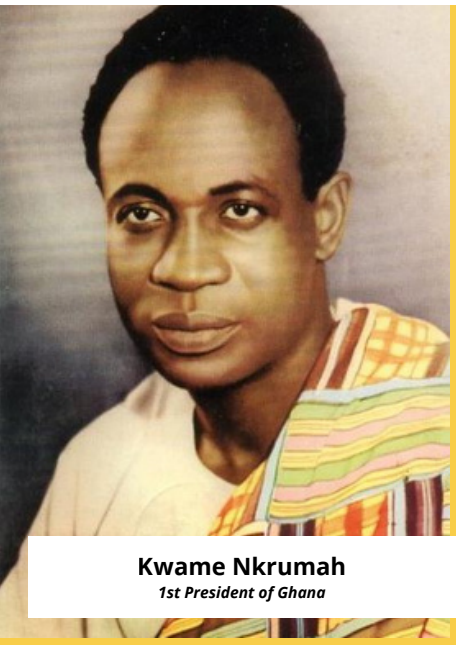
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Speech by Kwame Nkrumah at the International Conference of Independent African States for the Creation of the OAU (Organization of African Unity) May 25, 1963

“On May 24, 1963, 32 newly independent African countries met in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, to "find ways to unite the continent." On this occasion, Kwame Nkrumah delivered what became "one of the greatest speeches of his life, a speech that serves as the definitive model for a strong African unity.”

« ……We have seen, in the example of the United States, how the dynamic elements within society understood the need for unity and fought their bitter civil war to maintain the political union that was threatened by the reactionary forces. We have also seen, in the example of the Soviet Union, how the forging of continental unity along with the retention of national sovereignty by the federal states, has achieved a dynamism that has lifted a most backward society into a most powerful unit within a remarkably short space of time. From the examples before us, in Europe and the United States of America, it is therefore patent that we in Africa have the resources, present and potential, for creating the kind of society that we are anxious to build. It is calculated that by the end of this century the population of Africa will probably exceed five hundred million.



Kwame Nkrumah
1st President of Ghana

Our continent gives us the second largest land stretch in the world. *The natural wealth of Africa is estimated to be greater than that of almost any other continent in the world*. To draw the most from our existing and potential means for the achievement of abundance and a fine social order, *we need to unify our efforts, our resources, our skills and intentions.* Europe, by way of contrast, must be a lesson to us all. Too busy hugging its exclusive nationalisms, it has descended, after centuries of wars interspersed with intervals of uneasy peace, into a state of confusion, simply because it failed to build a sound basis of political association and understanding. Only now, under the necessities of economic stringency and the threat of the new German industrial and military rehabilitation, is Europe trying - unsuccessfully - to find a modus operandi for containing the threat. It is deceptively hoped that the European Community will perform this miracle. It has taken two world wars and the break-up of empires to press home the lesson, still only partly digested, *that strength lies in unity*. While we in Africa, for whom the goal of unity is paramount, are striving to concert our efforts in this direction, the neocolonialists are straining every nerve to upset them by encouraging the formation of communities based on the languages of their former colonizers. We cannot allow ourselves to be so disorganized and divided. The fact that I speak English does not make me an Englishman. Similarly, the fact that some of us speak French or Portuguese does not make us Frenchmen or Portuguese.

We are Africans first and last, and as Africans our best interests can only be served by uniting within an African Community. Neither the Commonwealth nor a Franco-African Community can be a substitute. To us, Africa with its islands is just one Africa. We reject the idea of any kind of partition. From Tangier or Cairo in the North to Capetown in the South, from Cape Guardafui in the East to Cape Verde Islands in the West, Africa is one and indivisible. I know that when we speak of political union, our critics are quick to observe an attempt to impose leadership and to abrogate sovereignty. But we have seen from the many examples of union put forward, that equality of the states is jealously guarded in every single constitution and that sovereignty is maintained.

There are differences in the powers allotted to the central government and those retained by the states, as well as in the functions of the executive, legislature, and judiciary. All of them have a common trade and economic policy. *All of them are secular, in order that religion might not be dragged across the many problems involved in maintaining unity and securing the greatest possible development.*

We in Africa who are pressing now for unity are deeply conscious of the validity of our purpose. We need the strength of our combined numbers and resources to protect ourselves from *the very positive dangers of returning colonialism* in disguised forms. We need it to combat the entrenched forces dividing our continent and still holding back millions of our brothers. We need it to secure total African liberation. We need it to carry forward our construction of a socio-economic system that will support the great mass of our steadily rising population at levels of life which will compare with those in the most advanced countries.



Diallo Telli
1st Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity

But we cannot mobilize our present and potential resources without concerted effort. If we developed our potentialities in men and natural resources in separate isolated groups, our energies would soon be dissipated in the struggle to outbid one another. Economic friction among us would certainly lead to bitter political rivalry, such as for many years hampered the pace of growth and development in Europe. *At present most of the independent African States are moving in directions which expose us to the dangers of imperialism and neo-colonialism.* We therefore need a common political basis for the integration of our policies in economic planning, defense, foreign, and diplomatic relations

That basis for political action need not infringe the essential sovereignty of the separate African States. These States would continue to exercise independent authority, except in the fields defined and reserved for common action in the interests of the security and orderly development of the whole continent.

In my view, therefore, a united Africa - that is, the political and economic unification of the African Continent - should seek three objectives:

Firstly, *we should have overall economic planning on a continental basis*. This would increase the industrial and economic power of Africa. So long as we remain balkanized, regionally or territorially, we shall be at the mercy of colonialism and imperialism. The lesson of the South American Republics vis-a-vis the strength and solidarity of the United States of America is there for all to see. *The resources of Africa can be used to the best advantage and the maximum benefit to all only if they are set within an overall framework of a continentally planned development*. An overall economic plan, covering an Africa united on a continental basis, would increase our total industrial and economic power. We should therefore be thinking seriously now of ways and means of building up a Common Market of a United Africa and not allow ourselves to be lured by the dubious advantages of association with the so-called European Common Market. We in Africa have looked outward too long for the development of our economy and transportation. Let us begin to look inward into the African Continent for all aspects of its development. Our communications were devised under colonial rule to stretch outwards towards Europe and elsewhere, instead of developing internally between our cities and states. Political unity should give us the power and will to change all this.

We in Africa have untold agricultural, mineral, and water-power resources. These almost fabulous resources can be fully exploited and utilized in the interest of Africa and the African people, only if we develop them within a Union Government of African States. *Such a Government will need to maintain a common currency, a monetary zone, and a central bank of issue.* The advantages of these financial and monetary arrangements would be inestimable since monetary transactions between our several States would be facilitated and the pace of financial activity generally quickened. A central bank of issue is an inescapable necessity, in view of the need to re-orientate the economy of Africa and place it beyond the reach of foreign control.

Secondly, *we should aim at the establishment of a unified military and defense strategy*. I do not see much virtue or wisdom in our separate efforts to build up or maintain vast military forces for self-defense which, in any case, would be ineffective in any major attack upon our separate States. If we examine this problem realistically, we should be able to ask ourselves this pertinent question: which single State in Africa today can protect its sovereignty against an imperialist aggressor? In this connection, it should be mentioned that anti-apartheid leaders have alleged that South Africa is building a great military force with all the latest weapons of destruction, in order to crush nationalism in Africa. Nor is this all.

There are grave indications that certain settler governments in Africa have already been caught in the dangerous arms race and are now arming themselves to the teeth. Their military activities constitute a serious threat not only to the security of Africa but also to the peace of the world. If these reports are true, only the unity of Africa can prevent South Africa and these other governments from achieving their diabolical aims.

If we do not unite and combine our military resources for common defense, the individual States, out of a sense of insecurity, may be drawn into making defense pacts with foreign powers which may endanger the security of us all. There is also the expenditure aspect of this problem. The maintenance of large military forces imposes a heavy financial burden on even the most wealthy States. For young African States, who are in great need of capital for internal development, it is ridiculous - indeed suicidal - for each State separately and individually to assume such a heavy burden of self-defense when the weight of this burden could be easily lightened by sharing it among themselves. Some attempt has already been made by the Casablanca Powers and the Afro-Malagasy Union in the matter of common defense, but how much better and stronger it would be if, instead of two such ventures, there was one overall (land, sea, and air) Defense Command for Africa.

The third objective which we should have in Africa stems from the first two which I have just described. If we in Africa set up a unified economic planning organization and a unified military and defense strategy, it will be necessary for us to adopt a unified foreign policy and diplomacy to give political direction to our joint efforts for the protection and economic development of our continent. Moreover, there are some sixty odd States in Africa, about thirty-two of which are at present independent. The burden of separate diplomatic representation by each State on the Continent of Africa alone would be crushing, not to mention representation outside Africa. The desirability of a common foreign policy which will enable us to speak with one voice in the councils of the world is so obvious, vital, and imperative that comment is hardly necessary.

I am confident that it should be possible to devise a constitutional structure applicable to our special conditions in Africa and not necessarily framed in terms of the existing constitutions of Europe, America, or elsewhere, which will enable us to secure the objectives I have defined and yet preserve to some extent the sovereignty of each State within a Union of African States. *We might erect for the time being a constitutional form that could start with those states willing to create a nucleus*, and leave the door open for the attachment of others as they desire to join or reach the freedom which would allow them to do so. The form could be made amenable to adjustment and amendment at any time the consensus of opinion is for it.

It may be that concrete expression can be given to our present ideas within a continental parliament that would provide a lower and an upper house, the one to permit the discussion of the many problems facing Africa by a representation based on population; the other, ensuring the equality of the associated States, regardless of size and population, by a similar, limited representation from each of them, to formulate a common policy in all matters affecting the security, defense, and development of Africa. It might, through a committee selected for the purpose, examine likely solutions to the problems of union and draft a more conclusive form of constitution that will be acceptable to all the independent States.

The survival of free Africa, the extending independence of this continent, and the development towards that bright future on which our hopes and endeavors are pinned, depend upon political unity. Under a major political union of Africa, there could emerge a United Africa, great and powerful, in which the territorial boundaries which are the relics of colonialism will become obsolete and superfluous, working for the complete and total mobilization of the economic planning organization under a unified political direction. *The forces that unite us are far greater than the difficulties that divide us at present, and our goal must be the establishment of Africa's dignity, progress, and prosperity.* Proof is therefore positive that the continental union of Africa is an inescapable desideratum if we are determined to move forward to a realization of our hopes and plans for creating a modern society which will give our peoples the opportunity to enjoy a full and satisfying life. The forces that unite us are intrinsic and greater than the superimposed influences that keep us apart. These are the forces that we must enlist and cement for the sake of the trusting millions who look to us, their leaders, to take them out of the poverty, ignorance, and disorder left by colonialism into an ordered unity in which freedom and amity can flourish amidst plenty.

Here is a challenge which destiny has thrown out to the leaders of Africa. It is for us to grasp what is a golden opportunity to prove that the genius of the African people can surmount the separatist tendencies in sovereign nationhood *by coming together speedily, for the sake of Africa's greater glory and infinite well-being, into a Union of African States.*

Source :
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