

Africa must unite

By Mwalimu Julius K Nyerere

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FORTY YEARS AGO the people of Ghana celebrated the raising of the flag of their independence for the first time. Throughout Africa people celebrated - in solidarity with Ghana but also for themselves. For the liberation of Africa was a single struggle with many fronts.

Ghana's independence from colonial rule in 1957 was recognised for what it was: the beginning of the end of colonialism for the whole of Africa. For centuries we had been oppressed and humiliated as Africans. We were hunted and enslaved as Africans, and we were colonized as Africans.

The humiliation of Africans became the glorification of the others. So we felt our African-ness. We knew that we were one people, and that we had one destiny regardless of the artificial boundaries which colonialists had invented. Since we were humiliated as Africans we had to be liberated as Africans.

So forty years ago we recognised your independence as the first triumph in Africa's struggle for freedom and dignity. It was the first success of our demand to be accorded the international respect which is accorded free peoples.

Ghana was the beginning, our first liberated zone. Thirty-seven years later - in 1994 - we celebrated our final triumph when apartheid was crushed and Nelson Mandela was installed as the President of South Africa. Africa's long struggle for freedom was over.

But Ghana was more than just the beginning. Ghana inspired and deliberately spearheaded the independence struggle of the rest of Africa.

I was a student in Edinburgh University when Kwame Nkrumah was released from prison to be Leader of Government Business in his first elected government. The deportment of the Gold Coast students changed. The way they carried

themselves up - the way they talked to us and others, the way they looked at the world at large, changed overnight. They even looked different. They were not arrogant, they were not overbearing, they were not aloof, but they were proud, already they felt free and they exuded that quiet pride of self-confidence of freedom without which humanity is incomplete.

And so five years later when the Gold Coast became independent, Kwame Nkrumah invited us, the leaders of the various liberation movements in

Africa, to come and celebrate with you. I was among the many invitees. Then Nkrumah made the famous declaration, that Ghana's independence was meaningless unless the whole of Africa was liberated from colonial rule.

Kwame Nkrumah went into action almost immediately.

In the following year he called the Liberation Movements to Ghana to discuss the common strategy for the liberation of the continent from colonialism. In preparation for the African Peoples Conference, those of us in East and Central Africa met in Mwanza in Tanganyika, to discuss our possible contribution to the forthcoming conference. That conference lit the liberation torch throughout colonial Africa.

Kwame Nkrumah was your leader, but he was our leader too: for he was an African leader. People are not gods. Even the best have their faults, and the faults of the great can be very big. So Kwame Nkrumah had his faults. But he was great in a purely positive sense. He was a visionary. He thought big, but he thought big for Ghana and its people and for Africa and its people. He had a great dream for Africa and its peoples. He had the well-being of our peoples at heart. He was no looter. He

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did not have a Swiss bank account. He died poor. Shakespeare wrote that the evil that men do lives after them, but good is oft interred with their bones.

Another five years later, in May 1963, thirty-two independent African States met in Addis Ababa, founded the Organisation of African Unity, and established the liberation Committee of the new organisation, charging it with the duty of co-ordinating the liberation struggle in those parts of Africa still under colonial rule.

The following year, 1964, the OAU met in Cairo. That Cairo summit is remembered mainly for the declaration of the Heads of States of independent Africa to respect the borders inherited from colonialism. The principle of non-interference in internal affairs of member states of the OAU had been enshrined in the Charter itself, respect for the borders inherited from colonialism comes from the Cairo Declaration of 1964.

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In 1965, the OAU met in Accra. That summit is not well remembered as the founding summit in 1963, or the Cairo summit of 1964. The fact that Kwame Nkrumah did not last long as Head of State of Ghana after that summit may have contributed to the comparative obscurity of that important summit.

But I want to suggest that the reason why we do not talk much about that summit is probably psychological: it was a failure. That failure still haunts us today.

The founding fathers of the OAU had set themselves two major objectives: the total liberation of our continent from colonialism and settler minorities, and the unity of Africa.

The first objective was expressed through immediate establishment of the Liberation Com-

mittee by the founding Summit. The second objective was expressed in the name of the Organisation - it is the Organisation of African Unity.

Critics could say that the Charter of itself, with its great emphasis on the sovereign independence of each member state, combined with the Cairo Declaration on the sanctity of the inherited borders, makes it look like the 'Organisation of African Disunity'. But that would be carrying criticism too far and ignoring the objective reasons which led to the principles of non-interference in the Cairo Declaration.

What the founding fathers - certainly a hard core of them - had in mind was genuine desire to move Africa towards greater unity. We loathed balkanization of the continent into small unviable states, most of which had borders which did not make ethnic or geographical sense. The Cairo Declaration was prompted by a profound realisation of the absurdity of those borders. It was quite clear that some adventurers would try to change those borders by force of arms. Indeed, it was already happening. Ethiopia and Somalia were at war over inherited borders.

Kwame Nkrumah was opposed to balkanization as much as he was opposed to colonialism in Africa. To him and to a number of us, the two - Balkanization and Colonization - were twins. Genuine liberation of Africa had to attack both twins. A struggle against colonialism must go hand in hand with a struggle against the balkanization of Africa.

Kwame Nkrumah was the great crusader for African unity. He wanted the Accra summit of 1965 to establish a Union Government for the whole of independent Africa. But we failed. The one minor reason is that Kwame, like all great believers, underestimated the degree of suspicion and animosity which his crusading passion had created among a substantial number of his fellow Heads of States. The major reason was linked to the first: already too many of us had a vested interest in keeping Africa divided.

Prior to independence of Tanganyika, I had been advocating that East African countries should federate and then achieve independence as a single political unit. I had said publicly that I was willing to delay Tanganyika's independence in order to enable all three mainland countries to achieve their independence together as a single federated state. I made the suggestion because of my fear, proved correct by later events, that it would be very difficult to unite our countries if we let them achieve independence separately.

Once you multiply national anthems, national flags and national passports, seats at the United Nations, and individual entitled to 21 guns salute, not to speak of a host of ministers, Prime Ministers, and envoys, you would have a whole army of powerful people with invested interests in keeping Africa balkanized. That was what Nkrumah encountered in 1965.

After the failure to establish the Union Government at the Accra Summit of 1965, I heard one Head of State express with relief that he was happy to be returning home to his country still Head of State. To this day I cannot tell whether he was serious or joking. But he may well have been serious, because Kwame Nkrumah was very serious and the fear of a number of us to lose our precious status was quite palpable.

But I never believed that the 1965 Accra summit would have established a Union Government for Africa. When I say that we failed, that is not what I mean, for that clearly was an unrealistic objective for a single summit. What I mean is that we did not even discuss a mechanism for pursuing the objective of a politically united Africa. We had a Liberation Committee already. We should have at least have a Unity Committee or undertaken to establish one. We did not. And after Kwame Nkrumah was removed from the African political scene nobody took up the challenge again.

So my remaining remarks have a confession and a plea. The confession is that we of the first generation leaders of independent Africa have not pursued the objective of African Unity with vigour, commitment and sincerity that it deserves. Yet that does not mean that unity is now irrelevant.

Does the experience of the last three or four decades of Africa's independence dispel the need for African Unity? With our success in the liberation struggle, Africa today has 53 independent states, 21 more than those which met in Addis Ababa in May 1963. If numbers were horses, Africa today would be riding high! Africa would be the strongest continent in the world, for it occupies more seats in the UN General Assembly than any other continent. Yet the reality is that ours is the poorest and weakest continent in the world. And our weakness is pathetic.

Unity will not end our weakness, but until we unite, we cannot even begin to end that weakness.

So this is my plea to the new generation of African leaders and African peoples: *work for*

unity with firm conviction that without unity there is no future for Africa. That is, of course, assuming that we still want to have a place under the sun.

I reject the glorification of the nation-state which we have inherited from colonialism, and the artificial nations we are trying to forge from that inheritance. We are all Africans trying very hard to be Ghanaians or Tanzanians. Fortunately for Africa we have not been completely succeeded.

The outside world hardly recognises our Ghanaian-ness or Tanzanian-ness. What the outside world recognises about us is our African-ness.

Hitler was a German. Mussolini was an Italian. Franco was a Spaniard. Salazaar was Portuguese. Stalin was a Russian or a Georgian. Nobody expected Churchill to be ashamed of Hitler. He was probably ashamed of Chamberlain. Nobody expected Charles de Gaulle to be

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ashamed of Hitler, he was probably ashamed of the complicity of Vichy. It is Germans, and Italians and Spaniards and Portuguese who feel uneasy about those dictators in their respective countries.

Not so in Africa. Idi Amin was in Uganda, but of Africa. Jean Bokassa was in Central Africa, but of Africans. Some of the dictators are still active in their respective countries, but they are all of Africa. They are all Africans, and all perceived by the outside world as Africans.

When I travel outside Africa the description of me as former President of Tanzania is a fleeting affair. It does not stick. Apart from the ignorant who sometimes asked me whether Tanzania was Johannesburg, even to those who knew better, what stuck in the minds of my hosts was the fact of my African-ness. So I had to answer questions about the atrocities of the Amins and the Bokassas of Africa.

Mrs Ghandi did not have to answer questions about the atrocities of the Marcosses of

***The second phase of the
liberation of Africa is going to
be much harder than the first.***

But it can be done.

It must be done.

***Empower Africa through unity,
and Africa shall be free,
strong and prosperous.***

Asia. Nor does Fidel Castro have to answer questions about the atrocities of the Somozas of Latin America. But when I travel or meet foreigners, I have to answer questions about Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire, as in the past I used to answer questions about Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia or South Africa

And the way I was perceived is the way most of my fellow Heads of State were perceived. And that is the way you are all being perceived. So accepting the fact that we are Africans gives you a much more worthwhile challenge than the current desperate attempts to fossilize Africa into the wounds inflicted upon it by the vultures of imperialism.

Do not be proud of your shame. Reject the return to the tribe, there is richness of culture out there which we must do everything we can to preserve and share. But it is utter madness to think that if these artificial, unviable states which we are trying to create are broken up into tribal components and we turn those into nation states we might save ourselves.

That kind of political and social atavism spell catastrophe for Africa. It would be the end of any kind of genuine development for Africa. It would fossilize Africa into a worse state than the

one in which we are. The future of Africa, the modernization of Africa that has a place in the 21st century is linked up with its decolonization and detribalization. Tribal atavism would be giving up any hope for Africa. And of all the sins that Africa can commit, the sin of despair would be the most unforgivable.

Reject the nonsense of dividing African peoples into Anglophones, Francophones and Lusophones. This attempt to divide our peoples according to the language of their former colonial masters must be rejected with the firmness and utter contempt that it richly deserves. The natural owners of those wonderful languages are busy building a united Europe. But Europe is strong, even without unity. It has less need of unity and the strength that comes from unity than Africa.

A new generation of self-respecting Africans should spit in the face of anybody who suggests that our continent should remain divided and fossilized in the shame of colonialism in order to satisfy the national pride of our former colonial masters.

Africa must unite! This was the title of one Kwame Nkrumah's books. That call is more urgent today than ever before. Together, we the peoples of Africa will be incomparably stronger internationally than we are now with our multiplicity of unviable states. The needs of our separate countries can be, and are being, ignored by the rich and powerful. The result is that Africa is marginalised when international decisions affecting our vital interests are made.

Unity will not make us rich, but it can make it difficult for Africa and the African peoples to be disregarded and humiliated. And it will therefore increase the effectiveness of the decisions we make and try to implement for our development.

My generation led Africa to political freedom. The current generation of leaders and peoples of Africa must pick up the flickering torch of African freedom, refuel it with their enthusiasm and determination, and carry it forward.