REPORT

Can the new AU commission reposition Africa in a Changing Global Governance Landscape ?
The Institute for Security Studies & The Institute for Peace and Security Studies

Online

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On the 11th of February 2025, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) co-hosted a webinar exploring Africa's positioning within the global governance landscape. The event examined how the upcoming African Union (AU) summit could influence leadership decisions and shape the continent's role in international affairs.

Key discussions revolved around governance, economic sustainability, youth representation, and security challenges.

Key Speakers:

- **Prof. Patrick Lumumba**, Lawyer and Pan-Africanist (Keynote Speaker)
- **Janah Ncube**, Deputy CEO, Crisis Action
- **Prof. Thomas Tieku**, Associate Professor, University of Western Ontario
- **Paul-Simon Handy**, Director, ISS Regional Office for East Africa and AU Representative
- **Moderator:** Dr. Andrews Atta-Asamoah, ISS Addis Ababa

Prof. Patrick Lumumba's Perspective

Prof. Lumumba strongly emphasized the need for Africa to reassess its governance and economic strategies to achieve true sovereignty and sustainable development. He was particularly critical of the enduring influence of colonial-era structures, such as the Commonwealth and La Francophonie, which he argued continue to shape African politics and economies in ways that hinder progress and self-determination. Furthermore, he warned against the over-reliance on foreign aid, asserting that such dependency undermines Africa's capacity to develop independently. Instead, he advocated for a shift towards self-reliant policies that empower African nations to leverage their own resources, foster economic resilience, and dictate their own development agenda without external interference.

Adding to these concerns, the absence of key countries such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Mali, Guinea, Gabon, and Sudan at the summit highlights Africa's disunity at a time when collective leadership and collaboration are essential for addressing the continent's challenges.

Janah Ncube's Perspective

Janah Ncube highlighted three major challenges that Africa faces today. First, food security remains a critical issue. Despite possessing approximately 60% of the world's arable land, the continent still relies heavily on food imports to feed its population. This paradox underscores the urgent need to enhance local agricultural production, invest in agricultural infrastructure, and strengthen food sovereignty policies. Secondly, she emphasized the problem of youth representation in governance. Africa has a predominantly young population, yet this demographic is largely underrepresented in political and decision-making spheres, which are dominated by an aging elite. This disconnect hinders innovation and fresh perspectives, making it essential to foster greater youth inclusion in political and economic processes. Lastly, security issues remain a major concern, as Africa currently hosts 30% of the world's conflicts. This instability hampers development, deters investment, and exacerbates humanitarian crises. In light of these challenges, it is crucial to implement sustainable solutions to ensure stable governance, better youth integration, and strengthened food self-sufficiency.

Prof. Thomas Tieku's Perspective

Professor Tieku critically examined the shortcomings of the African Union (AU) leadership election process, highlighting its lack of transparency and effectiveness. Despite Africa being a continent with a predominantly young population, the average age of AU leadership candidates remains significantly high at 69 years. He argued that this opaque system often results in the selection of leaders who may not be the most qualified or best suited to address the continent's pressing challenges. According to him, there is an urgent need for reform to ensure that the selection process identifies leaders capable of making decisive and strategic contributions. He emphasized that Africa requires strong and visionary leadership to effectively represent the continent's interests on the global stage. By addressing these issues, the AU could foster a leadership structure that is more aligned with Africa's needs and aspirations.

Paul-Simon Handy's Perspective

Paul-Simon Handy underlined concerns regarding the African Union's (AU) thematic focus for the year, arguing that it does not adequately address the most urgent and pressing challenges confronting the continent. He emphasized that Africa's multilateral governance framework is becoming increasingly fragile and requires immediate reform to enhance its effectiveness. According to Handy, the weakening of these governance structures poses significant risks to the continent's ability to respond to critical political, economic, and security issues. He particularly stressed the need for a substantial adaptation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which is currently ill-equipped to handle the complex crises affecting Africa. Without meaningful reforms, the AU and its institutions may struggle to provide the stability and leadership necessary for addressing Africa's evolving challenges.

Challenges and Opportunities

The discussions highlighted key **challenges** and **potential opportunities** for the AU moving forward. While governance issues and security threats remain significant obstacles, there are also opportunities for **reform and growth**.

Challenges:

- **Disunity among African nations**, as seen in the absence of key states at the summit.
- An **opaque and flawed AU leadership election process**.
- **Heavy reliance on external aid**, limiting Africa's economic independence.

Opportunities:

- **Strengthening AU institutions** to improve governance and leadership.
- **Investing in Africa's youth** for sustainable leadership development.
- **Reforming agricultural policies** to enhance food security and economic stability.

Conclusion

The webinar emphasized the critical role of strong leadership and institutional reforms in driving Africa's progress. As the AU prepares for its upcoming summit, it must prioritize governance, economic sustainability, and security to ensure meaningful outcomes. Key recommendations include implementing leadership reforms to enhance transparency and competence, fostering unity and institutional strengthening among African nations, and encouraging greater youth participation in decision-making. These efforts will be essential in shaping a more stable and prosperous future for the continent.