

Africa Day Celebrations 2022 – May 26th Gala Night
Opening speech by the Chairperson of AfCham
D. Nkwetato Tamonkia

Excellencies, distinguished guests, members of AfCham, partners, sponsors, friends and well-wishers, it is a singular pleasure for me to address you on this special day for Africans, thanks to the magic of technology. The ideal thing would have been for us to be together under one roof in a cozy hotel conference room downtown as we did in the past years. This year we couldn't, due to COVID-19 resurgence in our host city. We are therefore putting technology to the test by making the event virtual this year. A virtual event comes with its own advantages. We have attendees listening to us live from Africa, USA, South America, Europe, Asia and Australia. On behalf of the African Chamber of Commerce (AfCham), I would like to welcome you to the 2022 edition of celebrations marking Africa Day. We look forward to a successful event thanks to your collective efforts so that by the end of today each one of us here will have felt the warmth from others physically far away across cities, countries and continents but connected online.

In this light, I would like to acknowledge and appreciate the presence of our special guests of honor:

Mr. Moctar Toure, Special Advisor to the President of The Republic of Mali.

Mr. Dario La Torre, Chief Commercial Officer of Jumia Global.

Mr. Lorenzo Riccardi, CEO of RSA, Asia

Ms. Tosin Sorinola from Transsion

Mr. Kitenge

Ms. Tiiyah, Founder of AfroQueen Secret

Mr. Gugulethu G. Xaba, Founder & President of Amandla Omnotho & Adamopix (Pty) Ltd.

Mr. Amine Lahmamsi, CEO of Bank of Africa, Shanghai

And all other VIPs in the room I have not mentioned. It is a great pleasure to have you with us during these difficult times.

We are celebrating the Africa Day this year under the theme: **Investing in food self-sufficiency for an Africa less dependent on AID**. The United Nations in a press release on May 20th this month, through its Central Emergency Response Fund announced that 18million people in the Sahel will face severe hunger in the next 3months. At the just ended World Economic Forum, the IMF warned of the current rising prices of food commodities across the world. Here in China, the resurgence of COVID-19 has brought about the lockdown of multiple cities, slowing down business, food production and food supplies. We have seen first-hand what role food plays in our society. Food self-sufficiency is a basic requirement for peace to reign. Food sufficiency is the energy that powers all projects for development. Food self-sufficiency is the best tool with which governments can make their people begin to live less dependently on AID packages. The adage "A hungry man is an angry man" is not meaningful enough for me as an African. In the context of Africa, a more appropriate expression would be: "A hungry man is a desperately vulnerable man." That desperation is seen in the negotiations and partnerships we have with countries and organizations. That vulnerability is seen in the political, socio-economic and cultural abuse inflicted on us Africans, time and again. If we, Africans genuinely believe in

Agenda 2063 laid down by the African Union, we must start investing in food self-sufficiency right now. We must be able to feed ourselves sufficiently before we think about building skyscrapers and fancy monuments, and this message concerns every one of us because every African I know has land, fertile land that can produce enough food to feed him and his family. Hunger and famine shouldn't therefore make any sense to Africa, the most fertile land on planet earth.

AID is a good thing at all levels because nobody can accomplish everything without help. No country in the world has achieved development without foreign aid. However, there is the bad side of aid, especially aid that comes with strings attached and hidden agenda. Too much dependence on aid gives birth to laziness and lack of creativity. We Africans must begin to look at foreign aid only as a bonus on solutions to our problems we must have found. If aid alone could develop a place, Africa would be the most developed part of the world. The more we ask for foreign aid and wait for it to come with all its strings attached, the more vulnerable and compromised we become.

The world is in turmoil, the threat of famine, growing inflation, pandemics, armed conflicts, economic crisis, etc. as countries across the globe rethink their geostrategies and geopolitics. Some old alliances are loosening. Others are tightening up and new alliances are being born. Leaders across the globe are working day and night to cater to the interests of their people. "No nation has friends, only interests" Charles De Gaulle once said. This quote is more than ever illustrative now. We see leaders of different countries flying across the world to meet other leaders every day in recent times. Why? Because something is amiss. All is not well. In the context of Africa and to those who have read *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, "A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing". In these troubling times, are our leaders in Africa looking out for our interests? Yes, I am sure they are. Are they doing that enough? That, I am not sure. What I can say is that the world is experiencing a lot of strategic realignments to which future generations will be bound. And every leader is called upon right now to make the best moves possible on the global chess board, to ensure a big win for his people in the future. To our leaders in Africa, I say, in you we trust our future.

Africa has the biggest diaspora in the world. We Africans are in every corner of the globe working, resisting adversity and surviving against all odds. We need the fighting spirit of Mama Africa in us always, wherever we go, out of Africa. That is one reason why we celebrate this day. It is an opportunity for Africans all over the world to reconnect with their roots, find strength and progress. In recent years, Africans in the diaspora have begun to mobilize, point out the mistakes we have made in the past and brainstorm on how development can come to the continent. We brainstorm in forums on and offline every day because Africans in the diaspora have seen first-hand how other countries are fast developing and are willing to bring the secrets home if given the chance and support by our leadership back in Africa. The African Union has endorsed the crucial role the African diaspora plays in the development of the continent through various initiatives and the creation of many commissions and articles but at the level of individual African countries, there is still a lot to be done. The African Child who fled the land because of one or two reasons has now understood that no matter where you go,

home is home. If our leaders say come home, there is room to settle, there is the ease of doing business, there is the ease of movement around the continent, we shall all go home tomorrow morning because we want to build and develop homeland. The more children of Africa flee the land because of lack of opportunities, the more vulnerable the land becomes to invaders.

As a Chamber of Commerce, we at AfCham have promoted Africa in all dimensions, encouraging people from all over the world to visit Africa, to go and invest in Africa. We have told the world how abundant the opportunities in Africa are. People have listened to us and are now moving in. Companies are relocating their factories to Africa in large numbers. Mega-construction projects are ongoing across the continent. You now hear everyone saying Africa is the future. Think of China in the 90s. Think of Africa now. This is a good thing when you look at it superficially but a scary thing when you think of it deeply sometimes. As Africans, especially those of us living out of Africa, let us ask ourselves this question: With hundreds of thousands of young and talented Africans leaving the continent every year, settling out of Africa, promoting Africa, telling the world how Africa is full of opportunities for business and growth, encouraging relocation to Africa, how will the continent of Africa look like in 2063? I leave you to ponder. English people say, **“Be careful what you wish for.”**

Now we have the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It is a good thing for us if and only if we make good use of it. How can we make good use of it? By following the guidance of a leadership that wants the best for its people. Our youths also have the responsibility to grab the opportunities that currently exist, think smart and avoid the compromises parents, grandparents and ancestors made under the circumstances that surrounded them. To our youths, even as you complain, work harder to reverse trends that have placed you under the stigmas we hate so much. If a post in the media offends you do not sit quiet. Write back, reply and better still, do something, no matter how small it is to enlighten the offender. In that way we effect change. We are the change we are waiting for. Always have this African proverb in mind. “If you make yourselves bananas, monkeys will come for you.” African youths deserve better opportunities, especially as Africa counts on them as the main strength. Technologies like the Internet have brought about a plethora of opportunities that past generations didn’t have. Are you using social media or social media is using you? Gone are the days when gov’t jobs in the civil service were the dream thing. Today the dream thing is sustainable talent and entrepreneurship, because the new big thing is called the talent economy. The talents of our youths form the centerpiece of that economy and are our most precious bargaining chip. May these talents not be limited to unique dance steps and sports. May they extend across all sectors of science, technology, business and economic development too.

We went to school, graduated with piles of certificates, got jobs and have been working hard for decades upon decades as employees in companies everywhere around the globe. At NASA you will find Africans as employees. At the United Nations You will find Africans as employees. In every top company in the world, you have Africans working as employees. Wonderful! We’re missing out on something very important however: Ownership. Many Africans still think employee status is the best thing that can happen to us. We think ownership is a thing for the

others. At AfCham we are preaching the importance of ownership to our youths because that is what rules the world today. Those who own are the ones who decide and rule. We must cultivate the spirit of ownership right down to our grassroots. Teach every African child how to own and manage a business, an organization, assets, etc. How to be an employer, not just an excellent employee. Stop celebrating employee status as your ceiling. Own something, no matter how small it is. If you think you are the best employee in the organization you work for, try to create a small organization and manage it. If you think you are the best teacher in your school, try to own a school. That is one missing link in our strife for a developed Africa. We cannot make it there just as employees. We live in a capitalist world. It is controlled by those who own not by those who work for XYZ.

As we listen to other speakers tonight, may we reflect on the whole essence of celebrating Africa Day so that by the end of this event we find our place and role in the development of Africa and her push to become a player at the global stage.

God Bless Africa. Thank You.

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