

Contributions to the African Union Diaspora Engagement: Amb. John Kayode Shinkaiye

I wish to thank the Foundation for Democracy in Africa and others involved in the events of the last few days for all allowing me to make a brief presentation on the contributions I have made to the African Union Diaspora Engagement.

2. This event precedes the ceremony for the 2023 Medal of Glory Award (MOGA) for my “lifetime commitment to the public service as a Diplomat, and contributions to the advancement of Peace, Security, Stability, Economic Integration, and Diaspora Engagement in Africa”. It has been a privilege for me throughout my career to make contributions to each of these areas just cited.

3. As a very young diplomat, my very first post was in Nigeria’s Mission in Lome, Togo where I was privileged to see at close quarters, the processes leading to the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a project that was spearheaded by the then leaders of Nigeria and Togo, Generals Yakubu Gowon and Gnassingbe Eyadema. I had the honour to proofread the 1975 Treaty establishing ECOWAS and the Protocol that followed in 1976. Thus, I began my career being involved in the process for economic integration in our sub-region, West Africa.

4. That certainly robbed off on me in the engagement at the continental level when, as Ambassador of Nigeria to Ethiopia, I, and my colleague and fellow MOGA Awardee, played considerable roles in the transformation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) from 2000 to 2002 when the AU was born. During this period, I had graduated from being a note taker and proofreader to one of the Ambassadors who, on behalf of their governments, produced ideas that helped put in place an organisation that would promote continental integration, not one that would become an albatross by creating a Continental Union government with one military, one currency, one president, and one judiciary, knowing how diverse our continent was, and still is, regrettably. We also thought-out ideas that we hoped would ensure peace and security, good governance, human rights, freedom of movement and defence of the continent from the oppression of bigger powers. Then, having secured the instruments that would do all these and more, we also had the responsibility, for a couple of years, to see them work.

5. We also participated in introducing a number of instruments that would help Africa to be better governed and developed. These included the famous AU NEPAD Programme, with its governance aid, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation (CSSDCA) which sought to treat security, stability, development, and cooperation in Africa in a holistic manner. It was my first major assignment in Addis Ababa as Ambassador, and I chaired the Committee that saw to its adoption by Foreign Ministers in Abuja and Heads of State in the Lome OAU Summit in 2000. Regrettably, that beautiful instrument was not ever used in spite of the

excellent ideas in it which would have helped Africa to grow in peace, security, and development.

6. Let me go back a little bit in my career as I had the rare privilege of serving twice in my country's Mission in London, on both occasions (1978 to 1982 and 1987 to 1989) as the Head of the Political Desk with responsibility for, among other things, bilateral relations between Nigeria and Britain, and anti-apartheid activities to end that odious practice which systematically dehumanised black South Africans. In that role, Nigeria not only campaigned against the apartheid regime, but we also served as a voice of conscience in the Commonwealth by ensuring that that organisation was clear that it could not accept what was going on in South Africa then. The outcomes of the Melbourne CHOGM in 1981, New Delhi in 1983, and Vancouver in 1987, which I attended, attest to this.

7. Finally, in Addis Ababa as the Ambassador of Nigeria and the Chief of Staff to the Chairperson from 2006 to 2012, I made, I believe, considerable contributions to building a stronger Africa by putting in place the right institutions and strongly defending Africa's interests in its relationships with other powers and power blocks. Part of that process concerned how to build a mutually beneficial relationship with Africa's Diaspora which one knew could make important contributions to Africa's economic development.

8. Consequently, since the African Union was established, it has had a vibrant Diaspora engagement programme. That explains why Ambassador Mamabolo and I, together with Mr. Amara Essy and a compatriot of mine, Dr. Jinmi Adisa, joined the Foundation for Democracy in Africa to organise the first Africa Diaspora Town Hall Meeting on December 17, 2002, in Washington. A very successful event, it has led to the deepening of Africa's Diaspora involvement in the continent's development. Thus, my contributions to the African Union Diaspora Engagement began when I was the Ambassador of Nigeria to Ethiopia.

9. I became the Chief of Staff to the Chairperson of the AU Commission on February 1, 2006, and remained in that position until October 31, 2012, serving two Chairpersons, Prof. Alpha Oumar Konare, former President of Mali, and Dr. Jean Ping, former Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Gabon. As their Chief of Staff, I had the honour to lead, at the level of officials in the Commission, the Union's engagement with its international partners. I also had the responsibility of supervising the African Union Citizens and Diaspora Directorate – CIDO – which reported to the Chairperson through me as the Chief of Staff. CIDO is the primary institution responsible for engaging with Africa's Diaspora and the Civil Society. With respect to the latter, CIDO served as the Secretariat of the Economic, Social and Cultural Commission (ECOSOCC), which is an advisory organ of the AU.

10. CIDO promotes dialogue, cooperation and collaboration between the AU and the African Diaspora. In this regard, CIDO, under the guidance of the Chief of Staff, organised a landmark event which took place in May 2012, namely, the Global African Diaspora Summit in Sandton, South Africa. This summit paved the way for the development and implementation of the AU Diaspora Programme.

11. In rounding up, I like to emphasise that the Diaspora engagement with the African Union has led to the Diaspora being regarded as the 6th Region of the continent, in addition to the five geographical regions, namely, North, West, Central, East and Southern Africa. This development is affirmation of the political, economic, and cultural importance of the Diaspora to the development of Africa.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. Regrettably, I cannot be more specific about the contributions I made to the African Union Diaspora Engagement. I believe you will understand why. Thus, the main point of my presentation is that I was privileged in my career to have served in Addis Ababa where, either as Ambassador of Nigeria or the Chief of Staff in the AU Commission, I played some critical roles in the African Union Diaspora engagement. In due time, perhaps one could say more and be more open, but it is not appropriate to do so now. What I can say with some measure of pride but gratitude to God, and deep appreciation to the various Presidents, Foreign Ministers, and other colleagues with whom I worked, is that Nigeria's imprint on Africa's Diaspora engagement is quite remarkable. The Foundation for Democracy in Africa has been a worthy partner all along and I commend them for their own role in greatly expanding Africa's engagement with its Diaspora.



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