

CONFERENCE AND BOOK LAUNCH

Joel Netshitenzhe, MISTRA Executive Director

28 September 2022

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

DEVELOPING A PAN-AFRICAN AGENDA DEALING WITH GLOBAL ISSUES

Let me start off by welcoming you all to this Conference, and by specifically acknowledging Prof Sarah Mosoetsa, CEO of the National Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences; Dr Philani Mthembu, Executive Director at the Institute for Global Dialogue and Sebastian Sperling, Resident Director of the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (South Africa) who have worked with us in organising this conference.

Since its launch, the Mapungubwe Institute has published many books. Dispersed in these publications on the evolution of human civilisation, on the political economy and on the application of natural sciences are strategic reflections on Africa's development and the role of South Africa in that endeavour.

During MISTRA's tenth anniversary, the question arose whether we should not integrate the foreign policy insights into a volume that focusses on Pan-Africanism in the current age.

Thus was born the idea of this conference and the book that we launch today, which extracts from various publications and also contains new reflections on a grand strategy for South Africa in the context of Agenda 2063.

As we all know, these ideals are being pursued in a global environment that is not of the continent's making.

Post-1990, many of us had assumed the end of Cold War duality and the emergence of benign liberal democracy as the underpinning of domestic and global political relations, irrespective of any country's economic and military power.

In this context, the notion of primary unipolarity in terms of the global economic system and a military hyperpower, on the one hand; and secondary multipolarity in relation to regional and other alliances, was posited. Economic globalisation strengthened the belief that humanity could multilaterally march in step, with positive implications for Africa, as reflected for instance in how NEPAD and Agenda 2063 were received in other regions of the world. In the recent period, the attempts at joint efforts to deal with climate change, pandemics and the global economy, seemed to encourage these centripetal tendencies.

Yet, below the surface, two counterintuitive dynamics were starting to assume prominence: aggressive mercantilism and poor management of the relay-race in economic development, with China increasingly characterised as a strategic enemy or competitor to the developed nations; and nationalisms of yore on the European continent, which have now exploded into open conflict.

Against this background, Africa once again finds itself at the cross-roads. The impulse to impose choices on the continent, in terms of its relations with the rest of the world, has resurfaced with a vengeance.

And so, Africa will need to develop strategies that respond to many scenarios in the context of Graham Allison's Thucydides trap: are we seeing in Eastern Europe the choking of a bear that sought to swallow a common nightingale; are we seeing in western Europe the self-immolation of a union, egged on by a distant Sparta of the current age; and are we seeing in East Asia and on a world scale, a hyperpower and its allies tilting at the windmills in relation to the unavoidable shift in global economic power balances!

In this milieu, how indeed does Africa doggedly pursue its self-interests which are based on human development and social justice?

It is against this background that the new chapters in this volume posit the notion of 'pragmatic Pan-Africanism': that Africa should hew its path to prosperity in this jungle of fraught geo-politics, while at the same time addressing local constraints to progress. One of the current challenges is the politics of opinion polls as distinct from serious strategic leadership.

Failure to develop a coherent response to these dynamics, may consign Africa once again to the status of the grass that suffers under the weight of fighting elephants, with its social development once more arrested, and its pursuit of democracy and a culture of human rights sabotaged on the altar of the self-interest of the powerful.

Pragmatic Pan-Africanism includes pursuing continental integration with an immediate focus on both the hardware and the software that constrain free trade. Africa should also position itself to benefit from its resources in relation to green technologies, the arable land it commands and the demographic dividend that attaches to its youthful population.

Needless to say, South Africa has an important role to play in the conceptualisation of a Pan-African agenda under new conditions; in building continental institutions; and in acting as a force of example rather than through pious declarations.

All of us would agree that the issues are many and they do not lend themselves to easy answers.

So, MISTRA welcomes you all, confident that you will enrich these *Reflections on Africa's place in the world*.

END