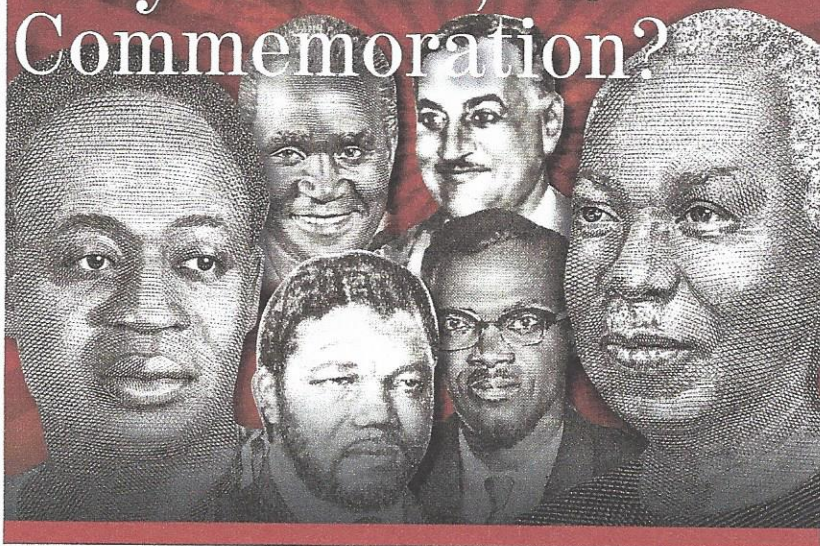


## 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 5TH PAN-AFRICAN CONGRESS

# Why Silence, No Commemoration?



Outstanding Pan African leaders. Clockwise, from left Kwame Nkrumah, Kenneth Kaunda, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Julius Nyerere, Patrice Lumumba and Nelson Mandela

The third phase of a revitalised Pan-African series of Congresses with structured and agreed time lines and well-thought out plans and outcomes is needed.

By Mammo Muchie

### Inspiration

*"It is better to die for an idea that will live, than to live for an idea that will die." Steve Biko*

*"The enemies of a people are those who keep them in ignorance." Thomas Sankara*

*"Let us all agree to die a little, or even completely, so that African unity may not be a vain word." Ahmed Ben Bella*

*"We regard it as the sacred duty of every African state to strive ceaselessly and energetically for the creation of a United States of Africa from Cape to Cairo and Madagascar to Morocco." Robert Sobukwe*

*"There is no time to waste. We must either unite now or perish." Julius Nyerere*

*"The People of Africa should be yearning for unity." Anonymous*

*"When the threads unite, they can tie a lion." an Ethiopian proverb*

*"Africa is the Spiritual Frontier of human kind." W.E.B. DuBois*

### Is the Pan African Congress forgotten?

I was truly puzzled when I met my strong pan African sisters and brothers and asked them: do you know it is now

70 years since the fifth Pan African Congress was held in Manchester, UK, in 1945? I myself only became aware of this when the editor of *The Thinker*, Essop Pahad, suggested that

I contribute a thought piece on this topic. As my friends all said: Really? I too was in the same predicament. This is not good at all.

We do not remember, or we remain silent, failing to at least organise a commemoration event. We should use the 70th anniversary to reflect upon the African journey – the journey to go beyond the difficult past in order to join all Africans globally together to give a united and renaissance Africa a bright future.

We have to keep on reflecting on the African liberation journey: do we Africans know where we have been? Do we also know where we are now and indeed where we are going? If we want to know, we should look back and revive our history to draw lessons to facilitate our journey. Such historical moments provide the opportunity to reflect on how we can re-educate ourselves to move forwards and upwards by avoiding embarking on the wrong path towards making a free and well-being anchored future.

### The first phase of the Pan-African movement

The first phase of the Pan-African Congress (PAC) movement started entirely in the world of the African diaspora. The Pan-African movement, first expressed as Ethiopianism, started in 1776, was followed by the preparation of the pan-African association in 1897, later launching the first Pan-African conference in 1900 in London. Subsequently a series of congresses were held, with the first Pan-African Congress being launched in 1919 in Paris; the 2nd in 1921 in London and Brussels, the third in 1923 in London and Lisbon; and the 4th in 1927 in New York.

The fifth Pan-African Congress was held from October 15-21 in 1945 in Manchester. Over 200 delegates drawn from trade unions, intellectuals, and the new rising liberation anti-colonial movements joined the Congress. It had many African delegates, including prominent African liberation leaders. Following this Congress, in 1946, the Pan-African Federation was formed, with Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta as its founding members.

The first three congresses addressed

mainly cultural and racial injustices. The resolutions highlighted the redress of injustices; they expressed the need for self-determination for all African peoples; for socialist economic systems; and for pride in all things African.

What makes the fifth Pan-African Congress distinctive and significant is that the Pan-African call to use any means necessary to de-colonise Africa and create African national liberation movements emerged as a manifesto, endorsed not just within the continent but also globally.

The fifth Congress was indeed a watershed conference. It rejected the partnership, trusteeship, guardianship and the mandate system of indirect rule – demanding freedom from colonialism by using force if necessary. The 1945 declaration called for total freedom for Africans in Africa and globally.

*We are determined to be free. Therefore, we shall complain, appeal and arraign. We will make the world listen to the facts of our condition. We will fight in every way we can for freedom, democracy and social betterment – Forward to the Socialist United States of Africa. Long live Pan-Africanism!*

### **The second phase: interrupted and irregular**

After the 1945 historic 5th Pan-African Congress anti-colonial struggles intensified and in 1957 Ghana became free. After Ghana's independence there was a movement from Pan-African Congresses to the All-African Peoples Organisation (Accra, 1958, Cairo 1960, Tunis, 1961). We can say that a second phase of Pan-African Congress began after the political independence of the 1960s.

The 1945 Pan-African Congress was organised mainly by the Trinidadian George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah, with the presence of Africans both from home and abroad to pursue a global pan-African project.

George Padmore joined the Ghanaian government after Ghana's independence in 1957 and said that if he had another life, he would have spent it entirely in Africa and for Africa. But it took nearly 30 years to re-launch the 6th Pan-African Congress after

1945. Why it took so long is a mystery to many of us.

The OAU was born in 1963, involving a fatal compromise amongst the Brazzaville, Casablanca and Monrovia groups, and these trends prevented the unity of Africa by actually separating areas that were together during colonial times. They became separate states with different policies and interests, failing to present a distinctive and unified African voice to respond as Africans to accelerate decolonisation. The moment of decolonisation could have brought the opportunity to consolidate unity, not to divide and fracture states that had been ruled together by the colonial powers. The OAU was established in 1963, but it cannot be said that it was the vehicle required to express a united African voice.

The 6th Pan-African Congress took place in Tanzania in 1974 and the 7th in Uganda in 1994. And during 2014 and 2015 the 8th Pan-African Congress was held in Johannesburg first and later in Accra. The organisers in Johannesburg, where I was also a participant, did not include Governments. They wanted to anchor Pan-Africanism to diffuse learning and awareness among the people, intellectuals and civil society. The session in Accra included Government involvement, and will be followed up in mid-2016. Participants are aware of the need to ensure that action follows words.

It is critically important to ensure that the significance of the 70th anniversary the 5th Pan-African Congress reaches the Global South; very much as we all tried to highlight the Diamond Jubilee of the 1955 Bandung Conference. (<http://www.zehabesha.com/the-bandung-diamond-jubilee-time-to-rebuild-world-order-based-on-a-new-culture-and-civilisation/>).

We need to persist with a new third phase of PAC by organising and making it very distinctive, original, essential, relevant, consistent and periodic. The PAC from here on should be linked as part of a comprehensive and unified movement to create African systems, governance and institutions for building African unity and renaissance – not to be talked about but to be fully realised by learning constructive

lessons from all the efforts of the past. Africa can only remove the resource curse if the state curse is removed for good with honesty, integrity, humility and sincerity. Trust and truth shall prevail over lies, corruption, greed and the pursuit of self-interest without any concern for the people and Africa.

As the 5th PAC influenced the creation of a post-colonial African world, the 70th year commemoration could have highlighted African unity and a new era of renaissance. This must be based on Africa's principal role to create a new humanity, new history and new civilisation by adding to the post-colonial objectives also Africa's deep values that can contribute to a better world. That the 5th PAC becomes revitalised and remembered means that the PAC remains as a powerful and relevant inspiration to promote sustainably the global pan-African project that is also a great contribution to creating a better world for all.

All the relevant stakeholders need to be reached, but who amongst them should anchor this global pan-African project? It must be primarily the people of Africa. The opportunity to re-think and re-engineer this process now must not be missed. "Africa, Unite!" should never remain a slogan; it can be converted into reality. The third phase of a revitalised Pan-African series of Congresses with structured and agreed time lines and well-thought out plans and outcomes is needed until Africa is fully united and the current fragmented existence is overcome for good.

### **Pan-African Congresses for Realising Africa's Full Agency**

What is the potential to re-position the Pan-African Congresses to be one of the key drivers to enable Africa to achieve a fully post-colonial agency by exercising comprehensive economic and political independence and freedom?

The current African states have been good in declaring the need for African unity since 1963 by using the meetings and protocols of the heads of states and the ministers; but there has not been any systematic implementation, even in a few crucial areas. For example, it should have been possible to

create African labour mobility, boldly rejecting the cynical colonial borders that the existing 54 states spend so much protecting, even though many of us believe that these costly divisive schemes should have been removed a long time ago. Unity should have been an on-going process.

The Europeans had the Second World War. The French and the British as allies were at war with the Germans. They decided after World War II to establish NATO with the USA. Next they founded the European Union. They managed to create labour mobility, and now inter-European trade is said to have reached nearly 70%. Africa has more reason to unite than Europe, but it is very far behind in realising its unity project. Substantive commitment requires action. The people in Africa should be involved in making African unity. The Pan-African Congress can become a tool to educate for the Pan-African empowerment of the people.

In Europe, the people of a number of countries are invited to vote for membership in the EU or not. Some countries allow more than one referendum. Britain is going to have a referendum soon. The Pan-African Congresses should become the means to make African people the change-makers. African history can only be made by African people. The Pan-African Congresses should be the way to construct the future and not dwell in the past. It is time to move on; to bring new Pan-African achievements; to make the African future shine with moral well-being and radiance. We need new innovative initiatives to promote Africa's overall Pan-African development.

Some of the initiatives we have already taken can fall perfectly within a revitalised grand Pan-African Congress revival plan.

In 2010 we started the African Unity for renaissance conferences in South Africa. We held the conference in Soweto this year, and if this series of annual conferences rotate across Africa they will strengthen awareness for launching Pan-African congresses by linking this education with African liberation day in the month of May every year. We have produced a

series of declarations, the latest being the Soweto Declaration. (<http://www.forumdesalternatives.org/en/soweto-declaration>). The 6th Pan-African Congress will be managed by TMALI and will be connected to African liberation by holding it around May 25 every year to remember the OAU/AU that started in 1963. Of course, even the AU still needs to be converted to realise real African unity and not merely in protocol versions.

One recent relevant activity is the Pan-African Talent initiative (PATI). Its main purpose is to turn Africa into a world talent innovation hub. Africa should be the talent destination, not the talent departure zone of the world. Talent retention, talent gain and not drain, talent reverse migration must be promoted. And all the stakeholders, and particularly the private and corporate world, must contribute substantially to raise funds to promote employable talented graduates by participating actively in the training process to avoid the current unacceptable skills mismatch. A PATI Returning Talent Fund (RTF) is already established. The first inaugural conference for PATI-RTF was held at the Tshwane University of Technology in Pretoria ([www.patiglobal.com](http://www.patiglobal.com)) with the participation of private sector, students, professors and government to create sustainable collaboration to promote talent gain in and for Africa.

We have also opened an education platform for African unity and renaissance for an integrated development. (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1046983685329854/>).

The contribution of Africa to the world is rich and platforms to educate Africans and the world using the current e-learning outlets to reach all must be promoted.

A new approach to generate positive understanding of Africa by challenging the current dominance of portraying Africa as a passive participant in the creation of knowledge is much needed. Africa has already contributed hugely to the whole world and will, without doubt, continue to do so, despite the lack of recognition and appreciation. The knowledge, struggle and spiritual narratives that are negative must be balanced to show the overall massively

positive impact of Africa on the world. This requires the excavation of Africa's rich contributions from the past to the present as the foundation for the future. There is a need to research, educate and innovate, using the widest variety of learning platforms, including e-learning, formal, non-formal and community-based learning organisations and institutions.

## Conclusion

It is about time to re-imagine Africa with the capacity to innovate unity and renaissance. No Pan-African unity means this: no African agency; if there is no unity and agency, there will be no African renaissance; no way for Africans to own their own economy today. And even in 2063! African unity is critical to realise the full synergy of political and economic independence.

This unity was necessary yesterday; but let the failure to unite yesterday become a commitment to stop delaying African unity and renaissance anymore and do it today. Let the future Pan-African Congresses be re-positioned like the 5th one to create a new paradigm shift to start a distinctive third phase by making the African unity and renaissance a reality now, not tomorrow!

Finally the 70th anniversary of the 5th Pan-African Congress should be used as a learning resource to reach millions both in Africa and across the world and should not be ignored or forgotten. Let us not only remember it, but also promote a great PAC moment to diffuse pan-African education to reach all in the world by using all available avenues and outlets. There is still time. Let us all try to do it and make it the means to re-imagine our innovative and reascent united Africa to become a reality now. ■

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