

# Remark for giving thanks on the 5th anniversary of Amani Africa's launch of its flagship project

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**Dr Solomon Ayele Dersso, Founding Director**

It was on 9 April 2018 that Amani Africa launched its flagship work, *Insights on the Peace and Security Council*. Last Sunday marked five years since that landmark launching of this work, that has become in the years since the launch the leading source of information and analysis on the African Union Peace and Security Council and its work. What we have accomplished during the five years is nothing short of transformative given how Amani Africa's work completely changed the landscape of knowledge and access to information on the work of African Union's most powerful body on governance and peace and security. For this, not only that each and everyone of you here and many others working on peace and security issues on Africa are major contributors to and witness of this development.

While we in Amani Africa are proud of this achievement accomplished with limited capacity and resources, we believe that this is an important development for bolstering what I call the continental policy ecosystem that has been taking shape over the years. A couple of years ago Tatiana Carayannis, a friend, and Thomas G Weiss wrote an insightful book titled *The 'Third' United Nations: How Knowledge Ecology helps the UN Think* which is instructive to illustrate this point.

This is a book about the highly critical, if underappreciated, contribution of non-state actors including think tanks, scholars, NGOs, opinion makers, the media and development, human rights and peace and security experts to the UN's policy making and normative development. As I think of our continental organisation the African Union and the work of Amani Africa in the past half a decade, it is clear that Amani Africa forms part of and contributes to the growing 'knowledge ecology' that has been forming around the AU, thereby constituting the continental policy ecosystem that I made reference to above.

If there is one development that clearly embodies and illuminates the growth and importance of this knowledge ecology, it is Amani Africa, which in a short period of time carved out a critical and hugely useful space for policy thinking and policy relevant knowledge production on the African Union and its policy making and policy action. We at Amani Africa are grateful to the fact that you all have been a witness to and stakeholders of this remarkable fiat.

The importance of this 'knowledge ecology', of which Amani Africa forms a part, is illustrated by Article 20 of the PSC Protocol and the 2009 AU's Sirt summit declaration. Most recently, the increasing significance this 'knowledge ecology' continues to attract is concretely expressed by the steps taken by the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs Peace and Security (PAPS), Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, on the establishment of the Network of Think Tanks for Peace, for which Amani Africa played a key part. This is further demonstrated by the institutionalisation of the close working relationship and periodic consultation and exchanges between AU facing CSOs and PAPS with the convening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> consultation at the AU Commission only the other week.

Today's celebration of the 5<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of launch of Amani Africa's flagship project is thus a celebration of these

key developments towards the recognition and institutionalisation of this knowledge ecology around the AU, for which we wish to extend our appreciation to Ambassador Bankole Adeoye as we give recognition to AU PAPS as part of today's celebration not only for the collaboration with Amani Africa but also for his leadership that led to these two key milestones.

Excellencies Ambassadors, distinguished friends and members of the community that raised Amani Africa

Amani Africa is a result of a very simple idea – the idea that the pursuit of the progressive objectives, policies and norms of the African Union cannot be fully realized without the injection into it and being anchored on ideas and evidence based knowledge. These are the ideas and knowledge that present practical solutions and policy options to the issues that policy makers face and are seized with as they engage in policy action in pursuit of these AU objectives, policies and norms for achieving a more peaceful, integrated and prosperous continent. It is the production of such ideas and knowledge and importantly the linking of such ideas and knowledge with policy making and policy action by the AU and AU policy stakeholders that Amani Africa is dedicated to and has been robustly advancing for the past five years.

Like any venture, the founding of Amani Africa and the launching of our flagship project have not been easy. It involved a great deal of sweat and intellectual tenacity. As the entire Amani Africa team and many of you could attest, it has been a challenging exercise in perseverance, discipline, and a belief not only in one's conviction but also importantly in the Pan-African philosophy, Ubuntu – I am because you are. All that Amani Africa has become and achieved, it is because of you – the you who are here today in this hall and the many you who are not in person with us today.

So today is not really about patting ourselves on the

shoulder, it is rather about celebrating each of you who make up the community that raised Amani Africa for there can be no Amani Africa without the role you all played as part of this community. That is why my address is framed as remark for giving thanks rather than one that outlines the many accomplishments of Amani Africa in marking this milestone.

So as I extend the gratitude of the Amani Africa team, I ask for your forgiveness for not being able to name each and everyone of you and also for us not being able to give recognition to you all today in appreciation of your contribution for what Amani Africa has become and your continuing role to what Amani Africa has as yet to become in the service of Africa's peace and the dignity of its peoples. Yet, it would also be remiss of me if I don't on this occasion, name by way of example some of the individuals and people who played key role to the birth and growth of Amani Africa in various ways, particularly when Amani Africa was at its infancy.

I wish to start with my wife and daughter. My daughter, Bethel Solomon Ayele, who just turned 18, has from very young age challenged me on the value of my work for Africa. While she now has come to tell me how proud she is for the success Amani Africa accomplished, she remains sceptical that my work and the efforts of many of in this field is changing the course of peace and security events on our continent for the better – highlighting the daunting task we have on our hands for ensuring that we don't pass to the new generation an Africa that continues to be shackled with conflicts & insecurity.

My beautiful wife and long-time friend Dr Emezat Hailu Mengesha was the first to champion the idea of the establishment of Amani Africa. Not only that she stood by me as I start working on the founding of Amani Africa but also contributed materially to it.

Amani Africa has a long genesis and many friends and

colleagues have contributed to this genesis to whom I am very grateful. Of particular note in this respect are Dr George Mukundi, a brother, a friend and former colleague here at the AU Commission, Mr Brian Kagoro an erudite pan-Africanist who mentored and continues to inspire myself and many like me, Donald Deya of Pan-African Lawyers Union and Professor Khabele Matlosa , former Director of Political Affairs Department at the AU Commission, all of whom over a dinner table in my house years before Amani Africa was born planted the idea of the establishment of a pan-African institutions in Addis Ababa servicing policy making of the AU for promoting implementation of its progressive objectives and norms.

Once the idea of establishing Amani Africa became concrete, many friends, colleagues and supporters of the idea lent a helping hand in various ways and these include my great friend Daniel Yilma, who previously served at the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ethiopian Mission in New York and now works at the UN Secretariat in New York, Dr Tedros Adhanom, Shimels Abdisa, Hallelujah Lule and now my great friend and previously a great contributor to the establishment of Amani Africa by providing seed funding, Andrea Semadeni, formerly Ambassador of Switzerland in Addis Ababa and currently Swiss Ambassador in Senegal, Dakar and Oliver Humbel, formerly in the Swiss Mission in Addis Ababa and now in the mission in NY. I am grateful for all their support at that founding stage of Amani Africa, when Amani was not more than an idea.

I also wish to thank all those who supported the launch of our flagship work – ***Insights on the PSC***, including Jean-Marc of Swiss Embassy with whom we signed the first funding contract that supported this flagship work. My thanks also goes to the many friends and supporters in the AU Commission and in member states who encouraged and provided support by being part of Amani Africa's journey through feedback and information sharing – Ambassador Catherine Mwangi of Kenya (who graced the launch of Insights on the PSC with her presence and was the

first to visit us at our office & have until her departure at the end of her tour of duty worked with us including on the development of PSC's COVID-19 working methods), Ambassador Ndumiso of South Africa, who like Ambassador Catherine was present as PSC member at the launch of Insights on the PSC and told me on that occasion that I was conservative in telling the range of contributions I have made in various capacities to make me well placed to initiate this work.

I also thank

Elghassim Wane, former Director of Peace and Security at the AU Commission and chief of staff of the AU Commission Chairperson and current Head of UN Mission in Mali, one of the best peace and security policy experts, a generous senior brother who has been a great champion of Amani Africa

Ambassador Basso Sangqu, former South African Ambassador in Addis Ababa and New York, who during his tenure as Chief Advisor to former AU Commission Chairperson, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, and ever since has stood by and supported Amani Africa

Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, who was among the first members of the PSC to welcome to Nigeria Embassy and engage Amani Africa before our outreach and substantive policy consultations with member states of the PSC became institutionalized and who since becoming Commissioner has become a major champion of our work and support Amani Africa's close working relationship with PAPS and former Djibouti Ambassador and long-time member of the PSC, Ambassador Idriss Farah who is a great friend and champion of Amani Africa.

Members of the PSC, past and present as a whole and those we recognize today and present here and those who are not with us including Ambassador Edward Makaya of South Africa, Ambassador Mafa Sejanamane of Lesotho, Ambassador Amma of Ghana and Ambassador Jainaba Jagne of The Gambia and Ambassador Innocent Shiyo of Tanzania!

My sister and great friend Neema Chusi, one of the most hardworking colleagues in AU, to whom I would like to shout out for being recently appointed as Head of the PSC Secretariat after acting on that position for past years, and who supported us through constant advise on where we should improve and how

My senior brother from Senegal Amadou Diongue, an example of professional discipline and some one with incredible infectious passion for pan-Africanism, who was the Acting Head of the PSC Secretariat

Dr Ardmore Kambudzi, former head of the PSC Secretariat and Director of the Department of Peace and Security

My sister and great colleague Fiona Lortan, form3r acting head of Conflict Management Directorate at PAPS and Deputy SRCC of AMISOM/ATMIS

My other senior brother Dr Sajoh Bah, the current director of Conflict Management

Ambassador Fred Ngoga, Former acting head of Early Warning and Conflict Prevention Division, who have always been there at various key moments in the work of Amani Africa

Many other dear friends and colleagues with whom I worked for years including Simon Badza at the PSC Secretariat, Sivuyile Bam, Ambassador Salah Hamad and Ambassador Salvator Matata of COMESA.

Last and very important is the great Amani Africa team, past and present, who lift more weight than required by call of duty on a daily basis and our senior associates who support us variously in our work – this is also a moment for celebrating you and your work.

I also wish to thank those friends and colleagues from various embassies and governments who bet on the idea of Amani Africa

by providing funding and by collaborating with us on specific projects, including

Switzerland, our founding partner and most consistent source of funding support for our works thank you like Germany (another founding partners) for the trust you put in Amani Africa when it was just an idea in a funding proposal & I believe that we have delivered on your trust and made you proud partner.

I also wish to thank the UK for joining founding partners by providing funding for a couple of years, enabling our further consolidation

Australia, USIP and Crisis Group for collaborating with us on specific projects.

Our gratitude goes to our current funding partners who, apart from our longstanding partner Switzerland, include Ireland, Norway, OSF and until early this year Finland.

We are also thankful for the institutional partnership we have with the UN Office to the AU (including former SRSG and Head of UNOAU Hannah Tetteh and current SRSG and Head of UNOAU Parfait Onanga) the ICRC (including its head and great friend Bruce Mokaya) with who we collaborated on specific activities

I also wish to thank Michelle Ndaye, former Head of Tana Forum Secretariat at IPSS and SRCC and Head of AU Office in DRC, for welcoming Amani Africa to the community of Think tankers and CSOs

Prof Tim Murithi, my former boss and Head of Program at the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends of Amani Africa

We don't have the time to continue to list the contribution that each of you here and many others made and continue to



make to Amani Africa's journey in shaping, informing & catalysing policy action in pursuit of AU objectives.

We at Amani Africa cannot thank you enough!

I am because you are. Amani Africa is because you are.

Thank you for being part of the community that raised Amani Africa as the best expression of the saying in our African tradition that it takes a village to raise a child. Today, this anniversary is a celebration of you members of this community for each of you have contributed in various ways for what Amani Africa has become and represents and the contribution of this for expanding the ecology of knowledge supporting AU policy making and action in the service of Africa's peace and the dignity of its peoples!

Amesegnalehu, Asante Sana, Shkuren, Kealeboga, Merci, Obrigado and thank you!

Happy anniversary to us all!