



AFRICAN YOUTH FOUNDATION

Afrikanische Jugendhilfe e. V.

Fondation de la Jeunesse Africaine

Keynote Address

By

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**African Business and Entrepreneurship Network (ABEN)
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Mr. Moderator,
The Mayor of Bonn,
Excellencies,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to meet with African Professionals, Investors, Entrepreneurs, students and friends of Africa to network on investment issues.

Six years ago, *The Economist* put on its cover an image of chaos and violence in Sierra Leone alongside the caption: **“Africa: the Hopeless Continent.”** In 2005, *National Geographic* devoted a full issue to Africa, making the decision that no single image on the cover could capture the continent today. In place of the usual photograph, the magazine leveled an intellectual challenge: **“Africa—Whatever You Thought, Think Again.”**

For any African, or friend of Africa, such comments urges those who appreciate the positive side of Africa, to continue their good work and it is in this light that the African Youth Foundation, together with its partners, decided to network for the positive side of Africa.

Being organized for the first time by the African Youth Foundation and partners, the African Business and Entrepreneurship Network (ABEN) is a business network which will create a platform to enable diasporas identify and invest funds especially in Africa, to create a ***Culture of Ownership*** by buying into companies that are being privatized and setting-up new businesses which will replace a culture of dependency on foreign aid.

During what came to be called **“The Year of Africa,”** African leaders reaffirmed their commitment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by improving governance, accelerating and sustaining growth and job creation, delivering human services, and fighting poverty. They challenged the international community to support Africa’s progress, but this successful challenge and progress, couldn’t have come about without the African Diasporas, those who live outside the continent and contribute their widow’s mite to the development of their immediate families and country in general.

It is quite unfortunate that in the global basket, we have no less than most of the African governments themselves, who openly disdain their Diasporas, for reasons best known to them. They would rather consult and seek assistance from anywhere else, than their own diasporas. But the past 50 years have tested our wills and brought us in contact with an avaricious and aggressive way of life that has sought to undermine the very basis of our humanity. A life that tells us that, our governments cannot thread the path alone without their Diasporas. We shouldn’t forget that the resilience on the continent and in the Diaspora, is what has kept most strong. Like the palm branch that sways in the storm but does not break, the Diasporas are those that have taken the blows, the awful, brutal blows of neo-colonialism and enslavement and have survived. Sure, it is a fact that some of us have been broken down, shocked by the attacks, injured in the mind, and abridged in our growth by the assaults on us, but for the most part, it has been noble, because we still have the continent at heart.

That we all (both westerners and Africans) have sat back and looked on vulnerably, for Africa’s precious resources, both human and financial to be distributed as unessential resources and as gratis, to permit the image of the continent, to be painted as the most horrible phantasm that could ever exist, is something for which we all have to bow our heads down in shame.

The African Diaspora, constitute Africa’s greatest offshore asset and the most indispensable catalyst in the accelerated development of African home countries because Diasporas have a permanent vested interest in the welfare of their countries. The ever-growing African Diaspora is poised for this unprecedented role by virtue of remittances which are already a significant and growing portion of

the GNP of African countries. The sheer magnitude of remittances to Africa is staggering yet African Diasporas have nothing visible and collectively owned to show for it. This phenomenon is apparent in virtually all African countries – a lot of money pouring in from the Diaspora but nothing monumental to show for it. The aggregate volume of remittances to Africa now exceeds all forms of foreign aid combined. And there is more where that comes from. Thus, Africans both at home and abroad are only limited by their creativity in terms of how best to exploit this external “gold-mine” of private funds for the common good.

Ladies and gentlemen, our lovely African Continent is one blessed one. Just check how they come:
The Chinese are in Africa to supply fried rice and technology for ***free***;
The Italians and Germans are there to construct roads;
The Indians are there to supply scrap;
The Lebanese are there to operate fast food joints; and
The Americans are there to protect the continent with their GI's;

The only one missing are we the African Diasporas, who are taking care of the western forts. Such is the paradox of modern times. A situation where if we choose the health sector for example, we are informed about the lack of health education and personnel in most African countries but at the same time, the majority of medical personnel in the western world are Africans, and Africans who were educated in African countries. How could this be possible? This is the result of erroneous systems which have been practiced for the past 50 years whose consequences are now being felt.

We cannot turn the clock back, but we can contribute our share to rectify the error which is becoming a special type of cancer in our system. It is our hope that by the end of this network, we will be better able to identify and address certain areas which could be sustained as a prospective African initiative. Such an initiative could be the Diaspora Investment Fund (DIF) and this could be the beginning of such a fund.

Hypothetically, let's assume there are 4 million nationals of all African countries resident abroad who are interested in the welfare of their countries, but can't be there on the ground to contribute their support. These people may be willing to contribute at least 100 Euros annually to solve problems in Ghana. This implies 400.000.000 (400 million Euros) a year. Stakeholders of this fund could convert the initiative into a business or any positive initiative that will contribute to the control and development of Africa. This fund, should be able to use the resources of the state to manage the needs of the people. DIF could be one such example of creativity that Africans in the Diaspora can embrace wholeheartedly.

Mr. Moderator, Honourable mayor of Bonn, ladies and gentlemen, Africa is a continent on the move, and the AYP and its partners are working hard to support both African and European countries as they strive to move even faster.

We are living in an era when the human race is at its most sophisticated level! It is not impossible for us to make the world a better place for every one. We only need to employ our collective energy and creativity and invoke the determination and will to do so! I urge you all to use this platform to contribute your best to the economic and development success of a continent that has been bruised since its existence, then posterity will judge us fairly.

I am hesitant to contemplate the alternative!

Mr. Moderator, Ladies and gentlemen, like the usual caveat, I cannot end my speech without first acknowledging the support through which this Networking event has become a reality. The AYP has benefited from contributions of the European Union Youth in Action Programme, the Adinkra Verlag in Austria, the Stadtwerke Bonn, Telecass GmbH, Leo.xls Ltd. and AVOWEB technologies.

May I also take this opportunity to welcome our special guests and co-organisers; His Excellency **Mr. Peter Finger**, the Mayor of Bonn, His Excellency **Gen. Rtd Chinkule**, Ambassador of the Republic of Zambia to Germany, as well as the representatives of our collaborating partners, Samtec GmbH, African Heritage, The African Courier, FlyAfrica travel services, and the JAAG Consultancy.

What's more, I also wish to say a special word of welcome to the participants from other countries who travelled long journeys, to join us in this event. As has always been my request, I urge you to be very critical in reviewing the AYF concept and forthright which we intend to work on. Kindly share with us your own valuable insights in tackling similar issues both in the western countries and at home. I hope that you will feel very much at home in the warm heart of Bonn!

Last but most significantly, I am very pleased to welcome our panellists. The success of this event depends on them. Thank you for listening to me and a warm welcome to you all.

Paulyn Jansen, PhD
African Youth Foundation
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