

“AFRICAN DIASPORA IN A MULTI-POLAR 21st CENTURY.”

The President and Highly Esteemed members of the Ivory Club of Tampa,

The Mayors of Tampa Bay and Port Richey

Honored guests,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for this unique opportunity to keynote your highly valued annual Speakers' series and an evening in Africa -- what a splendid occasion; what a vivid demonstration of our cultural diversity and the richness of our collective efforts in favor of good causes on the continent and to people of African descent here in the United States. It is truly an honor and a pleasure to be here this evening.

I would like to give a special 'shout out' to members of the Executive Committee of the Ivory Club for determining that we devote this year's keynote to the "African Diaspora in a Multi-Polar 21st Century." The theme is topical and the moment is right!

For students of world affairs, it has been exhilarating to watch the arc of global geopolitics in the past four decades. Many of you may remember the activism former Polish president Lech Walesa at the time when he led the Solidarity Movement in Gdansk, Poland; the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War, and of course, the collapse of the Berlin wall and reunification of Germany.

In Africa, what political scientists describe as the 'third wave of democratization' saw Namibia obtain its independence in 1989, and the dismantling of apartheid in 1991/92 and the release of Nelson Mandela who in 1994, got elected the first president of a new, free and democratic South Africa.

We also witnessed the first 'National Conference' in Benin Republic in 1990, that brought an end to the Marxist-Leninist regime of then president Mathieu Kerekou. Significantly, the Benin conference spurred a series of national conferences in countries such as Congo Brazzaville, Mali, Togo, Zaire (or today's Democratic Republic of Congo) and across much of Francophone Africa, resulting in the fall of many military regimes and pro-soviet one party states, and the expansion of political space. Democratic principles of political pluralism and rule of law, human rights, civic engagement, media rights, and inclusion gained prominence.

There's no doubt that by the last decade of the past century, the West had won the cold war and appeared poised to stay uncontested at the helm of a unipolar universe. Many around the world began to talk about 'globalization' and brilliant political thinkers like Francis Fukuyama wrote "The End of History and the Last man" in which he posited that 'history should be viewed as an evolutionary process, and *liberal democracy is [had become] the final form of government for all nations.*'

Fukuyama and others professed that with the ascendancy of Western liberal democracy, humanity had reached not just the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: That is, "the end-point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."

Well, fast forward to this day, and the world is not the unipolar entity some dreamed about and others feared. The world has become, in the words of many global thinkers and analysts, a multipolar universe, although one must hasten to clarify that the theory is not that all major powers are equally powerful economically or militarily, but rather that a number of world powers are today able to project and exert influence beyond their national borders. For our continent, Africa, that surge of superpower influence and competition has generated concerns in some quarters about the advent of a second "scramble for Africa,"

So, besides the United States, there's China which, with its 1.4 billion inhabitants, remains Africa's largest trading partner for 15 years in a row, a position once occupied by the European Union countries. Then there is Russia, with its military might and a dangerous opportunism that seeks to ride a growing wave of anti-western sentiment among African youth even at the expense of many aspects of international law. Its leader seems determined to reconstitute at least some version of the Soviet empire whose demise he apparently regrets.

Other international actors deeply engaged in Africa include India, Brazil, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Japan and South Korea. It is therefore no surprise to see the multiplicity of high visibility Heads of State summits hosted by these countries and their African counterparts in an effort to enhance economic, diplomatic and political ties. In short: African votes count in international arenas such as the United Nations; African raw materials count even more.

Yet, as the full time afro-optimist that I am, I can confidently state that the dreaded second 'scramble for Africa' will not happen - that is, if we of the African Diaspora were to collectively activate our resistance as the much needed firewall or buffer to such a

dreadful repeat of history. Today, unlike during the Berlin conference of 1884, the African Diaspora is present on all seven continents of the globe. According to well documented sources, the population of the African Diaspora is estimated at 350 million worldwide, placing it right after China and India - and before the United States, Indonesia and Brazil -- if it were a country of its own.

Speaking to the African Diaspora community for me is almost like preaching to the pastor or singing to the choir because you all know the verses and chapters so well and, in many cases, are already doing the needful. Yet, the reaffirmation is important. For example, many (if not all) of you are shareholders in the massive enterprise of remittances which, according to World Bank studies on Migration and Development, surpass \$100 billion annually for Africa; an amount that is more than Overall Development Assistance (ODA) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). One can only wish that the shareholders that we all are, had more say in how the enterprise is run and how the dividends that flow from the investment are distributed.

Along those lines, and to conclude, I would like to make three recommendations on how the African Diaspora could increase its relevance in the current multipolar world:

1) The Diaspora must scale up its role on African Agency.

In my mind, part of the world's restiveness about Africa stems from a strong desire to engage in a global context in which the African state no longer has monopoly in determining perceptions of the continent or its reputation and credibility in the international arena. I would therefore propose that rather than be timid or minimalist in our engagement and approaches, we of the Diaspora must step forward and aggregate our groupings and networks, and with determination and greater intentionality, more aggressively speak up for and on behalf of the continent. The continent needs more voices to speak on its behalf internationally, and the Diaspora has a unique appreciation of the multi-dimensional spaces in which these conversations do occur.

The Diaspora possesses the expertise and institutional familiarity with public and private sector processes on both sides of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. And, lest we forget, remittances do not only have to be financial; they can also be of a social nature to include the ideas, knowledge, norms and practices, and the social capital that members of the Diaspora regularly transfer, albeit informally, to their respective communities and countries of origin.

II) The Diaspora must lead in assisting continental organizations such as the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) operationalize the lofty and progressive instruments adopted by these entities.

While the continent has adopted quite progressive and even futuristic legal instruments such as the African Union charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) to sustain its growth, prosperity and development, the ineffective implementation of these instruments undermines efforts at accountability, good governance, creativity and entrepreneurship among our fellow citizens.

The African Union recognizes the Diaspora as the sixth region (alongside the five regional economic communities, and has a bureaucratic entry point for engagement through a structure known as the *'African Union Sixth Region Global'* that is "dedicated to representing and advocating for the African Diaspora worldwide." To be truly impactful in today's global content, that entity and others within our continental bodies must intensify their engagements in order to become forward leaning and more operational and visible. Such entities must also serve as two-way or multiple track platforms that are open and receptive to Diaspora input and action.

III) The Diaspora must intensify its advocacy for good governance and make the necessary linkages with citizen engagement, accountability and development.

This era of renewed superpower competition across Africa and other parts of the world is fraught with excessive misinformation and disinformation, and the Diaspora cannot afford to stand idly by while the gains of our hard fought independence and recent democratization efforts are being undermined.

- We cannot and must not stand by while the continent and our individual countries are being negatively impacted by poor leadership with no prospects of success.
- We cannot, and must not stand by while a wave of toxic disinformation is descended upon the continent that seeks not to amplify the positive values and assets that we possess as a people, but rather is a throwback to antiquated models that have failed us in the past and can only prolong the hardship and suffering of our people.
- Yes, we cannot and must not forget that among the Founding Fathers of today's Africa were many that had served in the Diaspora and who from the trenches or

long distance made the case and put up the good fight for the independence that our respective countries and the continent so cherish today.

Many great African leaders at independence or in the pro-independence movement, starting with Rudoulf Douala Manga Bell of Cameroon even before the second world war cut their teeth in the diaspora. And later, others such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal, Amical Cabral of Guinea Bissau and Cabo Verde, Nnamdi Azikwe of Nigeria, Felix Houphouet Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, Tom Mboya of Kenya, to name a few, demonstrated their worth and prowess while in the Diaspora or actively helping to mobilize it. Their calling and service at the critical moment of independence for the continent must be replicated anew by the Diaspora population of today. Collectively, we must step forward and rise to the occasion as Africa stands in the crossroads of a multipolar world in the 21 st century.

- 1) Thank you for your time and attention, and I look forward to our follow on conversations.