

Mike JOCKTANE

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« The Role of Inclusive Governance in Peaceful Coexistence in Africa »

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Distinguished guests, Good evening

It is a great privilege for me to stand here before you on the occasion of the 8th edition of the PAN AFRICAN LEADERSHIP AND HONOUR SYMPOSIUM (PALESH-ABUJA2022).

I feel even more honoured to share on the Role of Inclusive Governance in Coexistence in Africa with the eminent personalities taking part in this remarkable event.

Before I get to the heart of the matter, allow me to introduce myself to you. My name is Mike JOCKTANE and I am from Gabon.

From a very young age, the reality of the other has imposed itself on me in such a way that I have been committed to serving him for more than thirty years, first in the Church, as Pastor, then as Bishop.

The ever-growing need to take action and to change the living conditions of my fellow citizens then pushed me to become involved in politics.

I served my country first as a Personal Adviser, then as Director of Cabinet of the late Omar BONGO ONDIMBA, former President of the Gabonese Republic.

In 2009, convinced of the veracity of his attachment to Gabon, I joined the late André MBA OBAME, from whom I learned the mechanisms of politics.

Deeply attached to the values of the Republic and anchored in the Christian principles of life, I firmly believe that it is difficult, if not impossible to do good to others without taking the trouble to listen to them...

Without having seen and experienced the realities of their daily lives as closely as possible.

The African people, in general, and the Gabonese in particular, are crumbling under immense suffering in all areas of their lives.

It is driven by the desire to know in depth the daily life of the Gabonese people that led me to tour my country.

You know, I have never believed in this remote governance that pushes those in power to confine themselves to their palaces from where they take all the decisions without ever getting closer to the people.

I am convinced that a leader worthy of the name must be able to melt into the people, into the mass and immerse himself in their daily lives.

Therefore, I travel all over Gabon, including the hinterland, and go to all the provinces; town by town and village by village in order to find realistic and factual solutions to the problems of the Gabonese.

During these privileged moments, I listen to them and I share with them my vision of a Gabon that takes care of its children; my ambition of the New Gabon.

In my opinion, this is a first step towards inclusive governance, because if governance refers to the exercise of legitimate power, which is responsible for the functioning of a country or an organisation, whatever it may be, we speak of inclusive governance when

governments allow the participation of citizens in the decision-making process in the country's operating policies.

In other words, inclusive governance is about allowing the people to play a full role in the conduct of state affairs. I consider it to be, in reality, power of the people, by the people and for the people, i.e. democracy.

As John Jerry RAWLINGS says: "Democracy does not mean merely guaranteeing abstract freedoms on paper. It means, above all, being able to feed, clothe and house oneself... all those things without which life is not worth living. It is time for us to restructure this society in a truly democratic and meaningful way to ensure the engagement and active participation of the people in the decision-making process.

I would like to highlight a few phrases that I think are very important here.

They are : Legitimate Power and Citizen Participation...

Since I have the responsibility of speaking before former Presidents and current Heads of State, I would like to communicate my understanding and say that power is legitimate when it is exercised in accordance with the rules established by the supreme law: the Constitution.

Citizen participation, on the other hand, refers to voluntary citizen engagement in government decision-making.

Inclusive governance would then be a mode of management in which the people take an active part in the decisions, decrees, laws and other legislative and executive texts taken and voted by the state institutions through referendums and the pure and simple application of the sacrosanct principles of democracy.

Today, however, our African governments seem to have lost sight of the notion of community and living together.

To be more concrete, I am going to talk about my country, Gabon, where laws have been passed that are totally at odds with the principles of life, the habits and customs of the people, including one that is particularly controversial: the decriminalisation of homosexuality.

Indeed, having not been consulted and feeling dishonoured, even violated, the Gabonese people denounced this text, rejecting it with the utmost energy by demonstrating in the streets.

In a context where inclusive governance is the preferred mode of management, the Gabonese government should have allowed a debate on the issue and consulted the people through a referendum, thus giving them the opportunity to make their opinion known before proceeding to vote on this law, which is considered iniquitous.

Inclusive governance is the best way to invite the people to the decision-making table and give them the opportunity to make their needs, views and vision heard.

It is an opportunity for minorities, the disenfranchised and the voiceless to have a say in the policies that directly affect them and their lives.

Indeed, who better than a person with a mobility impairment to find solutions to the problems inherent in living with a disability?

Who, better than a woman, knows the difficulties of being a woman?

Who, better than a young person, knows the hazards of the younger generation and can provide solutions?

Inclusive governance is a sharp way of finding solutions to equally sharp problems, all together, in community.

It allows a perfect alignment between the reality of the people and the policies put in place to change it positively and improve the lives of citizens through practical actions.

It is a pathway to policies that provide effective and sustainable solutions for the country's economic growth, as well as its political and social development.

Therefore, focusing on inclusive governance is essential to advance democratic values such as peaceful pluralism and respect for diversity, human rights, and equality before the law, but also to ensure sustainable, durable and genuine development.

And here we enter squarely into its influence on peaceful coexistence.

It is essential to understand that man could lose his humanity outside of social life.

Thus, in order to blossom and evolve, he must be able to find his place among his fellow human beings and contemporaries. He must learn to live with others, to accept and respect them for what they are and for their differences.

I am absolutely convinced that our African continent draws all its strength and beauty from the immense diversity of its peoples.

Therefore, by promoting community-based decision making and bringing the people into the decision making process, inclusive governance provides an opportunity for all divergent and different voices to be heard.

As you know, more than half of the African population lives below the poverty line and this situation is more than a handicap to the development of all of us.

One of the things that inclusive governance can achieve is the eradication of poverty and, consequently, economic growth and human development.

However, in order to achieve this ideal, peace and security are indispensable, including the peaceful coexistence of the different tribes and ethnic groups that populate each African country.

As a political cleric, I advocate for self-acceptance and acceptance of the other, emphasising the need for each other to evolve and progress in our society together.

Indeed, we Africans really need to join forces in the fight against the evils that plague our continent, including poverty and insecurity, civil wars and ethnic conflicts, and so on.

Allow me to analyse these conflicts...

Tribal wars such as the 1990-1994 war in Rwanda, the civil war in the Congo, to name but a few, are rooted in our lack of understanding of our fellow human beings and the rejection that can result from this.

And the inability of our governments to resolve these crises stems not from the absence of solutions, but rather from the neglect of those stemming from our ancestral habits and customs, which I consider to be the first stammerings of inclusive governance.

For yes, we African people have always functioned in communities. From decision-making to conflict resolution; from the smallest family unit to the clan, and then to the country, we have always evolved in community and according to well-established rules.

The arrival of the colonisers made us lose sight of these values, which have nevertheless proved their worth.

For example, with regard to the civil war in Rwanda, the story goes that on their arrival, the German and then Belgian colonisers found a society that did not correspond to European criteria and decided to classify the populations according to characteristics such as their activities or their physical appearance.

They were particularly impressed by the Rwandan Tutsi monarchy and equated the Tutsis in general with the royal court and a superior 'race'. The colonisers describe the Tutsis as taller, better looking and more capable of leadership.

The colonial administration therefore relied on the Tutsis, to the detriment of the mwami of the Hutu clans.

The old distinction between Hutu and Tutsi was exacerbated, as Hutus were considered inferior in colonial society.

Access to benefits, education and administrative positions is reserved primarily for Tutsis. The terms 'Hutu' (commoner) and 'Tutsi' (noble) became an essential identity reference for Rwandans, leading to an antagonistic differentiation in society between these two groups.

This is how a civil war broke out between two sister ethnic groups that had previously lived together in harmony despite being aware of their differences.

A government decision to elevate one and belittle the other will exacerbate tensions and inflame hatred. As a result, between eight hundred thousand (800,000) and one million (1,000,000) Rwandans lost their lives during this war.

More recently, all over our continent, and more particularly here in Nigeria, we have experienced profound crises also due to the misunderstanding and rejection of the other, and this time, on a completely different aspect of individual freedoms: religion.

Indeed, on Sunday 5 June, a few kilometres from here, in the town of OWO, many Christians were murdered while attending the Sunday service at the Catholic Church of St. Francis.

I believe that no cause or purpose justifies such acts of terrorism against innocent people and I reiterate my condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

Nevertheless, I cannot help but draw a parallel between this scourge and the intolerance of the other due in this case to his expression of faith.

Koffi ANNAN, former Secretary General of the United Nations, stated that: "Tolerance has never stirred up civil war, intolerance has covered the earth with carnage".

On the strength of this certainty, I am all the more incensed by the crises that plague our continent because they seem to be accepted and maintained by our governments.

Yes, no matter how hard I turn the question, I remain convinced that these crises would never have erupted in a context where inclusive governance would have been the rule.

They would not have happened if the coloniser and the governments had allowed the people to express themselves.

Finally, I believe that they would never have started and would not have continued if the latent disputes had been settled according to our African customs.

This is why I think that a restoration of our cultural sovereignty is more than necessary and this is one of my fights.

Even science teaches us about the benefits of living in society by showing that there is attraction between two bodies composed of different atoms.

This is indicative of the vastness of the riches we could draw from others, especially when they are different from us.

We are all different; it is for the good of us all!

How monotonous it would be to be clones of each other!

What would be the point of living together if we are guided by a single thought?

In reality, it is because I am Gabonese, you are Nigerians, Ghanaians, Congolese, Cameroonians and others, that platforms like this one are so enriching!

And it is because we are driven by the desire to understand each other and to move forward together towards the development of our respective countries that we are gathered here.

Is this not inclusive governance?

To conclude my remarks, I would like to borrow this assertion from Gandhi and illustrate the crucial nature of inclusive governance in that it really allows us to see the truth from as many different angles as there are individuals, in complete cohesion and collegiality.

"The golden rule is mutual tolerance, because we will never all think the same way. We will only see part of the truth and from different angles.

Thank you.