunger, homelessness, extreme poverty, and all the other ills engineered and sustained by the actions of human beings.

Agenda 2063 prioritizes our unity and regional integration as key vehicles for Africa's accelerated social and economic development. The Solemn Declaration adopted by African Union leaders during the 50th anniversary celebrations held in May 2013

speaks to this determination and the collective responsibility required to develop Africa to its fullest potential. Recognizing that Africa can achieve this potential, Agenda 2063 emphasizes the Pan-African vision of an Africa that must unite in order to realize its renaissance.

There is no doubt that the destiny of Africa is in our hands. We must act now to shape the future we want. This is what is at the heart of Agenda 2063, underpinned by the premise that, as Africans, we must define, shape and pursue the future that we see to be in the best interest of the continent and her people.

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Agenda 2063 is, thus, a shared strategic framework for the inclusive growth and sustainable development of our continent—a catalyst for Africa's transformation—towards economic strength, social justice, and environmental stewardship. Importantly, it is a continuation of the Pan-African drive for self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity. Agenda 2063 aims to galvanize and unite in action all Africans on the continent and in the

Diaspora around the common vision of a peaceful, integrated and prosperous Africa, driven by her citizens and taking its rightful place in the world.

As South Africa, we realize that creating a better life for our citizens is inexorably intertwined with our coun-

try's pursuit of a better Africa in a better world. South Africa's destiny is inextricably linked to that of all the regional blocs of the continent. Regional and continental integration is the foundation of Africa's socio-economic development and political unity, and is thus an essential element in achieving South Africa's prosperity and security. Consequently, Africa is at the center of South Africa's foreign policy, informed by the premise that increased cooperation amongst ourselves is essential if we are to realize our collective goals as a continent.

Furthermore, our country's National Development Plan (NDP) is predicated on the key visions of Agenda 2063, which include *inter alia* a strengthened focus on regional cooperation and integration. The NDP highlights that South Africa needs to deepen its investment and promote cooperation and integration as a means to enhance socio-economic development in southern Africa, as well as on the rest of the continent. Among other benefits, enhanced regional integration will expand regional and continental trade, and the sharing of experiences and technical cooperation across the sectors.

The realization of Agenda 2063 will be influenced by where the world will be in 30 to 50 years. Several scenarios and trajectories have been developed by experts and think-tanks, as well as by the strategic forecasting units in many of our countries. Their methods

are, of course, not an exact science, but their predictions are nonetheless helpful for planning purposes and glimpses into the future. One thread running through virtually all these analyses tells the story of the shift in the international balance of forces in the direction of the countries of the Global South. Therefore, Africa has to ensure that she is part of this shift, and that the leverages she consequences of the global transformation to come, in order to attain the goals of Agenda 2063.

There are challenges in our current global system that will need to be overcome. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- the untransformed and undemocratic nature of the global institutions that govern the world in which we live;
- the unipolarity and unilateralism which undermine our multilateral institutions and the multipolarity required for Africa to have a greater voice in the world;
- the continuing threats to international peace which affect our continent and other developing countries, whose objective, in many instances, is regime change and control over our natural resources.

A transformed international order is what we want as Africa. One of the seven aspirations of Agenda 2063 is

entitled "Africa as a strong and influential global player and partner." Africa will prosper better in a transformed world that is governed democratically. A better world will enable Africa to leverage its demographic dividend to claim its rightful place in the twenty-first century.

The Africa we see rising today must be in full flight by 2063. But how high and fast we rise as a continent will depend on what we do today. As South Africa, we therefore believe the following principles should inform Africa's approach to the future:

- African ownership, including finding our own solutions to our problems;
- Silencing the guns once and for all;
- Self-reliance to reverse and eradicate our dependency, including on aid for fiscal support;
- Our people must come first, with the benefits of a prosperous Africa fairly shared among all of us;
- Industrialization supported by a strong infrastructure, instead of dependence on commodities and other raw materials;
- African unity should remain paramount;
- Africa should continue to be assertive in world affairs and not forsake its

demand for a permanent presence on the United Nations Security Council.

The potential of our continent is not in doubt. The UN's children's agency, UNICEF, estimates that, based on current trends, within the next 35 years, 25 out of every 100 people in the world will be African; and that by then, 40 percent of the children in the world aged under five years will come from our continent. Our people are our wealth and most prized resource.

One article in the January 2013 issue of the magazine *African Business* caught my eye because of its cover title "Why Africa will Rule the 21st Century." Let me quote an excerpt:

According to the authors of a new book, *The Fastest Billion: the Story Behind Africa's Economic Revolution*, Africa's current sustained growth level is set to not only continue but rise over the next four decades, so that, come 2050, the continent's GDP will equal the combined GDPs of the U.S. and the EU at current prices.

Indeed, in his address to that historic gathering in Addis Ababa in 1963 establishing the OAU, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, speaking about Africa's potential, highlighted that: "the resources are there. It is for us to marshal them in the active service of our people. Unless we do this by our concerted efforts," he continued, "within the frame-

work of our combined planning, we shall not progress at the tempo demanded by today's events and the mood of our people." Agenda 2063 seeks to provide this framework as we, today, seek to respond to the demands of our time for a better Africa.

Looking into the future as South Africa, we take our guide and inspiration from the Freedom Charter. "There shall be peace and friendship," we said. With peace, we will seek no wars. With friendship, South Africa will have no enemy in the global comity of nations, but partners and friends charting a prosperous future together.

The NDP is our roadmap to the year 2030, and, happily so, dovetails very well with the vision of Agenda 2063. Between now and 2019, which is the timeframe covered by our Medium Term Strategic Framework, contributing to a better and safer Africa forms part of our fundamental goals. Our output priorities are as follows:

- Advancing our national priorities in our bilateral and multilateral engagements;
- An economically integrated southern Africa;
- Political cohesion within southern Africa to ensure a peaceful, secure and stable southern African region;

- A peaceful, secure, and stable Africa;
- A sustainable, developed, and economically integrating Africa;
- An equitable and just system of global governance;
- Strong, mutually beneficial South-South cooperation;
- Mutually beneficial relations with strategic formations of the North.

As South Africa, we are clear of the task at hand. Agenda 2063 is a call to action. President Oliver Tambo had us in mind when he addressed the 50th Session of the OAU Liberation Committee in Harare in May 1988, saying on that occasion the following:

As we mark this historic occasion of the 25th anniversary of the OAU Liberation Committee and its 50th session, and cast our eyes west into the Caprivi Strip and Namibia and across the Limpopo into South Africa, we see the tree of freedom rising in all its magnificence, watered by the blood of our own peoples and nourished by the victories that the peoples of our continent have scored during the last quarter of a century. There will be no 50th anniversary of the Liberation Committee to celebrate and no hundredth session, because long before then, we shall all meet in a liberated Namibia and liberated South Africa, together to attend to the urgent question of the rebuilding of our continent as a zone of prosperity, peace and friendship among the people.

Two years after this address, Namibia attained its independence. Ours followed four years afterwards. Our freedom was just, but the difficult struggle for a better South Africa in a better Africa and a better world continues.

This brings me back to where I began. The Rise of Africa is nothing new. Despite a concerted effort by forces that often seem too great to surmount, I cannot emphasize enough the reality to which we have risen.

When centuries ago Africa came under the most humiliating form of subjugation by foreign colonial powers, the indomitable spirit that underlies Africa's composure ensured

that we shed our ugly past and rose beyond the expectations of those who tried to keep us down. When our men, women and children were stolen from this great land and taken across the Atlantic, we rose and became the great continent we once were. Amid all the challenges we experienced in the past, it is clear that Africa's economic renaissance will always serve as constant proof that economic progress is not only the preserve of the West or the East. Through the commitment of the continent, as echoed in Agenda 2063, Africa makes a bold announcement to the world that it has come of age and is now ready to join its peers on the economic and political frontlines of the twenty-first century. ●