

# AMINATA TOURÉ

Senegalese politician, former Prime Minister

**Robert Dossou, President of the African Association of International Law, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Benin, former President of the Constitutional Court of Benin**

I give the floor to Aminata Touré, who has been Senegal's Minister of Justice, Prime Minister, Head of Government, President of Constitutional Institutions and a political fighter for her country.

## Aminata Touré

Thank you, Mr. Dossou. We have also undertaken common endeavors for the continent, notably the trial of the late President Habré, when you made a significant contribution to the advancement of international criminal law.

I would like to say that I am an optimist, an Afro-optimist. I am not just saying this out of sentimentalism but because, from my youth to the present day, I have seen this continent of 54 countries make major strides. Let us not forget that.

Africa is talked about as though we speak the same language, dance to the same music and have the same funeral rites. We do not. Africa is a diverse place. It has diverse cultures and paths. For example, Senegal has never had a coup d'état. But when people talk about Africa, it sounds as if the whole continent is plagued by turmoil. Clearly, we share challenges, including the challenge of development, of which, incidentally, some countries have higher levels than others: Botswana, Cape Verde and many others.

I would like to take this opportunity to point out that the country with the most powerful economy is Nigeria, ahead of South Africa and Egypt. We forget to say that. At our conference in Morocco, I said that Nigeria's economy was five times the size of Morocco's. If Morocco wants to join ECOWAS, the country must think about it carefully because the reciprocity agreement means that many Nigerians would go to Morocco. People do not seem to realize that.

It must also be said that 50 or 60 years after its countries became independent, Africa is still poorly known. This is not normal. It is our own responsibility. We have the world's worst public relations policy. We do not blow our own horn. We maintain our Afro-pessimism, which puts Africa in its darkest light without mentioning all the challenges we face.

I talked about those challenges at yesterday's plenary session. As soon as the pandemic began, millions of deaths were expected. While we lack advanced statistical tools, Nathalie, when we bury our dead, we make enough noise so that it is noticed.

The expected mass deaths never materialized. That is not due to luck. Despite healthcare systems that still face huge challenges, African states took measures. We banned travel from France before the French did. Based on our pandemic-fighting experience, we took urgent steps well before many other countries. The forecasts and analyses about Africa do not mention this enough.

In 50 years, our life expectancy has risen. Let us remember that Africa is where the slave trade and colonization took place. Capital accumulation is a continuous process. When you get a late start, you have lots of catching up to do. Rwanda and other, less famous cases show us it is possible. Progress exists.

This being a forum for exchanging ideas, I would have liked to see many more people interested in what accounts for almost a quarter of the United Nations General Assembly. Africa is attractive because of its resources, period. For the rest, our partners embroider and beat around the bush, but it is essentially that. Our partners must change their attitude, but we do not expect them to. We are the ones who must make it happen.

Africa only trades 12% on the continent. It is 60% elsewhere. Why do we not do it? We need a pharmaceutical industry to serve our peoples. What keeps us from doing that? We are 54 countries with many universities, including some important and brilliant ones. We export intellectuals, scientists, etc. It is a housework, we must work better at keeping them home.

In addition to boasting bountiful resources, Africa is young. I see that as a great advantage over ageing places. Obviously, there is plenty of training to do. I completely agree with Ms. Guigou. The kind of training matters. Not the kind that has been imported for a very long time, but the type that meets urgent needs, i.e., more science training and a higher school enrolment rate for girls.

Some countries, like Senegal, have more girls in school than boys. This is a revolution nobody notices or talks about. In a country where 95% or 96% of the population is Muslim, more girls take the exam to enter middle school than boys. That says a lot about Senegal, its level of tolerance, its perception of religion and its desire to invest, starting from the bottom, in the future and in the contributions of women. But nobody mentions that.

I myself preside over the medical school's graduation ceremony. This year, more girls graduated than boys. This is not publicized. Women make up 48% of the National Assembly. That is much more than in France or the United States.

Positive revolutions are taking place that must be touted as African achievements. But the analysis must always be balanced. The glass must be seen as it is, with drawbacks and advantages. Otherwise, what we do, in a way, just feeds into our Afro-pessimism and passes it down to younger generations.

In my opinion, all the problems that have been raised are real, but Africa creates wealth and should distribute it better. The continent should aggressively fight inequality and empower women, who make up over half the population and, generally, are more innovative, more committed and even contribute more to GDP. In any case, in agriculture, the FAO shows that women grow 70% of the subsistence crops that families live on.

This powerful information must be put under a spotlight. It applies to many countries. For example, Senegal has a 7% growth rate. We are growing faster than the Asian countries.

We must share this perspective with our present and future partners. As we just said, countries must choose between China, the United States and France. I attended the panel discussion on Europe and the word that was mentioned the most was “interest”. Everyone looks out for their interests. So, I am sure our partners understand, and must better understand, that Africa will increasingly look out for its strategic interests by opening up prospects with its usual friends, its new friends, and above all by standing together in the African Union and trading within it. Some interesting dynamics are being set in motion.

One challenge is figuring out how to strengthen our institutions. Senegal, for example, is 61 years old. That is a short time in the life of a people. But our life, culture and history did not start there. I am not talking about Africa being the cradle of humanity. I would not go that far back. Senegal has seen brilliant civilizations. Some were led by women. Some women even led armies.

All this history must be better documented. We must create a narrative that captures our youth’s imagination, not just, “They do not have jobs, they are crossing the ocean, they are going to die, etc.” We also need to develop a narrative that people care about.

I totally agree on the issue of industrialization. It is important and it is one of the lessons Covid has taught us. People realized that they could be alone for practically eight months. If you fell ill, whether you were the President or a cleaning woman, you went to the hospital. That was the only choice. We had faith in our medical workers. We had faith in each other. We developed masks ourselves. Europeans and Chinese fought each other on runways to get a hold of masks. We manufactured them and they worked. As I said, we discovered a new self-confidence and showed it is possible. If we did it for eight months, we can do it for eight centuries.

That, in my view, is the new culture that must be instilled first in our leaders, then in our youth, our women and our communities. As I just said, I think we have the cultural background to do it. We are ancient civilizations that have developed values, competitive values among which it is said that X% of the population lives on less than a dollar a month. When I was at the United Nations, I told them, “Revise your calculating system. It makes no sense to me. If 90% of real production is not on the books – these are the informal sectors – you cannot define a poverty line. Poverty as you define it is not necessarily experienced in our country as such. You can have a wife, sometimes even two, and children who go to school and university without ever having worked in your whole life because there is an important solidarity network that, in my opinion, is also a legacy that must be leveraged.

The last question is about security. I totally agree with Dr. Gadio on this, but security is Africa and everybody. If your priorities are looking after your people – for this is a matter of life or death – sending them to school because your future depends on it, fighting climate change and having an army, there are hard choices to make.

In the spirit of building a continental perspective, Africa must think about its armies. Perhaps not standing armies, but forces that can be swiftly deployed to areas of conflict, intervention



and interposition. I think this must be the next goal, as well as the partnership with our old or new friends, without jealousy.

If we fail, we must avoid what I call the “Wagnerization” of Africa. When the matter of security comes up, everyone is ready to sell their last scarf to restore peace. There is no development without peace.

This is a discussion we must have. Otherwise, countries will find themselves in desperate straits. Many have seen what happened in Syria, where people eventually told themselves that perhaps some were better than others in fighting terrorism. Is that the prospect? I do not think so.

We must very calmly and responsibly address these issues and find solutions together. Nobody wants to see millions of Africans, who should be staying home, thriving and contributing to their countries’ development, come knocking on Europe’s door. That is why we have a shared destiny.

Thank you.