

II. Development in Africa

African Union Summit: Continental Development, Justice in Palestine

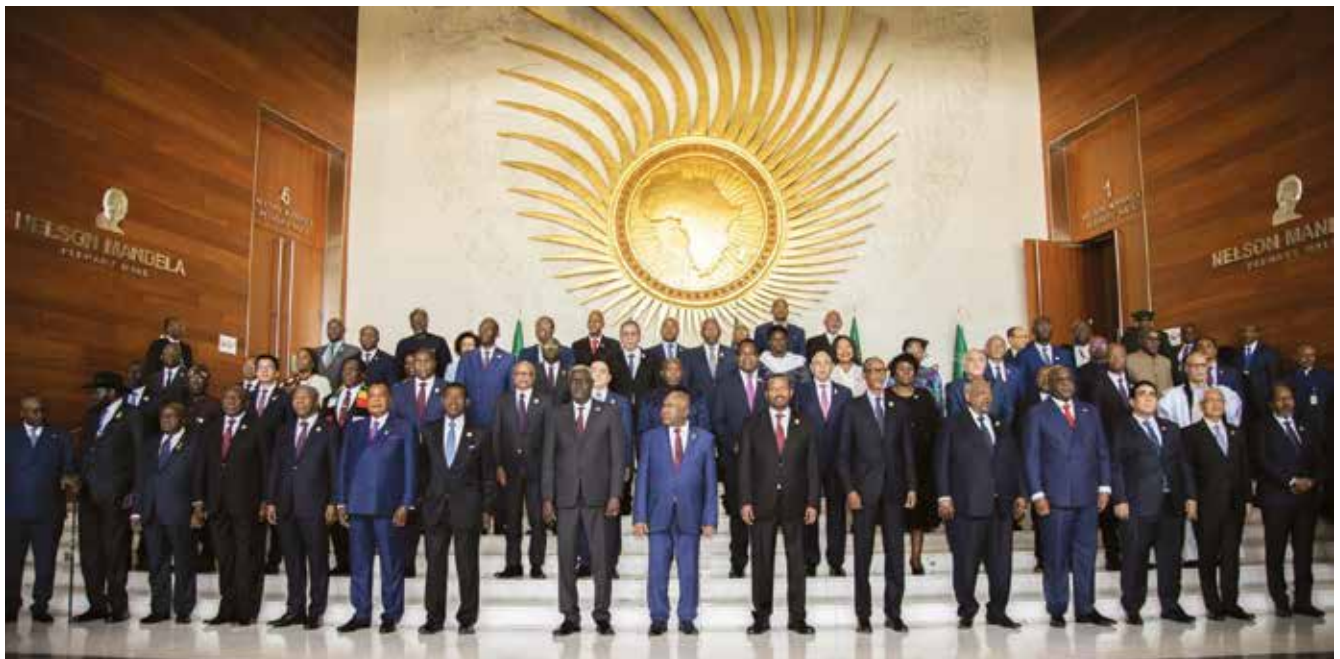
by Janet G. West and Marcia Merry Baker

Feb. 24—Africa has stepped forward as the moral compass of humanity. From the initiative by the nation of South Africa in December, 2023, to take to the World Court (the International Court of Justice) the conduct of Israel committing genocide in Gaza, to the commitment to the principle of economic development as a human right of all, leaders and nations from Africa are playing a vital international leadership role.

This was evident at the African Union (AU) annual summit Feb. 17–18 in Addis Ababa, where many heads of state and government, including South Africa’s President Cyril Ramaphosa, were among the officials present at the AU Ordinary Session of the Assembly, the top legal body in the 55-nation membership of

the organization. The AU gathering saw certain key consultations among four of the BRICS-9 nations—Brazil, South Africa, Egypt and Ethiopia, not as a group, but definitely as part of the leadership of the Global Majority.

This year’s AU Summit, the 37th, was titled, “Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century: Building Resilient Education Systems for Increased Access to Inclusive, Lifelong, Quality, and Relevant Learning in Africa,” and much attention was given to ongoing development goals. There was also attention to security and the terrible strife in Sudan, South Sudan and eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo; but, in addition, the Summit was the occasion—including



AU Commission

The African Union summit, Feb. 17–18 in Addis Ababa, concentrated on the AU development plan, Agenda 2063, with emphasis on education; on peace and security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and South Sudan; and on stopping the genocide in Gaza..

in pre- and post-Summit meetings—for deliberation on what must be done to stop the genocide in Gaza.

Reflecting these concerns, three of the special guests were UN Secretary General António Guterres, Prime Minister of the State of Palestine Mohammad Shtayyeh, and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. They all addressed the conference.

President Lula played a prominent role in the Summit proceedings, and side meetings, in what the mainstream media like to call his South-South agenda. But it is global. Brazil holds the 2024 chairmanship of the Group of 20, and the African Union is now a member for the first time. Lula spoke about the prospects for the African continent occupying an “extraordinary space in the future” world economy, and for ending the colonial era. He also spoke out sternly for ceasefire in Gaza, and for work towards negotiations to resolve the Ukraine crisis.

Lula made intense use of his five-day trip in Africa, visiting Egypt as well as Ethiopia. Before the AU Summit opened Feb. 17, Lula met one-on-one with the leaders of two new African BRICS members, Egypt and Ethiopia. Over Feb. 14–16, Lula was in Cairo, where he met with President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, and also attended an extraordinary session of the Council of the League of Arab States. On Feb. 16, Lula met in Addis Ababa with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

Then over the period of the Summit itself, although there is no read-out on private discussions, Presidents Lula and Ramaphosa—both from BRICS members nations—were both present. Before returning to Brazil, Lula gave a very powerful media briefing in Addis Ababa. [See excerpts following this article.]

It is noteworthy that within a day of the closing of the AU Summit, spokesmen for South Africa, Brazil and Egypt all gave testimony to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague, in the Court’s review of the conduct of Israel in the Palestinian territories, pursuant to a directive from the UN General Assembly in December, 2022. Ten out of the 52 nations testifying the week of Feb. 19–26 are from Africa. On Feb. 26, the African Union itself will give testimony to the ICJ, along with the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

AU Chairman’s Overview

Moussa Faki Mahamat (Chad), Chairperson of the AU, noted in [his remarks](#) opening the session that Africa faces many challenges—political and



CC/Paul Kagame

Brazilian President Lula da Silva: “the poor are the solution for the contemporary world, ... give them the opportunity they need to realize the middle-class society.”

institutional instability, poverty, and underdeveloped economies, among others—and that,

Conflict, violence and the decline of great principles have, unfortunately, taken over humility, peace and the nobility of the founding values of human civilization.

Not only have social inequalities widened, injustices multiplied, but hegemony and the absurd desire to resolve our differences by brutal and vain force prevail publicly before the eyes of all.

He spoke of the Gaza crisis with great emphasis and emotionally condemned Israel for its actions:

The most blatant case is that of Gaza in Palestine, literally razed to the ground, its people almost exterminated in the physical integrity of tens of thousands of its inhabitants, humiliated in their dignity and robbed of all their rights.

International law, international humanitarian law, human rights, morality in general, are

blithely ignored, trampled on, flouted.

He praised the role of South Africa—its ethical and judicial reaction before the International Court of Justice—and referenced Nelson Mandela’s words: “We know very well that our freedom is incomplete without that of Palestine,” and this was received with warm applause.

He went on to address the continuing war between Russia and Ukraine, the terrorism and conflicts ravaging several African nations, and the political instabilities in general.

But, in spite of these difficulties, he encouraged his audience to ensure that the AU makes an “irreplaceable contribution” in solving some of these challenges, and asserting the AU’s new role in the G20 forum.

He also exhorted the government leaders to forge ahead with technological developments and economic advances in a spirit of solidarity with other African nations, and not fall into narrow interests, but to revive Pan-Africanism.

BRICS Leaders Provide an Optimistic Perspective

The BRICS African member nations—Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Africa—made their presence felt in a positive way at the conference.

President Lula [addressed](#) the responsibilities and future of the Global South. He said, in part,

We Africans and Brazilians need to chart our own paths in the emerging international order. We need to create a new global governance, capable of facing the challenges of our time. The consolidation of the BRICS as the main forum for emerging countries is an undeniable step forward. Without the developing countries, it will not be possible to open up a new cycle of global expansion, combining growth, a reduction in inequalities, and environmental preservation, with an expansion of freedoms....



Michel Sidibé, X page

AU Chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat: Violence and the decline of great principles have taken over humility, peace, and the nobility of the founding values of civilization. The most blatant case: Gaza, razed to the ground, its people almost exterminated.

The Global South is becoming an unavoidable part of the solution to the main crises afflicting the planet. Crises that are the result of a model that concentrates wealth and that hit the poorest the hardest—including immigrants.... Development cannot be the privilege of the few.... There will be no stability or democracy with hunger and unemployment.

... Attempts to restore a global system based on ideological blocs are not applicable in the real world ... The Global South is becoming an unavoidable part of the solution of the main crises that afflict this planet....

The time is ripe to revive the best humanist traditions of the great leaders of African decolonization. Being a humanist today means condemning the attacks perpetrated by Hamas against Israeli civilians, and demanding the immediate release of all hostages. Being a humanist also demands rejecting Israel’s disproportionate response, which has killed almost 30,000 Palestinians in Gaza—the vast majority of them women and children—and caused the forced displacement of over 80% of the population.

The solution to this crisis will only last if we move quickly towards the creation of a Palestinian State that is also recognized as a full member of the United Nations—a strengthened UN that harbors a more representative Security Council, in which there are no countries with veto power, and which includes permanent members from Africa and Latin America.

He also addressed the war in Ukraine, deploring not only the loss of life, but also its impact globally in terms of food and fertilizer prices, and emphasized that the time has come in which it cannot be resolved militarily, but must be addressed with diplomacy.

President Lula also noted Africa’s great resources—its youthful population and natural resources; Brazil

wants to develop hand-in-hand with African nations, he said, not only in overcoming poverty, but also in enabling educational opportunities to flourish.

He concluded by pointing out the numerous areas in which Brazil and Africa can cooperate—education, healthcare, agriculture, debt relief—and emphasized that there will be several opportunities to increase such cooperation, such as at the upcoming G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro in November.

Stop Genocide in Gaza

Prime Minister of Palestine Mohammad Shtayyeh [brought his greetings](#) to Africa from the suffering people of Palestine, of Gaza, and appealed to the participants to stop the war in Gaza, and halt the illegal settlements; he was welcomed with long, warm applause.

“Let the voice of Africa and the voice of your union be loud for the freedom of Palestine and the right of its people to self-determination, and the embodiment of the Palestinian state and its recognition as a member state of the United Nations,” he said.

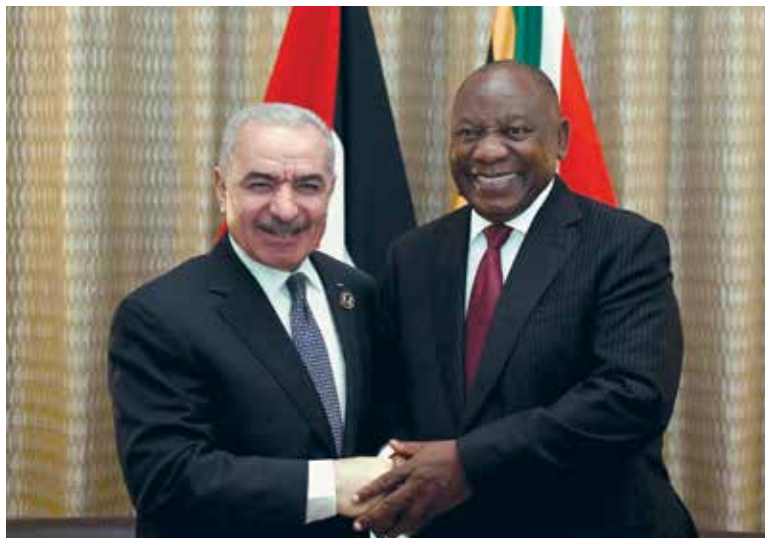
“Israel is an apartheid state and a state of racial discrimination in law and practice.... Israel is killing out of revenge, after 134 days of aggression, and wants to continue killing for as long as possible to serve [Benjamin] Netanyahu’s position as prime minister; this must not be allowed,” Shtayyeh said.

He praised the ongoing activity of the International Court of Justice, both on the issue of genocide and on the issue of the Israeli settlements in Palestine as a form of colonialism.

President Lula, in addition to raising the call for action to stop Israel’s assault on Gaza, has mobilized additional aid to Gaza from Brazil, since the United States and cohort nations have cut off funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the sole agency through which the hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians are fed. While in Cairo Feb. 15 Lula pledged extra financial donations to UNRWA, which now foresees closing down all operations in Gaza March 1, for lack of resources!

Egypt, as well, has mobilized a new program for emergency care in southern Gaza, setting up a shelter operation for 4,000 people.

An ugly counterpoint to these kinds of initiatives and discussions at the AU Summit was the attempt



GovernmentZA

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa (right) welcomes Mohammad Shtayyeh, Prime Minister of the State of Palestine, to the AU summit.

by an Israeli delegation to attend the event uninvited. The last year an Israeli delegation was accepted with observer status was 2021; it was subsequently revoked. Nevertheless, a group showed up from Israel at this year’s summit, including the Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Yaakov Blitstein, and Director of the Africa Management Department, Amit Bayas. They demanded to present their views. They were turned away. “Israel is not invited to the summit,” said Ebba Kalondo, spokesperson for the president of the AU Commission, on the opening day, Feb. 17, according to *Le Monde*.

Second Decade Toward Agenda 2063

The policy highlight of the Summit was the launch of the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan of the AU’s Agenda 2063, “The Africa We Want.” Agenda 2063 is a fifty-year blueprint for Africa’s socio-economic development and integration, adopted in 2013 by the AU member states after extensive consultations across the continent. The 2024 AU focus on education and skills will be a key part of the new decade.

In the pre-Summit ministerial and other meetings this year, fundamental programs were discussed relating to Agenda 2063, for example, progress to date on implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Initiated in 2019, this agreement seeks to further beneficial intra-African trade, ending the colonial trade patterns of predatory trade between Africa and Europe and the United States.

Economists estimate, for example, that imports from one African nation to another, for many goods, are more than 6% more costly at present, than importing these goods from outside the continent—partly because of tariffs between African nations, but also from lack of good transportation and other physical limitations.

At present, African exports within the continent are only about 14% of total African trade, in contrast with exports of Asian countries at 55% within Asia; exports within North America are 49%; and 63% within Europe.

Moving in many ways on Agenda 2063 puts an end to this legacy. As the AU website [describes](#) it, “Agenda 2063 is Africa’s blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future. It is the continent’s strategic framework that aims to deliver on its goal for inclusive and sustainable development and is a concrete manifestation of the pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity pursued under Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance. The genesis of Agenda 2063 was the realization by African leaders that there was a need to refocus and reprioritize Africa’s agenda from the struggle against

apartheid and the attainment of political independence for the continent which had been the focus of The Organization of African Unity (OAU), the precursor of the African Union; and instead to prioritize inclusive social and economic development, continental and regional integration, democratic governance, and peace and security amongst other issues aimed at repositioning Africa to become a dominant player in the global arena.”

It is an ambitious and optimistic plan. Its “[Flagship Projects](#)” include:

- An integrated high speed train network that would connect all African capitals and centers of commerce.
- Completion of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).
- Implementation of the Grand Inga Dam Project, which is expected to generate 43.2 GW of electricity.
- Its Africa Outer Space Strategy, to bolster the development of Africa’s space technologies, to be applied to agriculture, disaster management, remote sensing, climate forecast, and banking and finance, as well as defense and security.

David Cherry and Gretchen Small contributed to this article.

Lula to Western Political Elites: Treat Us as Human, or Human Beings Will Replace You

by Gretchen Small

Feb. 24—In his Feb. 18 press conference in Addis Ababa at the end of his five-day trip to Egypt and Ethiopia, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil took up again, even more forcefully, key themes he had raised in his address Feb. 17 to the opening of the African Union summit. The first theme addressed was Africa’s role in the new economic world order now coming together around the BRICS and the Global South, an order which not only will end colonialism—and the colonial practices of the IMF and World Bank—but will become the factor which provides much-needed growth for the entire world economy:

.... The African continent is an extraordinary space of the future for those who believe that the Global South will be the novelty of the 21st century in the new world economy....

I said today at a meeting with an African president



Ricardo Stukert/PR (Agência Brasil)

Brazil’s President Lula pledged more funds for UNRWA, the UN agency on which hundreds of thousands of Gazans depend for food, after the U.S. accelerated the “final solution” by cutting off funds to UNRWA.

that since the Berlin Conference of 1884, when Africa was divided up for the countries of the old continent, for England, for France, for Germany above all, this