

Address by Ambassador Tekeda Alemu on 'Africa and the reform of the multilateral system'

One of the signature events on the sidelines of the 36th AU Summit jointly held by the Republic of Namibia and Amman Africa is on 'Africa and the reform of the multilateral system'. As part of our coverage of some of the key events around the summit, we present in our 'Ideas Indaba' the address by Ambassador Tekeda Alemu on the theme of this high-level side-event and its importance. Among others, he argues that 'it would not make sense to seek those (permanent) two seats for Africa unless member states of the AU have the capacity for a common position on critical international and regional peace and security issues.'

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Dr Tekeda Alemu

Former State Minister of Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the UN Security Council during the joint high-level side-event to the 36th AU Summit on 'Africa and reform of the multilateral system'

Thanks Prof Murithi, our moderator. I recognize my old friend Basso Sanqu, who in New York was very dynamic and set the tone in the UN Security Council.

I would like to first of all to thank Ambassador Jeobeam Shaanika, who delivered, the very rich and excellent keynote address of the **Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of Namibia**. I have

taken to heart the contents of the address.

There is little doubt in my mind that at no time in the past has the theme of this meeting – Africa, the new agenda for peace and the reform of the multilateral system – been as urgent as it is today. I believe the statement delivered by Shaanika has risen to the occasion and set the tone for the presentation that will follow.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank our AU colleague Ambassador Fred Ngoga for the opening remark made on behalf of the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye. It was very rich and I must say very educative for me.

I must also express appreciation to Dr Solomon for organizing this event with the Republic of Namibia and for the great effort he has been making to highlight how much the reform of the multilateral system has become so urgent as to become almost an existential imperative for Africa. I have a very deep appreciation for Amani Africa of which he is the founding director.

I must also express with great deal of gratitude and appreciation the dignified and principled manner with which Namibia has been carrying out its pan-Africanist obligation.

Excellency, Dear Moderator,

As I already said, the reform of the multilateral system which is also being prioritized by the UN Secretary-General, as underlined in his Our Common Agenda, is an objective which has increasingly become an urgent matter which can no longer be postponed.

It should be admitted that multilateral governance has placed Africa, more or less, outside of its purview. Nowhere is this more vivid than with respect to international cooperation. One recalls how much the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals were

unanimously adopted with great fanfare in 2015. Now, we are at mid-point of the implementation of that agenda which has failed to deliver on the promises made in a number of areas extremely meaningful for Africa and others in the same situation.

One cannot, of course, afford to despair. It is in that light one ought to look at the proposals contained in the UN Secretary General's Our Common Agenda, all the more since it is said that the eleven policy briefs would offer concrete ideas to advance the work.

Now, we are told that the first brief will 'address the New Agenda for Peace and Security.' And it is said, this 'for a world in transition and a new era of geopolitical competition.' Equally important is what the brief will be adopting as an approach which will be holistic in the sense of focusing on the peace continuum, from prevention, conflict resolution and peacekeeping to peacebuilding and sustainable long-term development.

It is indeed encouraging, though it is not entirely a novel idea, to put the issue of sustainable long-term development within the peace and security continuum. In the same vein, two other policy briefs seem to encourage hope that perhaps at the level of the UN, there is a more robust realization that multilateralism is losing credibility. The two policy briefs on finance, one focusing on metrics that go beyond GDP, and the second proposal for reform of the global financial architecture seem to show perhaps a new determination to try to repair the damage caused by the failure sustained by the 2030 SDGs.

Coming to the issue of Africa's longstanding demand for the reform of the UN system with respect to which the reform of the Security Council is the most critical, it has been apparent that not even a small progress has been made since the Ezulweni consensus was formulated by Africa in 2005.

It seems to me there is a great need for Africa to address the challenge in two ways. One is within our domain and it has to do with our own effort to achieve real and tangible unity in pursuing the acceptance by others of the two seats as permanent members and the 5 non-permanent seats by Africa. There is no doubt that there is a feeling among member states, particularly among the permanent members, that, when the chips are down, they could prevail upon some African members to give in.

It is therefore critical that everything possible is done to ensure that Africa stands together on all critical international issues. Of course, it would not make sense to seek those two seats for Africa unless member states of the AU have the capacity for a common position on critical international and regional peace and security issues. That would be the litmus test for our capacity to occupy those seats.

The second is more problematic and requires a lot of diplomatic foot work on the part of both member states and the Commission. It must be clear, and this is not a new discovery, that all countries are driven by their respective national interests, and this is even more true in the case of the permanent members.

Though it may not always be the case, it is nonetheless very wise to be skeptical about the promises of support for the African position. It is critical to analyze the implication of the expansion of the membership of the UN Security Council for each (permanent) member of the body.

From that point of view, it is possible that those who wish for a stalemate might be supportive of the African position from conviction that doing so would discourage movement forward in the intergovernmental negotiation. This would mean that there is a lot of work to be done by member states of the AU as well as by the (AU) Commission with a view for an

objective assessment of the position on the matter of the permanent members of the Council.

I have no doubt that the body that (Namibia and Amani Africa) has been trying to create might contribute greatly to this exercise.

I wish us all a most productive conversation.

I thank you.

The content of this article does not represent the views of Amani Africa and reflect only the personal views of the authors who contribute to 'Ideas Indaba'