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I give the floor to the member of Parliament and Prime Minister Aminata Touré.

Aminata Touré

Mr. Chairman, I suggest that the organizers define the subject better next time. Africa is not one subject. There are a thousand Africas. There is a diversity of Africans. There are a thousand cultures. This is a “workshop on Africa”. Imagine if we said “workshop on Europe”. I wonder where it starts and where it ends.

Obviously, Africa is bigger than the Sahel. The Sahel is important, but Africa is made up of 54 very diverse countries. I think it is important to point this out because in the narrative that is also, unfortunately, one of Africa’s shortcomings. It is reduced to its problems, especially by the outside world. We have many, but there are also good news. The problems must be dealt with. I totally agree with my friend and brother Cheikh Tidiane Gadio. I endorse everything he said.

I am going to put myself on the other side of the equation. Africa also offers reasons to hope. When we became independent in 1960, life expectancy was 40, I believe. Today it is 63 and rising. That is an indicator.

Another key indicator involves women: if you put 51% of your population in a situation where they cannot make an economic, social and cultural contribution, especially in a world of global competition, because that is what this is about, you will come out on the losing side. When you want to move forward, investing in women is a matter of common sense.

As I said, Africa is not the Sahel. Statistics show that if Africa’s 54 countries were taken as a whole, it would be the world’s eighth largest economy. This means that Africa generates wealth and could generate more if we managed to make our voices heard, because that is what this is all about: better, fairer trade through win-win collaboration strategies. That is when we will be able to make the most of our enormous potential.

The situation in the Sahel is obviously worrying because of the risk that it will spread. Everyone wants to keep that from happening, especially Senegal, which has a coastline. And everyone knows that access to the sea is one of the terrorists’ goals. God forbid they achieve it because this would have repercussions well beyond Africa.



We are aware that this is important. It has been said. I think Cheikh said it yesterday. It would make sense for strategic countries with a seafront like Senegal to be included in the G5 Sahel. So, there are also political decisions that do not necessarily make sense when you want to fight terrorism.

I have never attended an international conference, and I have been to more than a few, where people talked to me about the funding of terrorism. When I see all those beautiful SUVs speeding across the desert at 200 kilometers an hour, I wonder where the money comes from and which port they came in through. Not to mention tanks and everything else.

Funding is at the heart of the matter, but nobody wants to address the issue because obviously it is a bit complicated. But it is time to have a good map of terrorist movements because there is much to say. Some leaders receive medical care in certain capitals. We know it but it goes unsaid. This is a complex issue. It is time to get to the bottom of it if we really want to tackle the problem.

With regard to Covid, Africa has suffered less. This takes us back to stereotypes. The United Nations Secretary General said that millions of Africans would die of Covid. The Director General of the WHO repeated his assertion. This was a typical stereotype based on nothing at all except that perhaps we would be incapable of containing the pandemic, etc. The exact opposite happened. And not by chance but because we have built up experience in fighting endemic diseases.

Senegal was the first country to close its border to France. We quickly realized that it had to be done. Then other steps were taken. But that was something we could do. For nearly eight months, we had to rely on our own doctors and pharmaceutical supplies and make our own masks.

I think we must develop this resilience. Perhaps it cannot be done exponentially. I mentioned life expectancy. I could also talk about the maternal mortality rate, which has also fallen, and infant mortality, which has been declining for two decades. Contrary to what many people say, fertility is decreasing: to 4.5 from 8, as some people say, with no scientific basis.

The middle class is growing at a brisk pace. The ADB now puts the figure at 226 million. Others say 326 million or 330 million. I told a group of young Americans that there are more mobile phones in Africa than in the United States and Canada combined. They could hardly believe it because this is not the image they have of Africa. Telephone banking is much more widespread in Africa than in some other parts of the world.

These are things that must be explained and built upon. I am not just talking about our mineral wealth, which can be a source of problems. Senegal, for example, is a country that will produce gas. I am taking advantage of this opportunity to address the issue of climate and the discussion that took place, including at Sharm el-Sheikh. Obviously, we are not going to stop profiting from gas. This will be the next bone of contention.

Of course, at a time when people need electricity, industrialization, etc. African leaders cannot tell them, "Listen, we are going to protect the climate. We are not going to use the gas that has just been discovered." This will be a very thorny issue, especially since Africa is the continent



that has contributed the least and suffers the most from climate change and needs funding. It is important for our partners to understand this.

There is also migration, which has been addressed in a rather schizophrenic way, as you said, Ms. Guigou. I agree. It is a hot-button issue that often defies common sense because Europe has an enormous labor shortage, especially post-Covid. Many services are running at a slow pace because there are not enough workers to fill jobs.

I think migration is another issue that warrants discussion. The France-Africa relationship would interest everyone here. I read an article in Jeune Afrique about a survey of people's opinions of different countries. The United States garnered 83% of favorable opinions. They do not have many operations. The United Kingdom scored 82%, which is interesting because it was an African colonial power. The figure is 79% for China and 68% for Russia, contrary to what is conveyed. It is 70% for Saudi Arabia and 57% for France. Perhaps that is something that must be understood.

Negative opinions of France seem to be on the rise. The explanations may lie in several factors, such as the ineffectiveness of cooperation. Young people, and Africans in general, think that there is not much to be gained from cooperation, since poverty persists. The issue of immigration is inadequately addressed. The major French corporations operating in Africa certainly do not contribute added value in terms of development.

All of these issues must be taken into account if we want to get back on the right track. It is a reality. It is a reality with young people drawn to radical movements. This must be said. I think that a dialogue of this kind cannot ignore these issues.

The feeling that Africa is France's backyard no longer exists in the minds of leaders, who are younger and more open to the world, and even less in those of younger and better educated people. This really leads to a redefinition of a dialogue.

I think President Macron understood this when he invited young people to a dialogue. But it was quite particular because young people belong to different countries, governments, etc. So, in my opinion, this was not necessarily the best approach to restart a relationship on new foundations that must be based on both sides winning. In my opinion, this is basically the claim that is being made and it should be studied calmly, but by getting to the bottom of things.

We have reached a point in time when many, if not most, governments increasingly factor in the opinions of their young people and population. They do not have a choice. Otherwise, you get kicked out. There is no other choice. So, between traditional friends and your youth, the choice is obvious.

This dialogue is important, perhaps by starting with clearing the air. That must be said. Occasions like this one allow us to air grievances about things that go unsaid, like colonialism and slavery.

We saw the outpouring of pent-up anger when George Floyd died. That is because it had been simmering for a very long time. So, it is important to do that. Some countries have renamed places. I recently saw – I think it was in an African neighborhood in Berlin – that a square named after a man who had done despicable things in one of the colonized countries was renamed.



That is symbolic, but it is necessary to go beyond symbolism and reframe the relationship between Africa and Europe, Africa and France, which is a win-win relationship. It is fundamental. If we want to do that, it could be the postulate and open us up to different areas to see how to move forward, it being understood that Africa remains an open continent, but a continent that increasingly focuses on its own interests. That much is clear. Africans have understood that no knight in shining armor will come from across the seas to develop them.

Africa will and must invest in its women, its youth and its institutions. This is my last word: strong institutions, constitutions that presidents must respect. No more third terms. They must be abolished everywhere, starting with my country, Senegal, where I hope Macky Sall will not seek another term. Thank you.

Robert Dossou

Thank you, Madam Minister, member of Parliament and Prime Minister Aminata Touré.