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Honorary Doctorate

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An urgency to drive Made in Africa agenda to realize a truly independent and prosperous Africa

On the 25th of May 1963, 32 countries and 32 presidents came together, led by Emperor Haile Selassie, who hosted them in Ethiopia. He was partnered by another incredible African, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the founding father of Ghana.

On the 24th of May 1963, on the eve of the founding of the Organisation of African Unity, Dr. Nkrumah addressed the presidents and implored Africans to unite. He argued that colonialism prevented Africa's growth and development. He said colonialism prevented Africa from accumulating the capital that is required to industrialize and grow the continent. He had a simple five-point plan:

- He said as a continent, as a people, we need to create a common union;
- He said as a people, we need to grow our economy and to industrialize;
- He said we had to create a common market. And this was all in 1963;
- He said we had to create a common African currency – and a common African monetary zone;
- He said we had to create a common foreign policy and system of defence system.
- He said we ought to create a common African citizenship

This was all in 1963.

I will have it put on record that only in 2018 did we agree finally in Kigali to establish a common African market, the Africa free trade continental agreement (the AfCFTA).

I'll put it on record that only in 2018 did we begin to make progress towards a common African citizenship and Africa passport. We haven't actually achieved that yet. It was a response to redressing the difficult times that the continent went through in 1886 when European countries gathered in Berlin and decided on how to divide this continent. What we didn't anticipate would take another 60 years to redress this historical issue.

In the 60 years of the African Union,

What they didn't anticipate is that 65 percent of the Union's budget would still come from foreign shores.

What they didn't anticipate is that the building that we call the Center of African Leadership in Ethiopia, would be funded and built by Chinese.

What they didn't anticipate was that Francophone African countries would still be fighting in 2024, to extricate themselves from the clutches of France.

What they didn't anticipate is that Francophone countries would have pledge over 50 percent of their reserves to France and that walk around with a derogatory currency in their pocket, the CFA, the French Colonies of Africa. Of course they tried to clean it up later when they realised this doesn't look right. That you can't be calling a currency, the French Colonies of Africa (CFA). So now they call it the Africa Financial Community, or something like that. But, you know, you cannot just change the name and think we forget the history.

What they didn't anticipate is that the most creative continent in the world, will still only account for only 3% of the \$3 trillion global creative economy.

What they didn't anticipate is that Africa will only account for five percent of the tourism, while accounting for 15% of the global population.

We rose within optimism and excitement in 2002, when another great African re-gathered all the Africans in Durban, former president, Thabo Mbeki, and said, we need to, we need to rethink, we need to reassess where we headed, we need to re-imagine the African Renaissance – and led the renaming of the Organisation of African Unity to the African Union, with a renewed vision.

At that time they urged us to observe Africa Day on the 25th of May every single year. While it's important, I think have as Africans, as a continent is we do not need any more days to observe or any more celebrations. Because what we needed most was a plan of action.

Thus in 2013 when African leaders gathered together again to celebrate 50 years of the founding of the OAU, in Addis Ababa, they agreed on a renewed agenda for an Africa that is integrated, prosperous and peaceful.

Now what we require more urgently, is what Thabo Mbeki said in on 9 April 1998 when he was addressing the United Nations University where your former, Vice-Chancellor is now the youngest and first Africa vice-Chancellor. He said in his address, that “out of Africa reborn needs to come out modern products of human economic activities, significant contributions to the world of knowledge, the arts, science, technology, and new images of an Africa that is at peace and prosperity.’

What he said in simple language, he said we need to create brands, we need to create products and services, we need to create ideas, we need to create events that speak to Africa, that speak Africa.

But what he didn't anticipate was that more than two decades later, in a study that I've undertaken since 2011, “Brand Africa 100: Africa's best brands,” is that and on average, only 15 percent of the brands that Africans admire are made in Africa.

So you can see that the journey is quite far.

That if 85 percent of the products and the services that we identify with and admire as Africans are not from Africa, it is not yet Uhuru.

But it also depends on the perspective that you want to apply to this.

Because we can look at this differently as an 85 percent opportunity, for Africa to do better.

We can look at it differently and say that with a continent where 70 percent is under the age of 30, we ought to have the energy to fast track the African renaissance.

We need to do better than what Ali Mazrui, the late Tanzanian/Kenyan academic, who once remarked that “Africa produces what it doesn't consume. and consumes what it doesn't produce.”

So our job is quite, simple: To conceive, to produce and to consume “Made in Africa.”

Made in Africa is an urgent call for us as Africans today. Whether it's in the area of academia, whether it's in the area of goods and services, whether it's an idea of creativity.

There is an urgency for every single one of us in this room to know that if Africa is truly going to become independent, if Africa is truly going to become free, if Africa is truly going to become integrated, if Africa is truly going to become prosperous, “Made in Africa” must be our singular and most urgent agenda.

What we ought to do as Africans:

- We need to stop blaming.
- We need to stop borrowing.
- We need to stop begging.

We need to stop borrowing.

If China is building every road in the continent; if Europe is financing our leadership at the African Union, if every single debt in this continent is external, you can see the challenge: We will forever be burdened by debt. As a continent we cannot afford to the \$1.8 trillion public debt we're in right now.

We also need to stop begging.

We have to stop the “We are the world” anthems which of the world. We cannot be everyone's charity case. We have to stop everybody else coming up with ideas on how to save Africa because only Africa can save Africa.

We need to stop blaming.

We have to stop blaming everybody for the state of the continent. We have to stop blaming everybody for the story of the continent. Why should we blame CNN for how they look at Africa? CNN, after all, is an American channel created to tell the American story and other stories through an American

lens. We have to stop blaming Al Jazeera for how they look at the African continent. Because the Arab saw the perception problems that they were facing they took the matters into their hands. We must accept that BBC looks after British interests. RTT looks after Russian interests, CNN looks after the American interests. We, too, need to take a hold of our own story. Because otherwise everybody looks at Africa as just poor, diseased and at war.

It is the single story that is told about our continent. And as Chimamanda Adichie, the great Nigerian said, there's a danger of a single story of the continent because all it does is perpetuate the stereotypes about our continent.

I was in London two weeks ago, speaking at the, at the, at the Brand Finance global Soft Power summit. One gentleman stood up in the, in the room, and said to me, Thebe, you are out here in Europe, championing a story about the great Africa, the great African Renaissance, but your country, your countries, are always at war. Your countries are always in conflict. I stopped for a minute to remind him that the last time I checked: Africa was not in Ukraine. Africa was not in Iran. Africa was not in Afghanistan.

But because they are telling the story, they will reshape the story the way they see it. But we have a responsibility to tell our own story. And it is why Chinua Achebe said, “until the lion learns how to tell its own story, tales of the hunter will always be glorified.”

It is our responsibility . . .

To re-think, to re-tell the African story in our own languages, to re-tell the story of a different and growing and rising Africa. To tell it from our own different places and spaces. I think it's Mother Teresa who once said, “do what you can with what you have, where you are.”

My journey started on 15 July 1996 in the city of first Kimberly. Where the diamond rush of 1871 became the catalyst for the growth of Africa, the catalyst for the growth of South Africa, the catalyst for what everybody knows of South Africa's economy, of modern South Africa.

I am a descendent of man who's roots are in Molepolole, Botswana and woman who's roots are from Tsokonyane, Taung – in South Africa, whose paths intersected in Kimberely to birth my mother.

We are the people of the crocodile tribe.

We are the jackal clan.

We are renowned for eating a cow alive.

Although I was denied my paternal history by a man who denied me at birth, I'm proud and honoured that I was raised by a young, beautiful, vivacious, caring, and educated woman. Miriam Gaolebalwe Ikalafeng.

As is the story of most of us Africans, my grandparents – my grandmother a disciplinarian, helped to raise, nurturing and care for me while my mother worked to build a career and put food on our table.

May the soul Regina and Frans Mediole Ikalafeng rest in peace.

I'm proud to have been born and named Thebe-e-tsile, which, as you know, means “the shield has arrived.” I'm proud that my mother's intention was to also name me Kosi, because in her eyes we I was royalty – the king in the continent. Someone who will have the responsibility to protect our future.

I have come to understand the privilege of our names. I've come to understand the responsibility of our names. And over my 57 years, I have steadfastly moved in the direction of my name and asked myself a few simple questions:

- How can I contribute to the protection of the history of Africa?
- How can I contribute to the growth of Africa?
- How can I contribute to the story of Africa?
- How can I be a narrator of our beautiful story of diverse people and the delightful cultures.

In going through every single country in the continent multiple times and over 100 times in a country like Ghana, I have come to appreciate that there is no continent as beautiful, innovative and industrious as our continent.

It is a journey that I have taken from the length and breadth of the continent. I was taking it to affirm what I know, that our continent is great. I was taking it to contradict every other negative narrative about the continent. I was taking it intentionally to build on the great journeys of Kwame Nkrumah, Thomas Sankara, Jomo Kenyatta, Kenneth Kaunda, Julius Nyerere and Patrice Lumumba.

This is a journey that I have taken intentionally with incredible pride and incredible care. I've also accepted that I'm living in a time different to theirs and understood very well what W Dubois said, that we need to have a “double consciousness” about how we look at the continent. There's nothing wrong with everything that we have, that we have learned, or more aptly appropriated from Europe. And there's nothing wrong with who we are as Africans. We ought to take dual pride in our heritage as Africans with a European history, albeit a difficult one.

I am singularly honoured, Chancellor, to receive the PhD (Honoris Causa) from this incredible university. This university many years ago was the exclusive bastion of Afrikaner intelligence, and over the years, from Iron Rensburg, to Tshilidzi Marwala and now chancellor Mpedi, this is a university that has shown that it is possible to change, it is possible not just to change for the sake of change, but to change progressively, to change forward and to re-tell the story of a proud continent that can renew itself.

I receive and accept this honorary doctorate with incredible humility, proud and grateful for every single one who's been on my journey: My teachers, my school at St. Boniface, where I started as a four-year-old at St. Boniface in the creche and finished matric – although I spent only one month in matric as the schools came to a halt to challenge the apartheid system. But because I was born by mother was always first and my grandmother understood the value of education, even with one month off of matric, I was able to get a university entrance when schools resumed and we had a chance to write – with only six weeks to go.

I am honoured to receive this honorary doctorate on behalf of the marketing industry that creates the ideas and the stories that are told about this continent. The stories that will be told in the future about why “Made in Africa” is excellent if not better than “made in America,” “made in Europe,” “made in France” or elsewhere, because none of those countries can ever, ever come close to the innate excellence, authenticity and creativity of our continent.

I receive this honorary doctorate in the presence of a young man, Thato Mabuza. My godson, who at the age of eight years old, because it is our responsibility to show the young ones the possibilities of a better continent. He will dream not just to receive an honorary doctorate. He will dream and ultimately contribute towards a better Africa.

I receive this on behalf of every single one in the industry that embraced me, as they were saying yesterday, “as the problematic unconventional marketer” who only became a marketing director after 18 months or so of working in the industry and went on to inspire others to pursue a career in branding, and change how people think about African professionals.

I received this on behalf of the 1.3 billion Africans who believe that our continent has a future because everybody else has a past.

Thank You.