

78TH SESSION OF UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

STATEMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION ON THE ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION AND SEGREGATION OF PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT FROM THE AFRICAN CONTINENT, INCLUDING TRADE BARRIERS, TAXATION, INVESTMENT, AND WEALTH CREATION

April 30, 2023

**United Nations Secretary-General
c/o Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Permanent Forum on People of African Descent**

Distinguished Delegates, Member States, and Participants:

I humbly petition you today on behalf of the approximately 210 million global descendants of the Trans-Atlantic and Indian Ocean (Eurasian) slave trades, who continue to thrive despite exclusion from formal ratification, recognition, membership, and voting rights before the African Union¹, and no clear or realistic legal right of return, residency, citizenship, or investment in the vast majority of its 55 member states². As the United Nations Secretary-General embarks on its mission to develop a programme of activities for the International Decade for People of African Descent, to be presented to the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session, this policy statement seeks to encourage the Secretary-General to focus its agenda on the continued economic neo-colonialization of People of African Descent, and to use its power and privilege to address the barriers to wealth creation and retention in global African and Afro-descendant populations.

The following briefing will introduce some of these economic barriers, and outline how the United Nations Secretary General, via its Forum on People of African Descent, can introduce more high-impact, substantive programming to address actual issues of systemic inequality for People of African descent, rather than merely symbolic or unactionable sessions on topics, such as reparations, that may

¹ African Union. (2016). *Haiti will not be admitted as African Union Member State at next Summit in Kigali, Rwanda*. Directorate of Information and Communication. Press release No. 180/2016.

<https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20160518-0>

² The Diaspora Division of the African Union. (2023). Citizen and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO).

<https://au.int/en/diaspora-division>

only ever be realized by a small number of Afro-descendants holding citizenship in wealthy Western imperialist states. It is the position of this briefing that Afro-descendants aren't in need of more empty apologies, memorials, or ineffective foreign interventions or aid that comes with "strings attached."³

Rather, Afro-descendants need what the colonial powers have enjoyed for the last 531 years⁴—an opportunity to grow, invest, and accumulate wealth and engage in cross-border free trade and currency valuation without restrictive Western-controlled monetary and fiscal policies.

Covid-19 and the Year of Return: How Afro-descendant Revenue Saved Ghana from the Pandemic

Prior to the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, Ghana decided to throw a party to end all parties. The Ghanaian "Year of Return" in 2019 "was linked to the 400th anniversary of slaves landing in the US - said to be the first recorded arrival of enslaved Africans in the Americas."⁵ Complete with concerts, celebrities, emotional visits to touted historic slave sites, and even a discretionary diplomatic granting of citizenship to 126 long-term Afro-descendant residents of Ghana, including 34 Afro-Caribbeans and famous persons like Rita Marley⁶, the year-long initiative was designed to bring in Black tourism dollars from Diaspora in the Americas and Europe. In the words of H.E. Nana Akufo-Addo, President of Ghana—

"We believe we have a responsibility to extend a hand of welcome back home to Africans in the diaspora."⁷

Ghana's bet on Black dollars paid off. According to Ghana's Minister of Tourism Barbara Oteng Gyasi, the Year of Return initiative injected \$3.1 billion into the Ghanaian economy.⁸ According to the Ghana Tourism Authority, African Diaspora and Afro-Descendant visitors increased by 45 percent (237,088) compared to the previous year, with an average spend per tourist of \$2,590 USD in 2019.⁹

³ Moya, Dambisa. (2018). *Dambisa Moyo: Foreign aid is 'corrosive' to democracy in Africa*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/8/2/dambisa-moyo-foreign-aid-is-corrosive-to-democracy-in-africa>

⁴ Drayson, Elizabeth. (2017) *The last Muslim King in Spain*. University of Cambridge. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/the-last-muslim-king-in-spain>

⁵ BBC News. (2020) African diaspora: *Did Ghana's Year of Return attract foreign visitors?* <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51191409>

⁶ Taylor, Mildred E. (2019). *Year of Return pumps \$1.9 billion into Ghana's economy*. <https://face2faceafrica.com/article/year-of-return-pumps-1-9-billion-into-ghanas-economy>

⁷ Ibid. (2020).

⁸ Wilson, Kimberly. (2021). *Beyond Ghana's Year Of Return*. Essence Magazine. <https://www.essence.com/feature/ghana-travel-pandemic-business-owners/>

⁹ Ibid. (2019).

The spike in Ghana's GDP from the "Year of Return" was so significant, that when the Covid-19 global pandemic hit Ghana in March of 2020,¹⁰ the African nation state was able to "coast"¹¹ on the revenue of Afro-descendants and Diaspora, and weather the storm of the economic impact of Covid, while the very Black population that provided them with the economic support via tourism died by the millions,¹² captive in the racist medical systems¹³ of the Western colonial states their passports relegated them to.

So what exactly, you may wonder, was the response of Ghana and the rest of the African Union nation states to the global slaughter¹⁴¹⁵ of Afro-descendant Diaspora from Covid-19 in former colonial states, the very same Black Diaspora that had earned them so many billions of dollars the year before during the "Year of Return" Initiative?

The answer is simple. Deafening silence.¹⁶

The AfCFTA: Afro-Descendant Trade Dollars Knocking on the Door, but Nobody is Answering

The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) is the world's largest free trade area bringing together the 55 countries of the African Union (AU) and eight (8) Regional Economic Communities (RECs).¹⁷ The overall mandate of the AfCFTA is to create a single African continental market with a population of about 1.3 billion people and a combined GDP of approximately US \$3.4 trillion.¹⁸

¹⁰ Amponsah, S. K., Tagoe, B., & Afriyie, D. K. (2021). One year after first case of COVID-19 in Ghana: epidemiology, challenges and accomplishments. *The Pan African medical journal*, 39, 226.

<https://doi.org/10.11604/pamj.2021.39.226.29069>

¹¹ World Bank and OECD. (2023). Ghana GDP Growth, 2000-2021.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2021&locations=GH&start=2000>

¹² The Covid Tracking Project. (2023) *COVID-19 is affecting Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color the most*. Covid Racial Data Tracker. The Atlantic Monthly Group. <https://covidtracking.com/race>

¹³ Caldwell, Kia L. and de Arujo, Edna M. (2020). COVID-19 is deadlier for black Brazilians, a legacy of structural racism that dates back to slavery. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/covid-19-is-deadlier-for-black-brazilians-a-legacy-of-structural-racism-that-dates-back-to-slavery-139430>

¹⁴ Gupta, Sujata. (2020). *Why African-Americans may be especially vulnerable to COVID-19*. Science News. <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/coronavirus-why-african-americans-vulnerable-covid-19-health-race>

¹⁵ Caldwell, Kia L. and de Arujo, Edna M. (2020).

¹⁶ Attiah, Karen. (2020) *Africa has defied the covid-19 nightmare scenarios. We shouldn't be surprised*. The Washington Post. Opinion. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/09/22/africa-has-defied-covid-19-nightmare-scenarios-we-shouldnt-be-surprised/>

¹⁷ AfCFTA Secretariat. (2023). About the AfCFTA. <https://au-afcfta.org/about/>

¹⁸ Ibid. (2023).

However, as mentioned earlier in this briefing, due to the intentional exclusion of the approximately 210 million global descendants of the African slave trades,¹⁹ of whom a tiny minority of African-Americans alone collectively represent more than \$835 billion in purchasing power and expenditures,²⁰ the African Union and AfCFTA signatory states have doomed their flagship free-trade agreement, which entered into force on May 30, 2019 and commenced trade on January 1, 2021,²¹ to economic stagnation and potential failure.

In fact, if the Afro-descendant potential investors who attended Ghana's Year of Return in 2019 are any indication of the spending and investment power of Afro-descendant Diaspora²², we are looking at a potential loss of revenue to African markets that is, frankly, incalculable, and that could potentially dwarf the GDP of the United States, China, and the European Union combined.

The economic threat to the economies of the former colonial powers imposed by the BRICS²³ Alliance simply pales in comparison to the power of a united Africa and its global Diaspora. Perhaps this is why Western powers and multinational companies have gone to such great lengths to prevent that from ever happening.²⁴

Africa's Blind Spot: Immigration and Taxation of Foreign Black Investors and Expatriates

Rather than engage with Region 6 Afro-descendants, African elites and Western powers have busied themselves with transforming African economies from innovative free markets with exponential growth, to tightly regulated, heavily taxed²⁵ markets that can never compete with Western capitalist economies.²⁶ Most of this policy change has been pushed through on the Western fear-mongering of

¹⁹ African Development Bank. (2020). *The Diaspora Prepared to Invest in Africa*. <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/the-diaspora-prepared-to-invest-in-africa-11881>.

²⁰ Chui, Micheal, Gregg, Brian, and Kohli, Sajal. (2021). *A \$300 billion opportunity: Serving the emerging Black American consumer*. McKinsey and Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/a-300-billion-dollar-opportunity-serving-the-emerging-black-american-consumer>

²¹ AfCFTA Secretariat. (2023). About the AfCFTA. <https://au-afcfta.org/about/>

²² Wikipedia. (2023). *African diaspora*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_diaspora

²³ O'Neill, Aaron. (2023) *Gross domestic product (GDP) of the BRICS countries from 2000 to 2028*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/254281/gdp-of-the-bric-countries/>

²⁴ Perkins, John. (2009) Excerpt: *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers. https://www.bkconnection.com/static/Confessions-of-an-Economic-Hitman_EXCERPT.pdf

²⁵ African Tax Administration Forum. (2021). *A new era of international taxation rules – What does this mean for Africa?* <https://www.ataftax.org/a-new-era-of-international-taxation-rules-what-does-this-mean-for-africa>

²⁶ Madden, Payce. (2020). Figures of the week: Taxation in Africa over the last century. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/10/15/figures-of-the-week-taxation-in-africa-over-the-last-century/>

“capital flight”²⁷ and “capital outflows” from large Western multinationals, with little regard to the impact on African, African Diaspora, and Afro-descendant small and medium enterprise investors.

The result is an Africa that is virtually unfit for foreign investment, residency, or citizenship by Afro-descendants. As Nowel Ngala, an expert in the rapidly expanding African airline industry noted—

*“Some African tax rates are the highest in the world. In Tanzania for example with one of the highest tax rates, a 30% rate is applied at \$475 of income earned plus a 20% VAT added on everything bought in the country.”*²⁸

The taxation of Black investors, entrepreneurs, digital workers, and expatriates in African Union member states knows no bounds. Spurred on by copious funding from the International Centre for Tax and Development (ICTD), a U.K.-based thinktank founded in 2010 by British political economist Mick Moore, and funded by the U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad),²⁹ academics around the world are paid hefty sums to report on the “lack” of African taxation as a “problem” and the primary factor for “African poverty,” and to devise new schemes to bleed Africans, and anyone daring to invest in their countries, of more and more money. In partnership with global international, non-profit, foreign aid, and civil society organizations, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),³⁰ the “Global North” has led the drumbeat that the economic redistribution of wealth from their countries is a non-starter, and that taxation is the only way forward in Africa.

So what happens to Afro-descendant “returnees” who wish to invest in Africa? Historically, the vast majority of Trans-Atlantic African slaves were transported to Brazil and other Latin American and Caribbean states.³¹ Their descendants still represent the majority of the population in many of these states.

²⁷ Chen, James. (2021). Capital Flight: Definition, Causes, and Examples. Investopedia.

<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/capitalflight.asp>

²⁸ Ngala, Nowel. (2018). Over taxation and charges in Africa: Case Study, aviation industry in Africa.

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/over-taxation-africa-case-study-aviation-industry-nowel-ngala/>

²⁹ International Centre for Tax & Development. (2023). <https://www.ictd.ac/about-us/>

³⁰ Tax Transparency in Africa 2022: Africa Initiative Progress Report. (2022).

<https://www.oecd.org/tax/transparency/documents/tax-transparency-in-africa-2022.htm>

³¹ History in Charts. (2023). *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: Routes and Destinations*.

<https://historyincharts.com/trans-atlantic-slave-trade-destinations-and-statistics/>

In Brazil, millions of Afro-Brazilian women, enraged at the brutal 2018 murder of Marielle Franco and other mostly Black female activists³² by Brazilian police directed by the hard-right Bolsonaro and European elite-controlled Brazilian government, led massive protests and voter initiatives to return leftist Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva back to power on January 1, 2023.³³ For his first speeches in office, President Lula spoke loudly to his mostly Afro-Brazilian female supporters—

“Africa will again be a priority in Brazil's relations with the world [emphasis added].”³⁴

Yet are African countries prepared for President Lula’s call to action? The minimum capital to start a company in most African countries as a “foreigner” ranges from \$100,000 to as high as \$250,000 USD in minimum investment capital, the highest in the world, while minimum capital requirements are lowest in Europe and Central Asia.³⁵ In addition, most African Union member states rank at the very bottom of the World Bank’s annual “Ease of Doing Business” Index, with only Mauritius appearing in the top 20 ranked states.³⁶

That means that a Brazilian female Afro-descendant investor, who is legally categorized as a “foreign national” in every African Union member state, rather than as an Afro-descendant “resident” investor, would have to pay a minimum of nearly a quarter of a million U.S. dollars to simply register a company in the majority of the AfCFTA signatory states. Not to mention the rash of ancillary taxes, such as stamp duty, VAT, digital taxes, excise taxes, licensing fees, bribery, and corruption³⁷ that are often due before an Afro-descendant company has seen any revenue.

So who is left to invest in Africa? Primarily large multinationals³⁸ and foreign aid organizations who enjoy the dependency-based “development” relationship they have entrenched on the Continent. Many

³² Swift, Jaime A. (2018) *Marielle Franco, Black Queer Women, and Police Violence in Brazil*. African American Intellectual History Society Inc. <https://www.aaihs.org/afro-brazilian-women-lgbt-rights-and-the-fight-against-police-violence/>

³³ Nugent, Ciara. (2022). *How Lula Won the Most Crucial Election in Brazil for Decades*. Time Magazine. Digital. <https://time.com/6226269/how-lula-won-brazil-election/>

³⁴ Krippahl, Cristina and Milz, Thomas. (2023). Africa bets on Brazil’s new President Lula da Silva. Deutsche Welle. <https://www.dw.com/en/africa-bets-on-brazils-new-president-lula-da-silva/a-64438215>

³⁵ World Bank. (2014). Why are minimum capital requirements a concern for entrepreneurs? <https://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/media/Annual-Reports/English/DB14-Chapters/DB14-Why-are-minimum-capital-requirements.pdf>

³⁶ World Bank. (2019). *Ease of Doing Business Archive: Sub Saharan Africa*. <https://archive.doingbusiness.org/en/rankings?region=sub-saharan-africa>

³⁷ Transparency International. (2019). Citizens Speak Out about Corruption in Africa. <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/citizens-speak-out-about-corruption-in-africa>

³⁸ Nanevie, Enyonam. (2020). *The Power To End Systemic Corruption Is In The Hands Of Africa's New Wave Of Entrepreneurs*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2020/11/09/the-power-to-end-systemic-corruption-is-in-the-hands-of-africas-new-wave-of-entrepreneurs/?sh=5a7a25745d0f>

Western powers exacerbate this divide by refusing to negotiate double-taxation agreements with African states and “Global South” countries with large Afro-Descendant populations³⁹, and by keeping Black expatriates strangled by excessive regulatory reporting⁴⁰ of offshore assets, investments, and businesses.

Non-Diversity in Supply-Chains and Logistics Keeps Afro-Descendants Segregated from Africa

The final nail in the African and Afro-descendant economic segregation coffin can be found in global shipping lanes, rail lines, and cargo routes, and supply chains, nearly all of which are controlled by non-African and non-Afrodescendant actors globally. With the glaring exceptions of Liberia and the Bahamas,⁴¹ most of the world’s container ships and marine logistics companies are not held under African or Afro-descendant flags, and even if based in those countries, are not owned by people of African descent. The biggest shipping company in the world, Maersk, is based in Copenhagen, Denmark, with subsidiaries and offices across 130 countries and over 110,000 employees worldwide.⁴² A review of the company’s shipping routes demonstrates that most trade routes lead away from African ports to those in the Global North and East Asia,⁴³ while nearly no direct routes exist between “South-South” destinations predominately inhabited by African and Afro-descendant communities.

This physical and logistical disconnect inhibits trade between communities with historical and cultural ties and contains wealth among a few actors in primarily Western states. The expansion of African aviation, most notably, the rapid rise of Ethiopian Airlines, does not alleviate this disconnection, as its’ route map reveals only irregular service to two locations in Brazil.⁴⁴

The result is expensive, near impossible exchanges of goods and services between global Afro-descendent communities in the Americas and the African Continent. Tourism and trade are often closely linked, and without progressive trade and investment policies between these communities, wealth will continue to amass in the allied former colonial powers of the Global North.

³⁹ United States Internal Revenue Service. (2023). United States Income Tax Treaties - A to Z.

<https://www.irs.gov/businesses/international-businesses/united-states-income-tax-treaties-a-to-z>

⁴⁰ Walt, Vivienne. (2020). *Why 'Accidental Americans' Are Desperate to Give Up Their U.S. Citizenship*. Time Magazine. <https://time.com/5922972/accidental-americans-fatca/>

⁴¹ Soare, Tim. (2015). Who owns the world’s ships? <https://www.marinetraffic.com/blog/who-owns-the-worlds-ships/>

⁴² Wikipedia (2023). Maersk. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maersk>

⁴³ Maersk (2023). International Shipping in Africa. <https://www.maersk.com/local-information/africa>

⁴⁴ Ethiopian Airlines. (2023). International Destinations. <https://www.ethiopianairlines.com/aa/book/network/international>

In light of the issues presented in the statement herein, the following urgent policy recommendations are hereby forwarded for investigation, consideration, and implementation by the United Nations Secretary-General on the implementation of the Programme of Activities of the International Decade for People of African Descent:

1. The United Nations Secretary-General must hold a formal programme activity on the failure of the African Union to formally ratify Region 6 of the African Diaspora, and investigate best practices to representation and membership that move beyond the economically destructive CSO/NGO framework of international foreign aid schemes, and instead seek to empower Afro-descendent business owners, investors, retirees, and “returnees” that seek to return to live, work, invest, and build in African nation states;
2. The United Nations Secretary-General must hold a formal programme activity on the economic barriers to trade and investment between African Union and Afro-descendent communities globally, including such issues as taxation, residency and citizenship, minimum capital requirements and corporate formation, trade and logistics, and corruption;
3. The United Nations Secretary-General must hold a formal programme activity on the threat to the health and wellness of Afro-descendants posed by their exclusion from the legal definition of “Africans” pursuant to the 2002 Constitutive Act of the African Union, as well as their exclusion in “African Diaspora” programming sponsored by Western actors in African states;
4. The United Nations Secretary-General must hold a formal programme activity on the impact of Western tax policy and financial regulation on African and Afro-descendant communities, particularly in the areas of double taxation agreements, global taxation frameworks and mandates, individual and corporate tax rates, world-wide taxation of income, foreign investment access and regulation, and the impact of global tax and financial policy on small and medium enterprises owned by Africans and Afro-Descendant Diaspora;
5. The United Nations Secretary-General must hold a formal programme activity on the exclusion of Region 6 Afro-descendant Diaspora from the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), and seek to collect disaggregated data on the economic impacts of such exclusions from African free trade;
6. The United Nations Secretary-General must hold a formal programme activity on the lack of physical shipping, cargo, and logistical supply chains between African and Afro-descendant

communities, and call for former colonial states to fund ownership and upskilling in such cross-border trade and logistics mechanisms by people of African descent, as well as the affordable expansion of pre-existing Global North trade routes to the Global South; and

7. The United Nations Secretary-General must hold a formal programme activity on the inclusion of Afro-descendant Diaspora in overall African economic growth, and well as the mutual inclusion of Africans and African nation states in the economic growth of global communities of African descent, particularly in regard to the widely accepted human rights principles of “freedom of movement.”

These earnest and exigent policy recommendations are humbly tendered to the United Nations Secretary-General on this 30th day of April in the year 2023, at Virginia Beach, Virginia, United States of America.

Respectfully submitted by a proud descendant of African slaves,



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