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Minister Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, the floor is yours.

Cheikh Tidiane Gadio

First of all, I would like to greet all my friends here. We have almost become an epistemic community. We see each other all the time at international meetings on the same topics. Maybe one day something great will come out of this for Africa and the world.

I must thank our friend Thierry de Montbrial, because this year he offered us a plenary session and a workshop. Last year, we complained that African issues should be in a plenary session, not just the workshops, and he kindly listened to us. He kept his word and yesterday's panel discussion on Africa was excellent. I congratulate my brother General Behanzin and all the other colleagues who made a contribution.

I wanted to say a few quick words about security, development and leadership. It is my profound belief that Africa's number one problem is a problem of leadership. Our progress is impeded by what seems to be the continent's key problem, the question of leadership, or, more exactly, the lack of leadership and the sometimes serious acceleration of the leadership crisis on the continent. Africa has not had a development strategy since 1960 and the lack of strategy is related to our leaders' lack of vision.

For me, the most obvious proof is that after 50 years of trying, after all the failed plans, etc., our leaders have found nothing better to offer us than Agenda 2063. In other words, they have set 2063 as the date to finally resolve all the continent's problems.

Africa is in dire straits. Africa is imperiled. Africa is under threat from many angles. We do not have time to wait for 2063. There is an enormous number of things to get done as quickly as possible. It is because most of our leaders reject pan-Africanism, even though they claim to support it, that we are in the present situation.

It is also because at the beginning our leadership was decapitated or silenced by executions, the assassinations of Um Nyobè and Ouandié in Cameroon, Sylvanus Olympio in Togo, Lumumba in Congo, Cabral in Guinea-Bissau, Boganda in the Central African Republic and Sankara in Burkina Faso. And other leaders were isolated and driven to paranoia, like Sékou



Touré, which led him and his country into a very serious situation. And great leaders, great minds of Africa, like Cheikh Anta Diop, have also been isolated in their own countries.

This means that Africa, in my opinion, got off to a bad start because good leaders were neutralized, eliminated or isolated, and now we find ourselves wandering without a compass. The grave security crisis is a good illustration of the lack of leadership on the continent.

This crisis is extremely serious. I am almost convinced that our leaders fail to grasp the magnitude and seriousness of Africa's security crisis today. In 2012, we created our institute primarily to alert, warn and sound the alarm. At the time, a few pickup trucks had left Libya to attack Mali. We warned that Mali was a weak link for them and that afterwards they would metastasize across the entire sub-region, if not the entire continent.

Some of them were already in Algeria, where they were defeated, beaten. They tried to establish a foothold in Morocco. They showed up in Tunisia. The elimination of Gaddafi and the destabilization of Libya was like kicking over an anthill where all these people scurried out to head for the Sahel. At the time, we warned our Western friends, "what you are doing in Libya will have immediate consequences on the Sahel and West Africa". Of course, we were not listened to. The results are there. We must all face the facts. The time for allocating responsibilities has passed. Now it is time for action and trying to resolve the crisis.

Let us start with ECOWAS. Our call to pool our forces fell on deaf ears. No country can fight terrorism alone, not even the United States, which put together a coalition of 60 nations. How can our countries hope to secure huge swaths of territory with small national armies and scant resources? How can a country like Mali, with 1,240,000 square kilometers and an army of 20,000 or 30,000, settle the question of terrorism if they do not agree to pool their resources? They did not listen to us. We said it was necessary to go back to the doctrine of regional armies or an African army. They laughed at the idea.

Twelve years later, the consequence is what the jihadists have done in Africa: 40,000 victims of terrorism in Nigeria, the continent's economic and demographic powerhouse. When Blaise Compaoré was President of Burkina Faso, the State controlled every inch of its territory. Then the jihadists took 30% and now they have 50%.

The young captain who had just taken power in Burkina Faso told his country's political leaders, "Do you want to know something? We have lost our territory". There is an avowal that an African country has almost fallen, because they say you cannot venture safely very far outside the two largest cities: Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouagadougou. The rest of the country seems to be outside the control of the state, to the delight of the terrorists.

For all these reasons, I believe that facing the facts allows us to move forward. ECOWAS has reached its historic limits. As I said, ECOWAS cannot go beyond what it is doing, because despite all the efforts and successes towards integration, common passports, despite everything we have done, we have had five coups and several countries plagued by terrorism. And there is no regional response, much less a continental one.

In February 2021, our heads of state gathered at two major summit meetings that we had been urgently calling for more than five to six years, one on terrorism to join forces and coordinate our strategy, the other on the African army. They planned these two summits. There was a

meeting scheduled at Sharm el-Sheikh to revise the African Standby Force doctrine and strategy to make it stronger. The other summit was on terrorism.

Using Covid as a pretext, the summits were postponed indefinitely and nothing has been said about them since. We are still in the situation that everyone knows today in our countries.

It was the great Tanzanian leader Nyerere who in the 1960s proposed a regional approach to African integration to Nkrumah. For us, the regional approach has run its course. All the regional economic communities are in crisis. The Arab Maghreb Union almost no longer exists, and nobody talks about it anymore. The other communities have also proven their ineffectiveness. So, we find ourselves in a situation where, after five coups – two in Mali, two in Burkina Faso and one in Guinea – we also have constitutional crises in which governments trample their countries' constitutions underfoot without the regional community blinking an eye.

In Guinea, for example, Alpha Condé ran for a third term, leaving behind many victims, many dead, and ending in a coup. ECOWAS was unable to talk Condé out of doing what he wanted to do. He did it. The results are there. One of West Africa's largest countries, Guinea, which has enormous resources and a very beautiful history, has been neutralized and almost paralyzed.

The other big problem today is that there are two foxes in the chicken coop. There are the terrorists, but there are also our Russian friends. Things must be called by their name. Our Russian friends have entered the game, almost without our knowing it. They have occupied the Internet. They have sometimes activated some of their local supporters, who have abundantly used the weapon of fake news.

When there was a coup in Burkina Faso at 11 a.m., by noon young people were waving thousands of Russian flags in the capital. Can it be believed that this was spontaneous? Were the flags made in an hour and handed out to these young people? It is highly unlikely. And the first person to support and defend the coup happened to be the boss of the famous Wagner group. Today, Russia's "Africa Strategy" seems to be scoring points in some countries and with some of our youth leaders.

The "Russian offer" is apparently appealing as terrorism spreads across the continent. Jihadist terrorists have reached Mozambique from northern South Africa. They have knocked on South Africa's door. They have staged an attack in Uganda. They have staged attacks in DRC. In Togo and Benin, they are said to be trying to conquer part of the seafront. They are everywhere on the continent.

Why are our leaders taking so long to grasp the gravity of the aggression taking place against African peoples, sometimes with mass massacres that resemble a genocidal pattern of systematic elimination? Why don't they understand that this must be stopped?

With this absolute urgency before us, we are told that the industrialization of Africa is the solution to our problems. All well and good. Africa must be industrialized. But we have not solved the fundamental challenge that is the precondition of all development: security! The basic criteria for development have not been met anywhere on the continent.

For example, agriculture, the main area of sovereignty, has not been settled. Senegal, my country, buys 50% of its wheat from Russia and 70% of its rice from Asia, rice being a staple



consumed daily. After 60 or 62 years of independence, food sovereignty has still not been achieved. All these issues are connected.

Now I am going to blow the whistle. Some friends insist that the military solution is not the only one. Nobody ever said that the military solution is the only one. The great tragedy today is that even African intellectuals are trying to lay the blame for terrorism on Africans, arguing that insecurity and terrorism are rooted in the lack of development. That is completely wrong. We had 50 years of non-development, of poverty, and zero terrorism.

What happened is that a conjunction of several factors, international agendas, very complicated agendas, converged in Africa and caused this situation. So, the truth must be told. "It takes two legs to walk," as the Chinese say. Of course, development must be a high priority, but I would like to recall Cheikh Anta Diop's warning in 1975, "Security comes before and serves development".

So do not tell Africans, "It is your fault. You have left disadvantaged areas undeveloped. You have not established public administration everywhere. That is why you have terrorism".

We are not mainly to blame for what happens to us. We are not the ones who dismantled Libya! But we are partly responsible because in the 1960s Cheikh Anta Diop also warned us about the heavy price to pay for having accepted the Balkanization of Africa and the choice of building "unviable dwarf States".

I am going to ask a question. Why, after 60 years of the same paradigm and the same development policies, are there no emerging countries in Africa? Zero. The development policies and strategies our leaders have proposed are clearly not working. So, the model must be changed. We must return to the question of unity and the construction of viable state and territorial entities.

There are 15 countries in ECOWAS. If "the Federation of West African States" was created along with a common army, a common diplomacy, a common currency, a common trade policy and a common citizenship, we would already be very far ahead and on the road to real development.

If we created a federated entity, we would have a powerful authority to lead the community. ECOWAS encompasses 400 million people and four to five million square kilometers of land area. Cuba, with 126,000 square kilometers and 12 million people, has an army of two million soldiers, including one million reservists. If ECOWAS had an army comprising 1% of its population, it would have four million soldiers. If it comprised 0.1%, that would make 400,000 soldiers.

Why can't we create such a force and support the peoples of Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, etc.? Instead, each country rides solo with the result that Nigeria, the continent's biggest power, has been brought down to one knee by terrorists and each of us remains powerless despite its national plan against terrorism.

How many times have we warned that the terrorists plan to go after Benin and Togo? We have been saying this for five years. Now they are there. The strategists of these political-military movements are apparently smarter than us and, in any case, more determined. They are not



choir boys. They have their strategy and above all their determination slung over their shoulders. They have their plan. As I often say, they have come to take their “share of Africa” and want to bring about a new division of the continent. Africans must understand this before it is too late! Thank you.

Robert Dossou

Minister Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, what you said was so interesting that I granted you a few additional minutes after giving you the minute or minutes of thanks on behalf of us all.