

IRAN/AFRICA RELATIONS: Suggested Points Worth Reflecting On

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With a broad mind, I wish to elicit a few points based on my experience as an Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran for almost thirteen years. While the main purpose of my writing is to enlighten with suggestions, I also wish to note that in today's global political landscape, new initiatives are not always a bad idea. It all depends on the good they bring to society and how much we are prepared to defend such initiatives. When, eventually, such initiatives become ideologies, people will always reflect, through time, and acknowledge how much of a milestone achievement it has been.

1) As targeted victims of constantly demeaning and negative propaganda of western stereotypes, IRI and Africa suffer a common fate in the hands of the superstructures of western mass-media, which, regrettably, can only thrive in an atmosphere of sustained imperialistic ideology and thus keeps advocating for one.

a) On one hand, the western media is distortedly portraying Africa as a bleak continent that would ever remain backward in existence, riddled with corruption, fraught with recurrent wars, famine, poverty and insecurity etc. The underlining insinuation from all the western cameras' focus in magnifying only the

subjects that feed their pre-conceived negative delusion of Africa is that, Africa owes its existence to the west. But whenever a promising personality emerges with good qualities of leadership and with nationalistic, pan-African ideology that will not be entirely dependent on western technology/values,... such a promising personality becomes an immediate enemy of the west. The west would therefore stop at nothing (overtly/covertly) in its power to topple the wisdom and reign of such a personality. No need to remind you of Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Amilca Cabral, the living legends in Nelson Mandela and Robert Mugabe.

b) On the other hand, the Islamic Republic of Iran - a peace-loving nation as history would bear witness – is simply vying for a legitimate right to advance technologically, industrially and economically without entirely depending on western political hegemony, which is transparently being used as a tool for sustaining imperialism.

From a) and b) above, it is evidently clear that Africa and Iran would only be allowed to respectively program a developmental agenda that is approved by the West. But then, the west cannot understand the needs/problems of Africans more than the Africans themselves. Likewise, the west cannot understand Iranian needs/problems more than Iranians themselves. It is therefore up to Africa and Iran to take up their destiny into their own hands and forge a multilateral relation based on mutual respect, trust, confidence and religious brotherhood.

2) In our time and age of globalization, it is nationalistically prudent for every nation to exhaustively pursue its economic objectives by exploring markets and developing multi-faceted relations with other countries all over the world. Understandably, not all of these relations equally garner greater economic

prospects. Institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO have all extracted more payment from third world countries in the servicing of debts at the expense of vital investments in the physical economy. But, with a thorough study, in-depth understanding, patience and proper strategies put in place, Africa/Iran economic relations have the potential of reaching unimaginable proportions. There are essentially many areas in which Africa and Iran share mutual economic interest.

Below are some of these potential areas:

- a) Agriculture: Global food crises will definitely see African governments diverting their developmental agenda towards mechanized agriculture. Iran has the technology to supply while Africa has a great demand to improve on agriculture. The transfer of technology from Iran to Africa is also being encouraged especially in areas of agricultural, fisheries, animal husbandry, tinned food etc
- b) The provision of sustainable electricity in many African countries is now a priority. Iran can play a very prominent role in this regard. Iran has the know-how to build dams through which we could create hydro-electric power. Comparatively, the price of transformers, generators or the construction of power stations is a lot more competitive in the Iranian market. Africa can be the target market for Iranian technology in this respect.
- c) The Islamic Republic of Iran can also play a crucial role in transportation because of the quality of its products and the competitiveness of its prices. There is also a geographical advantage since the continent is only separated from Iran by the Arab peninsular.
- d) Africa is inherently a rich continent endowed with a wealth of natural resources and unarguably the continent with the highest

potential of untapped development opportunities. With the AU's vision fundamentally aimed at improving governance while drastically discouraging armed conflicts, there is a huge possibility for Iran a bargain for a huge proportion of the mining market in Africa.

Furthermore, the consequential economic impact all over the world that resulted from the weakening of the US Dollar has been abundantly demonstrated in the skyrocketing of food prices, increase in oil prices, increase in travel expenses, worldwide job losses, etc. The world has, over the years, continue to peg their economic existence in the US Dollar, so much so that, in the recent trial judgment day of "world currencies", even the US Dollar couldn't save the world. The French Franc may even suffer the same fate regardless of the huge anointing deposits coming from Francophone countries in Africa. As a result of western-coined economic sanctions, Iran is now light years ahead in its readiness to shift its economic policies to another level, and would be very willing to share the adjustment strategies with our African partners whenever the need arises.

3) From the political front, there has been a tremendous amount of activities embarked upon by the Iranian government to cement bilateral relations with not only individual African countries, but with the African Union and other representational organizations in the continent. This positive engagement has been amply demonstrated by the huge amount of Embassies in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which diplomatically facilitate and sustain the bilateral relations between our respective countries. To buttress, this point, last year witnessed the reception in Iran of a big delegation from the African Union Headquarters in which the modalities of greater and improved ties between Africa and Iran were discussed. There has also been a notable increase in the number of high -level delegation visits from Iran to African countries and vice versa. The year 2007 witnessed visits by

President Omar Al-Bashir, President Robert Mugabe, President Abdalla Wade

There is no denying the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran has been, since its establishment, a target of prejudice and ostracism based on religion, technological independence, or race. And as the Islamic Republic laudably embarks on the broadening of its political, economic and cultural ties, it must be noted, quite extraordinarily, the remarkable reception and open-mindedness that African governments readily offered in reciprocation. The positive and enthusiastic response from Africa has contributed immensely in the strengthening of ties both in the cultural and religious sector between Africa and the Islamic Republic of Iran. In fact, Africa is presently one of the most dynamic areas of Islamic expansion in the world and is witnessing a historic era in the development and strengthening of Islamic institutions throughout the continent.

4) African governments would wish to see more vibrant and actively pursued policies in the educational and cultural sectors between Africa and Islamic Republic of Iran. More opportunities should be given to technology and other faculties when offering scholarship to African countries. Areas like medicine, engineering, architecture, industry, managements, manufacturing etc would go a long way to building the foundation of Africa's homegrown initiatives for independent technological development.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is historically renowned for its cultural heritage that features intricate miniature paintings, carpet weaving, pottery craftsmanship and clay artwork which could be traced back to the early centuries. With Iran's modern machinery and mechanized tools, we believe that cooperation in tourism could offer the much-needed link for the exchange of cultural

heritage and, by extension, enhance the skills and productive capacity of Africa's local craftsmen.

The Iranian climate remains an enigma, good enough to cater for a wide spectrum of tourists, depending on the weather of choice. Blessed with that holistic landscape of desert, mountains, valleys and lakes, different regions can offer different weather conditions ranging from temperate climate, tropical and even European climate. Therefore, identifying Iran as a possible center of cultural heritage would be stating the obvious.

There are other areas that could be enhanced particularly in the exchange of cultural values. We Africans would wish to see the establishment of African restaurants in Iran, just as much as we wish to see Iranian restaurants reciprocally established in Africa. A thriving tourism industry could also open the doors for Iran Air to fly across the African continent; local road and rail networks could be stretched to the hinterland to accommodate the anticipated growing number of tourists. It is therefore a matter of paramount importance that we continue to work relentlessly for the success of such meetings in the light of future progress and development in the field of tourism.

As we patiently wait for real, positive implementation of suggestions, one would wish to state here, quite proverbially, that procrastination is the thief of time. A miles walk begins with a step.