

African Eunuch...I mean, Union

The 27th Summit of the African Union (AU) is scheduled to take place in Kigali, Rwanda in July of this year (2016). The question is, SO WHAT! Structured around a theme that emphasizes women's rights, the summit will be laced with predictable, clichéd promises, all delivered in the grandest fashion behind elaborate words and glitzy outfits.

The truth is that the AU is just another addition to Africa's dilemma of unrecoverable waste usually achieved under the guise of performing some vital, even if phantom task. One can only imagine how much it costs each month to run its secretariat, agencies and other subsidiary offices. But to what end? The official advent of the AU in 2002 was little more than a name change from Organization of African Unity (OAU), its parent body, with the usual introduction of fresh, lofty rhetoric suggestive of a greater administrative and philosophical direction. Perhaps the move was also self-consoling; after all, our former rulers operate under the umbrella of a coalition that bears a similar name, European Union (EU). Changing the OAU to AU was like calling a shrub a plant. Nothing really changed and with the AU this has practically been the case since its inception. The fact that the alliance is run mostly by leaders that were never voted into power or that have overstayed their welcome summarizes its degeneracy and uselessness. Only a fool would believe that despots, even if adorned in fine suits and high heeled shoes, are interested in anyone's welfare. Africans need an enabling environment within which to function and take care of ourselves. That environment will never be provided and sustained by glorified thugs camouflaged in impressive titles, be it president, prime minister or head of state.

The value of any organization lies in its connectedness to the people. Asking the African people about the accomplishments of the AU would result in widespread blank stares because such accomplishments are nonexistent and the union is as disconnected from the people as are maggots from a sanitized surface. On the other hand, consider asking the destitute of India about Mother Teresa. The responses would not only be eager and celebratory, they would be delivered with excitement and testimonies. The people know her because she was intimately connected with them and sincerely cared for them. How wonderful it would be if the AU could provoke a similar response from the people it supposedly serves.

But just because the people do not feel or know the workings of the AU does not mean they are ignorant of its deception. In a visit to Addis Ababa in 2011, the building housing this body was one of the few, flashy edifices that eclipsed a collection of surrounding shanties and overall drabness. On inquiring from the people about the benefits that must accrue from having this secretariat and its sister UN Economic Community for Africa (ECA) headquarters in their city, they laughed and responded with much cynicism. True, the building is magnificent, but it takes up too much land space and for the most part is like a dazed giant with feet heavily caked in wet cement. It just stands and stares, accomplishing little or nothing. “It is as if they are not here,” the people explained further. “We don’t know them and they don’t know us. The only time we are reminded that they are here is when they have some big meeting and block our streets so that we do not obstruct the movement of their expensive cars. Their cars fill our streets again when, at the end of their big meeting, they drive around at night in search of prostitutes.”

I have a theory. If you want to know the truth about any institution, society or country, do not ask an ambassador or other top official who is more concerned about keeping his or her political job than telling the truth. Ask the people!

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