

African Union Summit Addresses Continental and Global Issues

Ethiopia hosted the 35th Ordinary Summit where heads-of-state grappled with instability, a continuing pandemic, the debate over Israeli observer status and the crisis of economic development

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Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed of the Democratic Federal Republic of Ethiopia welcomed presidents, ministers and other delegates to the first African Union (AU) Summit held since the advent of COVID-19 in 2020.

This gathering was held under the theme of “Strengthening Resilience in Nutrition and Food Security on the African Continent: Strengthening Agro-Food Systems, Health and Social Protection Systems for the Acceleration of the Human, Social and Economic Development”.

Image on the right: Ethiopia Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed at AU Summit, Feb. 2022 (Source: Ethiopian Press Agency via Abayomi Azikiwe)



During the course of the summit held on February 5-6, a change of leadership took place as the chairperson serves only a one-year term of office. President Macky Sall of the Republic of Senegal assumed control of the AU from H.E. Felix- Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), who ended his term as the Chairperson of the African Union for 2021. The transitional ceremony occurred as part of the official opening of the 35th AU Summit of Heads of State and Government, in the presence

of the Chairperson of the AU Commission (AUC), H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, the Deputy Chairperson of the AUC, H.E Dr. Monique Nsanzabaganwa, representatives of the United Nations, the Economic Commission for Africa, dignitaries and invited guests as well as the AU staff.

The AU headquarters has been located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia since the inception of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor of the AU, in May 1963. The formation of the OAU in 1963 came just three years after the so-called “Year of Africa” during 1960 when 18 former colonies gained their independence. Prior to 1960, several African territories such as the Gold Coast, now Ghana, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco had already gained their freedom from colonial rule. Liberia was formed by emancipated Africans from the United States with the assistance of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1847, while Ethiopia, which had never been formally colonized although the country was occupied between 1936-1941 by the Italian fascist regime.

In 2002, two decades ago, the OAU was transformed into the AU, where the organizational charter was revised to adopt strengthened principles and guidelines as it relates to the overall objective of enhancing unity through economic, cultural and military cooperation. In recent years, an African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was formed in Rwanda and headquartered in Ghana as more states join the initiative to integrate national planning.

Contemporary Questions Facing the AU

Since the early months of the pandemic two years ago, AU member-states have adopted various means of curbing the public health disaster which has compounded the existing social problems related to underdevelopment stemming from the international system of neo-colonialism.

Initially there was the difficulty in security effective coronavirus tests and later after it was broadly acknowledged that the pandemic was spreading rapidly across Africa, the energy was rapidly shifted to the acquisition and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. The African Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (ACDC), an affiliate of the AU based in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, has taken on a leading role in educating the African people, the international community and the media on the status of the pandemic, the rollout of the vaccination programs and the already operational production facilities manufacturing vaccines in Africa for continental and foreign distribution.

In the opening report by AU Commission Chair Faki Moussa Mahamat commented extensively on the security crisis on the continent. There have been a rash of military coups that have exposed the lack of effectiveness of regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in light of the seizure of power by army officers under the guise of fighting terrorism.

In West Africa, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Chad and Niger have either had coups or attempted usurpation of state power by the military. These defense forces elements have all been shown to enjoy close ties with the Pentagon and the French foreign services. The U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) has thousands of troops occupying permanent and temporary bases from Djibouti in the Horn of Africa to Mali in West Africa. Annual joint military exercises involving Pentagon, French and allied national defense forces

have not enhanced the security status of the affected states. To further illustrate the threat of instability, DRC President Tshisekedi was compelled to leave the AU Summit before its conclusion due to the arrest of a leading official inside his government on suspicions of a plot to undermine the authority of the state.

The reality is that the increasing presence of western imperialist military and intelligence agencies has been positively correlated with the worsening security crisis in African states. A coup in the Republic of Sudan in April 2019 has been utilized by Washington and the state of Israel to further penetrate and manipulate the domestic and foreign policy imperatives of the interim regime. Since the masses appear to want immediate democratic rule, the imperialists realize that the realization of self-determination for the people of Sudan could prove disadvantageous for Washington and its allies.

In reference to the character of the discussions at the AU Summit, the [North Africa Post reports](#) from the 35th Ordinary Summit that:

“Addressing the session, Chairperson of the African Union Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat expressed concern over the security situation in the African continent. ‘The security situation of the continent today is deeply marked by terrorism and the dangerous resurgence of unconstitutional changes of governments,’ Mahamat said.

Chairperson of the pan-African bloc said terrorism and violent extremism was Africa’s security challenge last year with international terror links are embedded in east, west, and southern Africa. ‘The security situation on the continent now calls for a real new approach which should question our peace and security architecture and its correlation with the new destabilizing factors in Africa,’ Mahamat said.”

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the AU Summit was the challenge by South Africa and Algeria to the unilateral decision made during 2021 by Commission Chair Mahamat to grant Israel observer status within the continental organization. Historically the progressive and anti-imperialist forces in Africa have demonstrated unconditional solidarity with Palestine along with other national liberation movements fighting colonialism. To grant Tel Aviv observer status absent broad consultations within the organization raises questions about the loyalty and commitment to the most progressive legacy within the OAU-AU tradition.

Mahamat in a lengthy memorandum explaining his rationale for the decision to grant such a concession to the apartheid Israeli state, attempted to utilize the already existing diplomatic relations between Tel Aviv and various African states to justify further acquiescence to Washington’s foreign policy in West Asia and North Africa by the continental organization. The Camp David Accord signed in 1978 between Egypt and Israel has not led to the liberation of Palestine. This was the position articulated by Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh of the Palestinian Authority who spoke at the AU Summit. The people of Gaza and the West Bank died in large numbers during 2021 due to the bombing by the Israel Air Force (IAF) and the security apparatus utilizing live ammunition against nonviolent demonstrators in Jerusalem and other areas of occupied Palestine. These attacks on the oppressed Palestinians are facilitated by U.S. weapons, intelligence technology and diplomatic cover. (See [this](#))

According to a [report published by Al Jazeera](#) on Shtayyeh’s speech, it emphasized:

“‘Israel should never be rewarded for its violation and for the apartheid regime it does impose on the Palestinian people,’ he said. ‘Your excellencies, I’m sorry to report to you that the situation of the Palestinian people has only grown more precarious. The decision to grant Israel an observer status is a reward that [Tel Aviv] does not deserve, and we call for this decision to be withdrawn.’”

By the second day of the AU Summit, it was announced that the debate on Palestine would be suspended and relegated to a special committee to be discussed at a later date. Mahamat suggested that the Palestinian question should not divide the AU. Nonetheless, there is nothing more important in the present period than the solidarity of the African people with the Palestinians in their struggle against colonialism and for an independent sovereign state.

Pan-Africanism Cannot Accommodate Apartheid and Neo-colonialism

These contradictions within the AU deliberations must be resolved in order for the majority of African workers, farmers, women and youth to be adequately represented in international bodies. By upholding the right to self-determination of oppressed peoples inside and outside of Africa would considerably lend moral authority to regional organizations which have not been readily effective in resolving internal political crises stemming from the continuing dependency of the 1.3 billion Africans to the world capitalist system.

Today in states where military coups have occurred, the people are rapidly turning against the former colonial and current neo-colonial power blocs within North America, Britain and the European Union (EU). In Mali, the coup government has expelled the French ambassador while people have gone into the streets in the thousands to celebrate the erosion of the legitimacy of Paris.

In both Burkina Faso and Mali, people raised the Russian flag alongside their national symbols as a means of demonstrating their exasperation with France. However, to remove French and U.S. military penetration of African states, the masses must be organized and mobilized independently of imperialist-backed apparatuses in order to exercise genuine liberation and sovereignty.

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