World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture

January 24, 2023

JMCA Report

African Capital of Culture 2022
World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture

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JMCA Report
"Africa should be proud of its resources, its cultural heritage, its spiritual values, and the future should strongly support this natural pride."

His Majesty the King MOHAMMED VI
From the Royal speech at the 28th African Union Summit, Addis Ababa, January 31, 2017
## Sommaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory messages</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message from Mr Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, Secretary General, UCLG Africa</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message from Mr John Ayité Dossavi, Founding President of the NGO RAPEC</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracts from the opening ceremony speeches of the JMCA 2023</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inaugural lecture: History of Africa, History of Humanity by Professor</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Célestin Monga, Harvard University, USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights from the debate</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 1: Promoting African and Afro-descendant culture in a globalized economy</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 2: Reconciling African youth with their culture: the possibilities offered by digital technologies</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 3: The contribution of the Diaspora and Afro-Descendants to the international influence of African culture</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards a Manifesto for the Renewal of African and Afro-descendant Culture</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESENTATION OF THE JMCA-KÉKÉLI AWARD AND BIOGRAPHY OF THE WINNERS</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JMCA-KÉKÉLI Award of Merit</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech by the winners of the JMCA-Kékéli Merit Award</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JMCA-KÉKÉLI Award of Honor</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech by the winners of the JMCA-Kékéli Honor Prize</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo gallery</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WORLD DAY OF AFRICAN AND AFRO-DESCENDANT CULTURE (JMCA 2023):

«History of Africa, History of Humanity»

On Monday January 24, 2023, under the auspices of the Moroccan Ministry of Youth, Culture and Communication, UCLG Africa organized, in collaboration with the City of Rabat, the third Official Commemoration of the World Day of African and Afro-descendant Culture (JMCA) held at the Hotel La Tour Hassan in Rabat.

Proclaimed in November 2019 by UNESCO at the 40th Session of its General Conference, JMCA is celebrated every year on January 24, the date on which the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance was adopted on January 24, 2006 by the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, now the African Union.

The commemoration of the JMCA is the result of more than five years of efforts made to UNESCO by the African Network of Cultural Promoters and Entrepreneurs (RAPEC), with the support of UCLG Africa.

«History of Africa, History of Humanity» is the theme chosen for the JMCA commemoration in 2023.

The exchanges during the commemoration of JMCA 2023 showed that the world has much to gain from recognizing and adopting the values of respect for nature, humanity and sharing that are characteristic of African and Afro-descendant cultural identity.

These exchanges have highlighted the need to recognize the indissoluble solidarity between all as a condition for the survival of human beings on the planet Earth they share with the rest of the living, and on which the survival of humanity is threatened by the competition of all against all, which has led to productivism, itself at the origin of the movement of cultural homogenization of the world around consumerism.

Because it is the region of the world where human beings first appeared on planet Earth, because it is the region of the world least embedded in the globalized economy, Africa appears to be the region best placed today to give new meaning to the ambitions of the world’s youths, and to reconcile humanity with the values of solidarity.

The JMCA 2023 commemoration was particularly marked by the emphasis placed on connecting Africans living on the continent with Africans in the Diaspora, as demonstrated by the participation in Rabat of representatives of the African Diaspora from the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America (Brazil in particular) and Europe.

The commemoration of the World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture 2023 was in the framework of the celebration of Rabat, African Capital of Culture, organized under the High Patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco.
**Introductory messages**

**Message from Mr Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi,**
*Secretary General of United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLG Africa),
President of the African Capitals of Culture (CAC)*

The commemoration of UNESCO’s World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture on January 24 every year since 2020 is a sign that the world has finally understood that Africa is the leaven that can reconcile the world with itself.

Africa is the region of the world from which Mankind began. History would have it that when you are far away, little by little the memory of your origins fades. That is why those on the edge of the world have tended to cut their ties with Africa, the cradle of humanity. This rupture has led some to question whether the inhabitants of Africa even have a soul, to justify all kinds of atrocities in the name of the need to bring civilization to Africans, to the point of making Africa a region of which its own nationals themselves come to feel ashamed.

By calling for the commemoration of African and Afro-descendant culture every January 24, UNESCO was in fact inviting the world to reconcile with itself. Africans are the only people in the world to be present on all five continents. Even when far from Mother Earth, the African Diaspora has never really strayed far from African culture.

One of the characteristics of African culture that is unanimously recognized is that it is a culture of solidarity, a culture of sharing and benevolence, a culture founded on living together and the cohesion of communities and societies as a whole.

Africa is a land of welcome, a land where we know how to receive, even when the intentions of those we benevolently receive are, alas, sometimes malicious. It is because of the Africans’ benevolent openness towards other peoples of the world that in recent history, the continent found itself drawn into the slave trade and then into colonization.

The fact that today we are celebrating World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture across the globe means that Africa is now the bearer of the reconciliation of humanity at a time when the tumult of the world is leading us into mistrust of all against all.

Through the commemoration of the World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture, Africa wants to affirm that it is the benevolence of the world, and that it must be, because by 2100, it will represent almost half of Humanity. By 2030, one young person in two aged 18 and under will be living in Africa. It is therefore Africa's responsibility to reconcile the world, and the World Day of African and Afro-descendant Culture must be the vector of this reconciliation.
Message from Mr John Ayité Dossavi,  
Founding President of the NGO RAPEC,  
Founder of the World Day of African and Afro-descendant Culture (JMCA)

On behalf of the members and partners of the NGO RAPEC, on behalf of the daughters and sons of Africa in the Diasporas, I would like to say how happy I am to be at this third official commemoration of the World Day of African and Afro-descendant Culture in Rabat.

One year ago, the official commemoration of the World Day of African and Afro-descendant Culture took place in Kinshasa, Central Africa, at the invitation of the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Today, for this third official commemoration of the JMCA, we are in Rabat, North Africa, at the invitation of the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco. This commemoration means that this day belongs first and foremost to those who bring it to life, to those who give it importance, to those who ensure that the uniqueness of the African people prefigures the uniqueness of the world.

Africa is the common cradle of humanity. Commemorating African and Afro-descendant culture is therefore a fitting return to the source, the matrix of Humanity.

It is no coincidence that as early as 1966, the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity recognized that culture would be the cement of our identity and conviviality. It is no coincidence that, over time, the idea of the uniqueness of African culture through its Diaspora spread throughout the world has taken hold.

We should sincerely thank the United Nations, through UNESCO, for doing justice to the cradle of humanity by dedicating a day in the calendar of world events to commemorate African culture. UNESCO should also be reminded of the urgency of continuing to do justice to Africa by increasing its share of inscriptions on the World Register of the Tangible and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture must become a bridge between the daughters and sons of Africa and its Diaspora, a bridge between African culture and those who love this continent.

Because Africa aspires above all to Peace and Concord, it seemed important to initiate the KEKELI Prize, which rewards Africans and non-Africans working for peace and concord on the continent.

As we officially commemorate this third edition of the JMCA, we cannot help but think of Franck Fanon's quote: «In a relative opacity, each generation must seek its mission, find it and accomplish it». Let us hope that in commemorating the World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture, we will have found our mission, and that we will be able to accomplish and perpetuate it.
Extracts from the opening ceremony speeches of the JMCA 2023

This Day is therefore an opportunity to pay tribute to the richness of multiple cultures, and to the commitment of those who bring them to life, for in the words of the Martinique writer Aimé Césaire, culture «is everything that men have imagined to shape the world, to accommodate the world and to make it worthy». Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO

Africa was present through its intellectual productions, art, literature, cinema and music, and the next florilège, the fifth edition of this cultural florilège, will obviously focus on Africa, as an extension of last year’s florilège, and will highlight all those women and men who make up today’s Africa, who take up the challenges and militate for a prosperous Africa, an Africa of enlightenment, an Africa jealous of its values, its culture and its civilization, but an Africa that is open, generous and sharing.

Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO didn’t know that by lifting the lid on African and Afro-descendant culture, it was reconciling the world with itself. You should know that Africans are the only people in the world to be present on all five continents, and you should know that despite this distance from Mother Earth, they have never strayed far from their culture, as culture is the foundation of our humanity, and one of the characteristics of African culture that must now be recognized worldwide is that it is a culture of solidarity, a culture of benevolence, it’s a culture of humanity, a culture in which living together and the cohesion of society are more important than the competition of all against all, which has unfortunately become the homogenized cultural order of the world, and which has led us into the tumult we see around the world, an order which seems to be reserved for those tribes who are always quarrelling, and we discover that in fact every time these quarrels occur in Africa: we have to look for the cause among those who have competition as their rule.

One of the explanations given for the fact that Africa has opened up, including through its conquest, and for the fact that Africa knows how to receive is that it knows how to receive with benevolence, never imagining that behind its benevolence lies malice. That’s how Africa opened up to colonization, that’s how it opened up to slavery. People came and were welcomed, but they had other ideas behind them.

Africa is the region of the world from which mankind originated. History would have it that when you’re far away, little by little the memory of your origins fades. This is how those who live on the edge of the world or in its vicinity have cut all ties with their cradle, the cradle of Humanity that is Africa. To the point of considering that this place itself had a soul, to the point of justifying all atrocities in the name of a Humanity liberated from its source, to the point of making Africa a place to be ashamed of, to the point of making Africans themselves ashamed of Africa.

The fact that today we’re celebrating World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture means - and please pass this message on to the Director-General of UNESCO - that you are now the bearers of the world’s reconciliation at a time when the tumult of the world is leading us into mistrust of all against all. We are the benevolence of the world.

Africa, the World Day of African and Afro-descendant Culture, wants to affirm that it is the benevolence of the world, and that it must be, because by 2100, it will represent half of Humanity. By 2030, one out of every two young people aged 18 and under will be in Africa. It is therefore Africa’s responsibility to reconcile the world, and the World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture must be that vehicle, and UNESCO that bearer. Mr. Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, Secretary General of UCLG Africa

This day belongs first and foremost to those who bring it to life, to those who give importance to this day, and to those who ensure that the uniqueness of this people becomes a reality. O this day, I confess of course that it’s a dream of a young boy in the 80s who reflected on the fact that Africa and its descendants are scattered all over the world, but what unites us? Melanin? but it doesn’t speak. Language? it doesn’t speak. What unites us is what we carry within ourselves, and it’s what we carry that quite simply makes us unique, but we share this uniqueness, we declare it in an ostentatious manner, all the more so because everywhere we go we’re considered to represent a value. For me and for those in this room, Africa is the common cradle of humanity. With good reason, through this World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture, a day initiated by civil society, the African diaspora in France, not to say Europe, felt that a day in the year to pay tribute to Africa, our cradle, should be a reality. But yes, the road was long, strewn with pitfalls. Sometimes you think, «Who is this Ayité Dossavi? Who’s financing him? Who’s behind it? There’s no one hiding behind my modest person. Only the Good Lord Almighty. Let us give thanks to God. I ask you to applaud Almighty God, frankly that’s the least you can do. Mr. Ayité DOSSAVI, Founding President of the NGO RAPEC
Our culture is first and foremost African, and has given rise to the living cultures of the African continent and African diasporas the world over. This culture, our heritage, unites us and helps us grow through its richness and generosity. Our continent is overflowing with talent, and this immense reservoir of African creative potential is infinite, fertile and powerful. Talents that carry with them the values of Africa, a sense of respect, solidarity and love of neighbor that knows no borders. This World Day concerns us all. It underlines the major contribution made by our continent to universal society and to humanity in general.

Strengthening our cultural ties has become a priority, which is reflected in facilitating the mobility of artists, creating marketing platforms for African cultural products, and setting up cultural initiatives to support and disseminate the creations of African artists and talents. It is our duty, indeed our responsibility, to make our African culture better known, to accompany and support the creations of our African artists and intellectuals, and to provide them with the tools they need to carry out their missions with dignity. Thank you all. Mr. Mohamed Ben Yacoub, Director of Arts and Commissioner for the Rabat African Capital of Culture celebration, representing H.E. Mr. Mohammed Mehdí Bensaid, Moroccan Minister of Youth, Culture and Communication.

January 24 is not a date chosen at random, as it coincides with the adoption in 2006 of the Charter for the Cultural Renaissance of Africa by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union. In fact, African cultures can be found all over the world today, as they are not only embodied by the continent’s inhabitants, but also by African diasporas, both past and present.

The African diaspora is that which, in the course of history, has been forced to settle outside Africa, and has left behind a large and dynamic progeny that has today forged closer links with the African continent. From Brazil to Haiti, from Jamaica to the West Indies, African culture expresses itself in all its diversity. Today, it is still guided by this ideal of strongly associating the African diaspora and peoples of African descent with the building of a new, dignified and prosperous Africa that Togo has worked to ensure that the Heads of State and Government of the African Union declare the decade 2021 - 2031: «Decade of African Roots and Diasporas».

In addition to promoting culture as a vector for job and wealth creation, the Decade of African Roots and Diasporas aims to mobilize the African diaspora, recognized as the continent’s sixth largest region, to make its most appropriate contribution to the continent’s development, in line with Agenda 2063.

I would like to launch a solemn appeal to all African diaspora organizations and associations around the world to join this initiative, so that together we can lay the foundations for a new Africa. There is a page of history to be written. Every African, every Afro-descendant can contribute. It is through the production of cultural content that we can gradually change the narrative about Africa, highlighting our intrinsic values, which are often ignored by the rest of the world.

All the world’s cultures are entitled to equal respect. To this end, we advocate Africanophony, which is not a rejection of the languages inherited from colonialism, but a promotion of our local languages, now highlighted by the UN through the International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Languages 2022-2032. Africanophony also means dreaming of an Africa that is not ashamed of its cultural singularity and its civilizational contribution to humanity. It means dreaming of an Africa that is proud of itself, of its roots, and that assumes its difference from the rest of the world. It means dreaming of an Africa that makes its voice heard on the major issues of the international agenda, especially those that concern it. Thank you very much. Mr. Messan Amakoé KLUTSE, Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of the Togo Embassy in Morocco, Representative of the Togo Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Mohamed Ben Yacoub, Director of Arts and Commissioner for the Rabat African Capital of Culture celebration, representing H.E. Mr. Mohammed Mehdí Bensaid, Moroccan Minister of Youth, Culture and Communication.

Culture has been recognized by international organizations as the fourth pillar of development. This is already the case. Rabat is a city that preserves and promotes its craft skills. It’s a capital involved in a number of cultural initiatives, and hosts many cultural and artistic festivals and gatherings. Rabat is also a city of knowledge, with its universities and numerous research and teaching initiatives, and is home to internationally renowned grandes écoles. In March 2022, we celebrated the tenth anniversary of Rabat’s inscription on UNESCO’s World Heritage List as a modern capital and historic city, crowning ten years of commitment and organization.

Honourable audience, culture is a marriage. A marriage between highlighting the past and looking to the future. For the past, Rabat is known for its historical, ancestral, tangible and intangible heritage. For the future, through the commitments and actions undertaken in the region. Rabat has become a cradle of culture on a global scale. Ms Asmaa Rhialou, Mayor of Rabat, President of the Rabat City Council.
I’d like to say a few words about the theme chosen for this conference. I must say that the choice of theme was not mine, but that of the organizers. I accepted the theme and thought I should bring my approach to it. I’m not a historian, I’m a professor of economics, although history has always interested and challenged me. I’m not going to talk about Africa’s place in history, prehistory, the Neolithic, the Paleolithic, the Middle Ages and all that.

I’d like to take a somewhat transversal approach and talk about our trajectory as a people, our positioning in relation to history and what I think are the difficulties we have in occupying the place in it that we think we deserve.

Above all, I’d like to focus on what we think of ourselves. This subject has been on my mind for as long as I’ve been working. I’m always wondering what Africans think of themselves, and this is perhaps where I’m most concerned. I say this because from time to time, like all intellectuals, I receive invitations to contribute to books on what this or that Head of State has said about Africa. About what Mr. X or Mrs. Y thinks about Africa. I always reply that I’m not interested.

Frankly, whether it’s the President of the United States, the President of China or the President of France, it’s all very well what they think of Africa, but that’s their problem. What concerns me is what one billion four hundred million Africans think of Africa and of themselves. What do they have in mind? How do they organize their position in history? And what software do they use to determine their own approach? For me, this is the most important work.

If you look at the history of Africa, even in the earliest times, even in the most glorious moments of its history, you can’t help but wonder about Africa’s place in world history.

The day before yesterday afternoon, when I left Boston, where I’ve been living for 3 years, to come here to Rabat, the American immigration officer was a young woman.

Boston is a university town par excellence in the state of Massachusetts, which is one of the most highly educated states in the world. The number of people with higher education in this region is among the highest in the world. I meet this young lady immigration officer, she takes my Cameroonian passport, looks at it in all directions, then hides it. She said, «That’s strange, Cameroon, I’ve never heard of that country».

I was suffocating with frustration. I couldn’t believe it. She said, «Where is it? I said, «It’s not in Asia, it’s in Africa». My pain was twofold, because this young lady, who had undoubtedly gone to university, was a black American. There’s something else about this that bothers me, this tiny curiosity about Africa. We talked, I told her it was the most beautiful country in the world and that she was wrong not to know about it.

It’s a tiny anecdote that’s not the basis of a theory, but you often hear things like that. As a Cameroonian, I often hear people say «ah yes! The country of Roger Milla» or «The country of Samuel Eto’o». I love the Indomitable
Lions, but I think Cameroon has much more to offer to the heritage of Humanity in the broadest sense.

I've always wondered why Africa doesn't have the place we think it deserves? Is it the fault of others? Is it ours? Is there a more general problem with History with a capital H?

History is tragic, as the French philosopher Raymond Aron once said. And not especially against Cameroon, but against everyone. Napoleon 1st said: «History is a series of lies on which men have decided to agree».

Napoleon 1st was a rather cynical character, but sometimes even cynical people say things that are worth thinking about. Of course, on the side of those we might call the others, those we don't define as African peoples (although in principle all peoples come from Africa), there's a kind of deficit in accepting or believing that Africa has made a contribution to the history of Humanity that deserves to be known.

Passing through Paris at Roissy-Charles-de-Gaulle airport, I waited four to five hours for my connection, and one of the things that fascinates me about these big airports is that announcements are made in French, English and Mandarin. Yet China, not so long ago, was not in a much better situation than ours, economically, in terms of poverty, or in terms of its reputation.

I'm a bit biased, in the sense that as an economist I tend to think that a lot of problems are sometimes linked to an economic situation. I tell myself that the overall economic situation on the continent, given that it's not very bright and that we're often pushed, forced or encouraged to go begging for money, we're sometimes perceived as people who don't have much to contribute. At least, that's what we're told and what we'd like to believe. The problem is that we sometimes tend to internalize these arguments. Just look at what we do on the continent, and how we treat each other. Beyond the rhetoric, beyond the slogans, does the average African citizen carry within him that dose of self-confidence and self-love that enables him to behave not only in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of others, as a human being? Do we have a problem of humanity deficit in relation to ourselves?

Last month, I was at FIMA, where I spoke briefly about what I call Africa's four deficits. When I talk about deficits here, I'm not talking about economic deficits. I'm talking about four traits that I often observe and
that I generalize roughly and that need to be taken seriously, but to make the point, I'd like to say that perhaps we ourselves don't take ourselves seriously enough to convince others to take us seriously. If we don't take ourselves seriously, how can we expect others to take us seriously?

The first deficit I see in Africans - and again I'm generalizing, and I don't want my generalization to be taken at face value - the first deficit is a deficit of self-esteem.

When I travel around the world, in the United States, Americans from the age of 2 think that the world is theirs and nobody else's, and that they made the planet. What's more, they believe they are an exceptional country. American exceptionalism is the foundation of the world. Everyone in the United States thinks that, even those who don't have any money. All Americans believe that, as citizens of an exceptional country, they are called to an exceptional destiny. But more importantly, Americans believe that by being Americans they are superior to others. I studied in France for 10 years, and this superiority complex is also very French. When I was in Germany, I was surprised to find that the Germans, whom I thought were guilty of a lot of things and would therefore have more humility, but no, the Germans also think they are superior to others. In China, it's worse. When I was a student in Boston, our university welcomed the President of the People's Republic of China on a visit to the United States. Bill Clinton was President of the United States, and he had criticized China. During his visit to our university, in response to a student's question about human rights in China, the Chinese President replied that China had been a state for 5,000 years, and that it wasn't a state less than 300 years old that could give him lessons in governance.

Everyone was surprised to hear this speech. It’s true that China has been poor for thousands of years, but that has never stopped the Chinese from thinking of themselves as the Middle Kingdom. So the Chinese take themselves seriously, despite thousands of years of poverty, unspeakable tragedy and dictatorship. The Emperor’s first decision was to ban and burn all books, «because I want history, with a capital H, to begin with me», he said. This is in a country that already boasted some of the greatest scholars on earth, such as Confucius, Lao Tzu and thousands of others. However, despite this troubled history, the Chinese have always held themselves in high esteem, whereas we Africans far too often lack this attitude. Even successful Africans have adopted the attitude that, to be taken seriously, they must first be taken seriously elsewhere, outside Africa, and not necessarily at home. Among intellectuals, this attitude of over-valuing external recognition is even worse. African intellectuals can tell you what was going on in Hegel’s head, but they don’t give a damn about what’s going on in their grandmother’s head and in the heads of the people for whom they are in principle directly responsible, namely their own people. It's this deficit of self-esteem that, I think, also makes us have a deficit of compassion. If you don’t take yourself seriously, you’re not going to take your neighbor seriously. I see in our countries that we say are countries where there is a lot of solidarity, but I see a lot of solidarity deficit.

I see, for example, how we treat people we call mad. In many of our countries, in our cities, we don’t even recognize that the insane are human beings with a humanity, for whom we are responsible, for whom we are accountable. Especially if we call them mad or sick. I think that as long as we don’t think about this
first deficit and resolve it in some way, we'll always be stowaways in the great History, we'll always be like undocumented immigrants when we talk about the great History of Humanity.

The second deficit I insist on is the knowledge deficit. I don't know how to put this more precisely. First of all, I could define this deficit as a deficit of good curiosity. We are curious, but often about the wrong things, superficial things. I'll give a tiny example to illustrate the point. I have, like all Africans, a large family, cousins, nephews and nieces who contact me day and night on the phone, chasing me all over the world to get me to buy this, and send money for that. Many of them are students, even of economics. I can assure you that there isn't one of them who has asked me for an economics book. On the other hand, they're always asking me for the new iPhone, the latest LeBron James shoes and I don't know what else. They're all into cell phones that cost 1,000 euros, but if you ask them to pay 1,000 euros in university tuition fees, they'll be on strike for a year. They'd rather have a blank year than pay 1,000 euros in tuition fees, because their priorities are upside down. Africans can be accused of not being serious when it comes to learning and being curious.

In the last ten years that I've worked at the World Bank as an economist, I've worked mainly on Asia and Eastern Europe. I was fascinated by many things in Asia, and one of the things that fascinated me was the positive curiosity. People were curious to know what others had done to get by, not necessarily to copy, no, but to see what good principles you apply when you're looking for a solution, because there's no problem that Africa has today that hasn't been observed a thousand times elsewhere in the world and hasn't been solved. There isn't a single problem, but we sometimes act as if we had an absolute monopoly on pain and suffering, and that the problems we encounter are unheard of elsewhere, and there's nothing anyone can do about it.

In Cameroon, to mark this kind of defeatist fatalism, we use the expression: «So what are we going to do?», which means that we agree that we've all given up, and that we agree on that at least. What fascinated me in Asia, in a country like Vietnam which has also experienced many traumas such as the Vietnam War. When I went to Vietnam for the first time some fifteen years ago, I felt an energy, a desire to get out of it at all costs and a common and collective thinking that I don't find in Africa. When I was vice-president of the African Development Bank (ADB), I spoke with quite a few African leaders, and I rarely got that feeling, because we have this deficit of knowledge, learning and positive curiosity.

The third deficit is perhaps even more complicated to formulate. It's what I call a communication deficit between us, the way we try to resolve conflicts, differences and problems. Conflicts are consubstantial with human beings, with living beings. And the societies that fare best are those that have succeeded in establishing more or less accepted norms, and more or less accepted frameworks for resolving conflicts. I don't think we've always found this formula, which means that even in African families, the slightest conflict can turn into World War III. In Africa, families tear themselves apart over sometimes minor problems. This attitude observed in families is transposed into the world of business and politics, including the management of the State, so that a difference of opinion becomes more than a difference of opinion, taking on enormous proportions, and almost reaching the level of a matter of life and death. And we all agree
on one thing: it's better that nobody wins and the country loses than that we make a concession, a small compromise, in order to move forward and preserve the dignity of each and every one of us. This third deficit seems to me to be very important.

The last deficit is what I call the leadership deficit. Many societies suffer from this, but I think Africa suffers from it in very large doses. It's hard to make progress when you don't have visionary leaders who are also capable of humility and getting teams to work together, because nobody succeeds on their own. A great American microbiologist died recently. His name was Edward Wilson, he was a professor at Harvard, he received all the honors, and he spent his life studying all the species that have existed on Earth since it existed. He looked at all the categories of species for almost 60 years, and concluded that the reason why certain categories, certain species live longer is that these categories are able to work together. These species have developed cooperation to a level that has not been seen or analyzed in other known species according to his measurement indicators. Edward Wilson concluded that the three most successful species in his view are ants, termites and humans.

The results of Edward Wilson's research show the advantages of working together. Societies in many African countries still find it difficult to work together, because of ideological, political, social status or so-called ethnic barriers or differences, and who knows what other artificial constructs. I always have a hard time when someone introduces me as the only African professor at Harvard University's Academy School: it doesn't mean a thing. When you're alone, you don't represent anything at all, you're vulnerable, nobody takes you seriously, whereas when you're numerous, then you represent a force, you're a critical mass. Africans are sometimes very happy when we say «the first African to have done this, the only African to have done that.» For me, that's where we're most vulnerable and we need to work on that, otherwise we'll always be repressed, exploited and our culture, which seems to me to be our most important capital, will continue to elude us, just as so many other things have eluded us, including our talents, our mineral resources, etc.

Manu Dibango, who died nearly 3 years ago, composed the song Soul Makossa in 1972, which was a worldwide hit. This song was copied without his authorization by the great Michael Jackson. It took all Manu Dibango's savings to mobilize lawyers and force the great Michael and his production company to recognize this and give him a share of the royalties. It took years of fighting, and it was Manu Dibango who led the way, but how many other artists have been copied and plagiarized without compensation? One example is the group Zangaléwa
in Cameroon, who made a song of the same name that was a hit in Cameroon. In 2010, when FIFA asked world-renowned Colombian artist Shakira to compose the anthem for the World Cup, which was being played for the first time in Africa, in the Republic of South Africa, the singer simply covered the Zangaléwa song with a new title, «Waka Waka», which obviously became a worldwide hit, earning Shakira billions of centimes. Here too, the poor Cameroonians in the group had to fight for a few crumbs. There are other areas where we have this problem. This means at least two things. The first is that, when it comes to culture, Africa has a lot to offer. The resources of the African imagination are infinite. If we wanted to change the African continent, using cultural assets, we’d get there faster. Firstly, because culture makes a lot of money.

Culture has to be a business, not just folklore. Culture can really help us reposition ourselves in the great movement of history. In purely economic and financial terms, culture could create an infinite number of jobs if we were a little better organized at state level. The African Development Bank lends around 5 billion dollars to African countries every year, and the World Bank at least twice as much. If a significant portion of these sums were allocated to the cultural industries, I think the return on investment would be incredible. But culture isn’t just a business, it’s also a software program that enables us to define what we think of ourselves and of others, and to give men and women the means to assert their dignity.

It’s culture that can help us resolve the 4 deficits I was talking about. It is culture that can help us to take ourselves and our fellow human beings more seriously. Culture is what determines how we define our priorities, how we position ourselves, what we want to think of ourselves and what we want others to think of us. Culture is therefore the number-one software for Africa’s development and structural transformation. It is the driving force that enables us to reposition ourselves in the great history of the world, and no longer be assimilated to stowaways.

Secondly, Africa’s cultural and artistic potential will only come to full fruition when we resolutely tackle the issues I’ve just described. We have so much to say about African cultures.

I’d like to finish by saying a word or two about culture, because culture is absolute proof that the resources of the imagination in Africa are infinite. Culture is proof that if we wanted to change the continent, we could do it faster by using cultural goods, and first of all because culture makes a lot of money. Culture has to be a business, not just a matter of folklore. I mention
culture as a final point, because I think it's what can really help us reposition ourselves in the great movement of history. From a purely economic and financial point of view, culture can create an infinite number of jobs, and if we were a little better organized in this respect at the level of our States, and also at the level of those who want to encourage us, help us and support us, i.e. development partners such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank and others, I believe that attitude should be the essential pillar. The AfDB lends around 5 billion dollars to African countries every year, and the World Bank at least twice as much. Imagine if, out of that 15 to 20 billion dollars from these two institutions alone, if half of that money were allocated to the cultural industries, I think the return on investment would be incredible. Culture isn't just a business, it's already a business, which is excellent, essential because it creates jobs and gives men and women the means to assert their dignity. But culture is also a program that enables us to define what we think of ourselves and of others. It's what can help us resolve the 4 deficits I was talking about. It's what can help us take ourselves and our fellow human beings more seriously.

I'm going to finish with the story of a poem called «The Conference of Birds» by Farid al-Din Attar. It's a beautiful allegorical poem. The birds are lost and decide to go in search of their king. They all agree to go, but the path is complicated, difficult and full of pitfalls. Along the way, everyone plays their cards. Some birds are selfish, some are impatient, and some want to be seen more than others. And among these, some either die or give up, and in the end only a tiny group manage to get to where the king is supposed to be, except that when this small group of birds look into the lake where the king is supposed to be, they only see their own reflection. In fact, the allegory or moral of the story is that the king that the members of the group were looking for lies within themselves, and the real approach should always be directed towards ourselves, and I think that if we accept this, if we take ourselves a little more seriously, if we measure what we are, what we have brought to this planet and what we can bring in terms of the resilience we have shown, if we really decide to question our actions and work together, there is no limit to what Africa could do.

Of course, there's that fine recommendation by Léopold Sédar Senghor, which he called the rendezvous of giving and receiving, where all the world's civilizations would somehow come together in a kind of great marketplace and be able to exchange, give and receive from each other the best they have to offer. It's a beautiful idea, an elegant formulation of what the civilization of the universal, as Senghor called it, could be. But I think there was a touch of naivety about it. The history of the African peoples is perhaps an indication that it's good to be nice, to believe in everyone, but it's even better to believe in yourself first and demand that others believe in you because you believe in yourself first and take yourself seriously.

I'll stop here. Thank you very much.
«All these elites, myself included, are responsible. I think that culture, if we take it seriously, helps to broaden our imaginations, to give us confidence in ourselves and then on a purely practical level, to create jobs if we do things right.

Alphadi designed Madonna’s dress for her 60th birthday, and I wrote a little text about Niger at the time, saying: «If I were Prime Minister of Niger, I wouldn’t spend 6 months in Washington begging the World Bank for a $50 million loan with lots of strings attached. I’d call Madonna and why not Rihanna, Jay-Z, Beyoncé and tell them, I’m tired of Africa and my country being seen as people begging for money. We have knowledge to offer and sell. You’re going to help us as part of a strategy to develop the textile industry here, for example, or the fashion industry, clothing, leather goods and so on. The only help I expect from you is to dress in Alphadi creations for a month in the summer, and let the whole world know about it, and tell all your billions of fans around the world to buy Alphadi for 1 month».

For a strategy like this to work, you have to think it through and organize the value chain. With production and market access, not only in Africa but also elsewhere, we have to negotiate all this and organize everything with the legal experts so that I don’t know which country will beat us to the punch. There are lots of things to do. Our defeat is above all a defeat of the imagination.

It’s not a defeat of anything else. The ideas are there, the money is there. I can tell you as an economist that for almost 20 years there have been more than $100,000 billion in deposits, in surplus savings deposited in banks, with institutional investors, in insurance companies, in sovereign wealth funds, and they don’t know what to do with this money. They’re desperate to find a use for it. Why can’t the African Union set up a task force to think about strategies for channelling this surplus savings into productive, profitable investments? The cultural sector must also be seen as a sector that generates wealth and employment, while at the same time helping to restore people’s dignity by transforming their mentalities, ways of thinking and software.

When I was in Abidjan at the African Development Bank as Vice-President, the first question I asked was whether I could come to work not in a suit and tie, as was required, but in proper African dress. I was told no, and the General Secretary wrote to tell me no. We’re in Abidjan, 35-40 degrees in the humid heat, and you have to put on three-, four-, five-piece suits, then go into a hyper-air-conditioned room that makes you sick. Culture can also make us change this kind of strange mentality, our way of doing things, our way of seeing, our way of looking at ourselves, so that we don’t take ourselves too seriously.»
Panel 1: Promoting African and Afro-descendant culture in a globalized economy

Moderator: Farida Moha, journalist

Speakers:
Eugène Ebodé,
Writer and Administrator of the Chair of African Literature and Arts at the Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco

Dr. Julius W. Garvey,
Grandson of Marcus Garvey, founder of Pan-Africanism, representative of the Diaspora in the United States of America

Meryem Sebti,
Publishing Director of the contemporary African art magazine Diptyk.
1) Eugène Ebodé, writer and Administrator of the Chair of African Literature and Arts at the Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco

Thank you so much, Farida, for evoking my mother and, through her, all mothers. I salute them all, and of course all the fathers too.

I would like to salute a mentor, Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, who was a tutor. Without guardians, trees don’t grow. We need guardians. You ask us about creations, you ask us how to promote them. First of all, I’d also like to salute Célestin Monga, who preceded me on this podium and who said some very powerful things. Afterwards, one wonders if there’s any left for oneself. So I stand before you naked, so that you can dress me, and so that we can tell the story of our strengths, our creations, and what our elders have left us. This story needs to be scripted, and to be scripted we need people who can shape it, design people like Hicham Lahlou.

And then Célestin Monga told us that there are a series of deficits, the first of which is self-esteem, and I’ll talk about that at the end, the one that consists in mobilizing strategies to value what we know. Who are we? If you look at Africa, if you’re curious, as Célestin Monga used to say, you’ll see that it has the shape of a question, and this shape is horned. One could even say that this shape is bicornue, because Africa is the first continent from which Man appeared on planet Earth. There have been scholarly discussions as to whether there is a missing link in the formation of Hominids, between Homo Erectus and Homo Sapiens. But what we know for sure is that human beings as we know them today first appeared in Africa.

I’m in charge of the Chair of African Literature and Arts at the Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco. The creation of this Chair stems from the vision and will of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, who summons culture to be the link and bond between Morocco and the African land, and this link comes to us from the question «What is Africa? ». As Célestin Monga has said, today it’s its human resources, nearly a billion and a half inhabitants. These people have stories. I’m interested in their creation and their trajectories, a word dear to Célestin Monga. I’m happy to remind you that here in Rabat, we’ve just held a symposium at the Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco on the invention of writing and its role in transmission in Africa. We have just organized an international colloquium on this subject in which the Sultan, King of the Bamouns, Mouhammad-Nabil Mforifoum Mbombo Njoya, the 20th of the dynasty of the Kingdom of the Bamouns created in 1394, took part.

As it is today, Cameroon was not created. It owes its existence to the Portuguese, who discovered endless shoals of shrimp when they landed, and named the corresponding river Rio dos Camarões, from which the name Cameroon derives. But the story of this country is told as if the peoples who lived there owed their existence solely to the naming of the place by the
Portuguese who landed there. This shows once again that the history of Africa is often written by others, and that it’s high time for Africans to reclaim their own history and tell their own story.

Under German colonization in 1896, Sultan Ibrahim Njoya decided to invent an «aka-uku» script and a «shü-mom» language. Why did he do this? Because he lacked the ability to communicate with his people without outside ears, and so protect the secrets he could entrust to them. And so, when asked, what could Africa have invented? Some say, but... Nothing. Others even believe that God gave Africa to Europe, as Victor Hugo wrote on May 19, 1879, asserting that Africa belongs to Europe and that God gave this land to Europeans, since this land has no past, no future and could only have one in the hands of Europeans. It was in response to the confiscation of his trajectory that Ibrahim Njoya invented a new form of writing, just as the Bété in Côte d’Ivoire did with Frédéric Bruly Bouabré, or the Malinkés, with Souleymane Kanté.

These accounts of African writing were presented and debated at the Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco. We were there in the bath of languages that refused to be repressed in the night of languages. This is the story of the people who came together in Rabat, African Capital of Culture, and at the Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco to raise the flag of our heritage, so that we don’t look at it with our heads down, but so that Africa is a horizon of thought that we look at with our heads held high. The people who gathered in Rabat also came to share, to decompartmentalize, to ensure that the diversity of African languages is not an obstacle, because we could be told «there are far too many», and that would prevent what Célestin Monga was denouncing here: the lack of cohesion, the lack of strong sociability, the lack of active solidarity and collective ambition. So this is the story of writing, backed up by diverse and multiple languages, since Unesco was there, and language is an intangible heritage of Humanity. Africa has half the world’s languages. This is not an obstacle, but a treasure.

Another founding story is the one that explains our origins, and is considered the foundation from which we can project ourselves. This story tells us that the Creator of all things sets us a mission, that of fighting mortals against immortals, the visible against the invisible, and that from one to the other, it’s the same movement.

And that’s why, in «Dressing the Sky», Mom can speak to me from wherever she is, setting me the task of being the awakener. And if she spoke to me from Rabat, it wasn’t for the sake of grandstanding. And I told Monceyf Fadili: to write this piece, she knocked on the door of my conscience, and she said to me, «my little one, it’s very good that you’ve written a great novel about your little mother». And she added, «You haven’t finished the job yet. It’s very strange that Mum, who could neither read nor write, should philosophize, «You should finish your great story about your little Mum», recalling this phrase which is a kind of sesame, a treasure, but also a gun-holder, to say: the smallest refuge of the smallest mouse is an impregnable hideout.

So it’s not a question of building ourselves the smallest refuge where we can hide, but of places where we make what we want to give to others, and that was your question. The peoples of Africa all have this kind of connection between the visible and the invisible. They all have a story about creation. The Dogon, for example, celebrate the Sigui every 60 years. This festival of masks is an invocation of the masculine and the feminine; the Dogons come together, androgyrous, and it’s all about the great discussion. And the Dogons celebrate the Sigui every 60 years as a reminder that the diversity and plurality of the gods that make up their sky are a treasure for mankind. The next rendezvous is in 2027 for a Sigui that will last 7 years. And when we look at this horizon, how can we not invoke the creators? And I’m looking at Alphadi to say that we’ll have to dress them, but also in the other capitals, and here I’m looking at Jean Pierre.

Let’s see ourselves as the Dogons do. Let’s celebrate, but with a scenario and a strategy, from Bandiagara to Kankan. It’s also a call, with my brother Sansy Kaba Diakité, to build together. As Senghor said, let’s move towards the universal, the «rendezvous of giving and receiving».

This concludes my speech to such a fine gathering.
Mr. Jean Pierre Mbassi, thank you for the invitation.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is truly a pleasure and a privilege to be here with you. I know I’m assaulting your French-speaking ears with English, but I was assaulted this morning by thinking that English was the universal language.

I’d like to talk about culture as a vector for African renaissance. Culture is the instrument by which we approach reality, by which we adapt reality to ourselves. Culture is self-awareness. Awareness shapes culture, and in turn is shaped by culture. Consciousness creates and conceptualizes the belief systems through which we see the world and organize reality. The type of consciousness largely reflects the nature of the culture in which we live. Culture doesn’t exist up there in space, only in people’s minds. It directs us from within, it’s a way of thinking, it’s a means by which a group of people organize their way of believing and seeing the world, it’s a means of creating the consciousness by which people can cooperate to achieve certain goals. Culture in the broadest sense can be defined as any group designed to live, survive and adapt to the environment. Ngugi Wa Thiong’O said: «In schools and universities, our Kenyan languages were associated with negative qualities characterized by backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation and punishment. We who went through this school system were expected to graduate with a hatred of our people and their culture; this was our daily humiliation and punishment.»

«Jamaican reggae artist Jimmy Cliff declared, «You stole my history, destroyed my culture, cut off my language, so I can’t communicate, then you mediate, and you separate, you hide my whole way of life, so I should hate myself.»

So the poorly educated African is systematically placed outside his own culture, he doesn’t know who he is, why he’s here, where he comes from, what his life’s purpose is or how to change the conditions of his life. In this state, he rests on self-doubt and self-hatred. So culture is an instrument of power. Power is our ability to define reality. If we abandon our culture and allow it to be replaced by someone else’s culture, then we have relinquished all power to control reality and become someone else’s servants.

No tree can grow without roots. Marcus Garvey said, «A people who do not know their past history, origin and culture, are like a rootless tree.»

No building can stand without a foundation. Amadou M’bow of Senegal declared: «Any people that turns its back on its culture loses what makes it what it is. «How do we transmit our culture? Through education. We Africans have a spiritual culture, and when we repair our cultural breach, we will restore our self-esteem and
self-confidence, and open up the infinite resources of our creative intelligence. We need to understand that one of the purposes of education is to build character, not just to make better things, which is the European perspective, but to make better people, which is the African perspective.

Education can be defined as the entire process of human learning through which knowledge is imparted, individual skills are acquired, and character is developed. Martin Luther King said: «It seems to me that education has a double function to fulfill in the life of man and in society: one is utility and the other is culture. Education must enable man to become more efficient, to achieve with increasing ease the legitimate aims of his life. But education that stops short of efficiency can prove to be the greatest threat to society. Perhaps the most dangerous criminal is the man gifted with reason, but without morals. We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character is the goal of true education. Complete education gives not only the power of concentration, but worthwhile goals on which to focus.»

The magnificent purpose of education is to humanize and socialize our species. Our vision of humanity as African people has always been a trinity: spirit, mind, and body. Our conception of civilization is to humanize man within society. It is the spirit that exercises creative awareness; it is this spirit that must be brought to control the mind and body. As Marcus Garvey said, «It is only through our spirituality and science that we can combat the naked materialism of the present age. «We must create an educational system based squarely on the truth of African action and history over the last 6,000 years.

Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop declared: «Africa's cultural personality is inseparable from the restoration of our collective historical consciousness, which is the main source of our creativity, which Man must create in order to survive. Only through continuous creativity can he ensure survival. Without overthrowing cultural imperialism, Africa cannot create its own economic ecosystems or an appropriate development model.»

Marcus Garvey declared, «We will emancipate ourselves from mental slavery because if others can liberate the body, no one but ourselves can liberate the mind.»

African universities have been modeled on Western universities and reproduced Eurocentric knowledge, and have failed to transform themselves into centers of learning to generate the knowledge needed for the social and economic transformation of our societies. Kofi Annan once said: «To live is to choose. But to choose well, you need to know who you are and what you stand for, where you want to go and why you want to get there.»

I choose to be an African working for the reconstruction of African civilization. It is incumbent on each of us in the organizations to which we belong to make personal and institutional efforts, as Africans and Pan-Africans that will be expressions of the African unionism that our ancestors practiced for millennia, and this guarantees us peace, prosperity, happiness and dignity.

I took part in 2017, in Accra, in the 60th anniversary of Ghana's independence with a demonstration of the resilience of the power of Pan-African culture. I
have also chosen to take part in «The Year of Return» in 2019, with visits to Ghana, Senegal and southern Africa. There has been an increase in tourism and migration since then, particularly to places like Ghana and Senegal.

We recently celebrated Kwanzaa, which is, if you like, essentially a diaspora celebration of African culture with seven principles: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility (cooperative economy), purpose, creativity and faith.

We celebrated Kwanzaa in Dakar, Senegal. So we brought the diaspora version of African culture back to the continent itself.

Recently, Chance the Rapper, a Chicago-based artist, gave a very successful concert and series of events in Ghana, under the title «Black Star Line Festival». There is a growing awareness among many artists of their African roots, and this is expressed in their work. Afro-centric hip-hop artists have millions of followers. I'm sure you're all familiar with the movie «Black Panther», which has a record audience. African creators are using social media and digital technology to create new formats for communicating with their audiences. With 20% of the world's population, 40% of whom are under the age of 17, the African cultural revolution is not something for the future, it's already here.

Africa is certainly the richest continent in the world. You have 60% of the world's arable land. It's very easy to say that you could resettle some of the diaspora here on some of this arable land that you have, and you wouldn't have any more of this food insecurity that manifested itself with Russia's war against Ukraine. My mission here, shall we say, or my message here, from the diaspora, is that we expect you to embrace us, just as we have returned and embraced the continent over the years, and it's very important that we make this a reality because we have significant resources and accumulated significant knowledge and technical capabilities that can help Africa in its growth and rebirth.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you.

We are personally involved in FESTAC Africa 2023, a pan-African cultural event to celebrate our music, art, literature, theater, dance and sports, scheduled to take place in Arusha, Tanzania, from May 21 to 27. It is designed to unite and create opportunities for business and collaboration across borders and regions. Everyone here is invited to see the sights, sounds and rhythms of African excellence, and to celebrate Africa Day on May 25. It's important that we have conferences like these and various festivities. We leave with meaningful methodologies through which to cooperate with each other. We certainly know that we have about 1.2 billion people here on the continent, at least 300 million in the diaspora, and members of the diaspora should not be disposable Africans. We have an important history of struggle and combat. As you know, when you put iron on the fire, you get steel, so we're very proud of our history. As we mentioned, many of us have returned to the continent: well, we need the continent to reach out to us.
This day is an opportunity to pause and ask ourselves what we’re doing to promote African and Afro-descendant culture. The title of the Day is very interesting, because it’s all based on this conversation and sharing of African knowledge and the African Diasporas. I’m going to speak from the point of view of my magazine, Diptyk, which I launched in 2009.

I’m not sure that the initial project is exactly what it is today, but we’re building knowledge and at the same time, trying to build an audience. Because, in fact, the real issue in promoting African culture is to build very precise content, country by country, but also to build audiences that will be able to give life to this culture under construction and ultimately drive it from within. We’re always talking about African culture and contemporary African art, but this is perhaps a rather Western construction, because the reality is that there are as many different types of contemporary art as there are African countries (54 in all). What’s important is that each country comes up with something very precise that constitutes it, because in reality, we only reach the universal when we’ve built up a very precise knowledge of what we are.

In two weeks’ time, there’s a very fine event in Marrakech, the 1-54 fair, a commercial art market event during which African and international galleries present contemporary art from African countries, and this event is an opportunity for all the cultural structures in the city of Marrakech to present exhibitions and performances. In fact, this event takes place at the same time as a book fair organized by Moroccan artist Mahi Binebine. What I’d like to talk about today, from a purely Moroccan point of view, on the question of contemporary Moroccan art, is the possibility of promoting this art so that it reaches an international audience. One of the first things to do in this respect

Meryem Sebti, Publishing Director of contemporary African art magazine Diptyk.

This morning, I’d like to come back to what Mr. Bennani from the Ribat El Fath association mentioned. There’s a very fine exhibition that I invite you to see at the Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, based on the exhibition that took place in Benin last year, which was a major event at the time of the restitution of cultural property. The organizers had the extraordinary idea of constructing the exhibition in two parts, with one part celebrated by the Beninese for the pleasure of rediscovering these objects that had returned to their land, and at the same time the idea was to confront these objects with contemporary Beninese art, and it was the linking of these two contents that aroused the interest of the public. What will always interest an international audience is the precision with which countries talk about themselves and build their culture. So you have this very fine exhibition at the Mohammed VI Museum.
is to work on training and art schools. In Morocco, we have an excellent Institut National des Beaux-Arts in Tétouan, which trains the majority of Moroccan artists. There is also a school in Casablanca.

I can't stress enough the need for African countries to pool the experience of these schools. In September 2022, there was a very interesting event, a biennial of Mediterranean art schools in Tetouan, which could give rise in the future to a biennial extended to the African continent, enabling art schools to pool their experiences and circulate their teachers. As far as I'm concerned, when I cover events on the international calendar, I see that there are some very solid countries in terms of training in contemporary art, such as Senegal, but also English-speaking countries like Ghana and Nigeria, and today we couldn't benefit too much from a cross-fertilization of these teaching techniques and teaching staff.

In Morocco, we realize that there is a natural evolution, for example at the Ecole des Beaux-arts in Tétouan, towards a rather conceptual art linked to the personality of the teaching artists of our time, and at the same time there are other African countries where there is an absolutely extraordinary painting scene that we don't necessarily have in Morocco. My hope is that some of these painting teachers will come and instill this desire and love of painting in Moroccan students, who are tending towards conceptual art. These school projects are also germinating in the minds of certain artists, such as the Moroccan artist Mohamed Arejdal, who had formulated a dream of a school in the South based on the model of the medersas, local art schools financed by the villages, where children could be trained in contemporary art. Schools, of course, are the focal point, where it all begins.

For contemporary art to flourish, it must first be firmly rooted. There's always a desire to produce an exportable offering, but that's not an end in itself. What's important is that the scene is first and foremost rooted in the country, in the school, and in the structures that promote contemporary art. In Morocco, we have very solid structures of this kind. For example, here in Rabat, we have L'appartement 22, where contemporary artists are structured. This year, L'appartement 22 celebrated its 20th anniversary with events in an industrial district of Fez, where all the works produced at L'appartement 22 were exhibited. It's important, it's local. It's important to remember that L'appartement 22 is a very deep-rooted, very Moroccan structure, and thanks to this rootedness and intellectual honesty, L'appartement 22 succeeds in working on what we are, and thus manages to touch on the universal. I'm thinking of artists like Younès Rahmoun, Mustapha Akrim and Abdallah Karroum, who today are artists with the level to be presented at the Venice Biennale, and this has already happened. Other structures of the same type exist in Rabat, which is a major hub for the Moroccan contemporary scene. It's important for events to be firmly rooted, and one of these is «État d'Urgence d'Instants Poétiques», an astonishingly rich and highly specialized event. Despite its highly intellectual nature, it reaches a very wide audience. It takes place at the Jardin d'Essais Botaniques, with astonishing sound and plant installations... And in Marrakech, Derb El Ferrane is home to the entire Marrakchi scene. In this district, artists discuss, create and manufacture endogenous thought.

Then there are the galleries, because once contemporary art has been formed in schools and built in non-commercial places, it has to get to commercial places. Galleries exist in many Moroccan cities. The kind of important event that also enables us to build a solid contemporary art scene and get into conversation with artists from the diasporas is
the biennial. And I insist: for a biennial to exist, it has to stem from the political will of a country. A biennial is not an exhibition, it's a moment of geopolitics, a moment when a country decides it wants to make its mark on the world stage through culture. Such is the case with the Venice Biennale, which is a good way of taking the temperature of which countries count on the international art scene, which manage to have a pavilion there to exhibit a sample of their artists and their works on the contemporary scene. So the question is, where does Africa stand?

I can tell you that Africa is growing in international events, and African countries are increasingly present through national representation pavilions at the Venice Biennale: these countries are Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, but unfortunately not Morocco. It's a subject I'd like to raise with the public authorities and perhaps one day have the chance to work on, and to tell you the truth, I think the Venice Biennale is a key moment to ask ourselves which countries have really understood that they need to bring the best of their contemporary scene and show it to the world, because it's a moment like the World Cup in sport, it's a very tight moment, geographically and politically. The whole world and the international press are there, and it's time to show who we are.

National biennials are also very important, as in Morocco, which a few years ago organized the first edition of the Rabat Biennial in 2019. We're looking forward to the second edition. It was a very interesting biennial, curated by Abdelkader Damani, who is a brilliant Algerian curator, and who had decided on the occasion of this Rabat biennial to make it a 100% Moroccan biennial in 2019. This event gave rise to all kinds of comments. I thought it was interesting that, at that time, a country like Morocco, a North African country, an African country, a Muslim country in the Arab world, should take the lead on feminist issues and the representation of women in the art world, and decide to strike a blow to show the world what a city like Rabat was capable of. Women are poorly represented in the art world because there's an audience deficit, and they feel obliged to talk about the female condition when they get together for an event. The idea of this biennial was to give a community of women artists from around the world all the space they needed to talk about the world, and the result was very interesting.

The other example is the Dakar biennial, exceptional in its scope, durability and strength. It's the great African biennial that's going strong despite the Covid and the difficulties, because it's very Dakar and very Senegalese. It's a biennial that calls on all young people and is aimed primarily at the Senegalese public. All the structures are called upon to present a program so rich that you'd have to spend the summer in Dakar to see it all, and it's truly an example of its kind. Although it's very Senegalese, it's also very international. The whole world comes to Dakar, because we know that this biennial is first and foremost about the country and African reality. The biennial attracts a lot of media, especially international. A medium like «Le Monde Afrique» is keen to go and see and listen to artists in a small, out-of-the-way structure in a Dakar district. I speak from memory of an event in 2022 where a young man from this incredible Senegalese-Vietnamese community describes how he finds himself in incredible situations of searching for kinship links, discovering his origins, and finds himself in stories of the deportation of Senegalese who left to fight for France in Vietnam. These are very singular stories, and because they are told in all their honesty and lived experience, they touch on the universal. These are extraordinary events.

I can tell you that a story like this one was covered by a colleague on four pages in the New York Times. This means that each of us has to speak about ourselves, in the most precise way, for our neighbor, for the person in front of us, in a truth of subject, narrative and story, that touches on universality.

Thank you for listening.
Panel 2: Reconciling African youth with their culture: the possibilities offered by digital technologies

Moderator: Farida Moha, journalist

Speakers:

Philomé Robert,
Journalist for France 24, originally from Haiti

Harold Love,
Member of the House of Representatives, State of Tennessee, USA

Hicham Lahlou,
International designer and founder of the Africa Design Award & Days (ADA & ADD) project

Will Mbiakop,
Executive President of the African Sport and Creative Institute (ASCI)
Philomé Robert, journalist for France 24, originally from Haiti

Thank you very much. I salute the organizations that are allowing me to speak on this Day and to bring what I hope will be a Haitian voice to this World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture. I'll try not to be too long, but I take the exercise very seriously and I've taken the liberty of preparing a short speech. It is as a child of two breasts that I address you today. The first is France, the country that generously welcomed me some twenty years ago when exile knocked on my door, grabbed me by the throat and threw me into an elsewhere that was totally foreign to me. France is the country that opened its arms to me when my life as a journalist was threatened. It’s the country where I had to reinvent myself because I was pushed out of the motherland, and I recount this adventure in a book published 10 years ago called «Exil au crépuscule». For this welcome and everything else, I’ll always be grateful to this homeland.

The other motherland, as you may have guessed, is Haiti. Haiti, the eldest daughter of Africa, Haiti where «négritude stood up for the first time» to quote Aimé Césaire, Haiti, the land of Toussaint Louverture, child of Benin, the land of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Napoleon’s nightmare, Haiti, the land of Henri Christophe, Jean-Pierre Boyer, Alexandre Pétion, Makandal, Boukman, Catherine Flon, Boisrond Tonnerre, Capois-La-Mort and so many others? All these men and women whose names may be foreign to you, but who were, are and will remain, on this side of the Atlantic, the first Negro and African voices to have said no, and in such a way, to a kind of colonial slavery that was iniquitous and perverse. This hard-fought independence was won 219 years ago, yesterday, but the struggle for sovereignty continues to this day, in the case of Haiti.

This struggle is weighed down by the weight of a hybrid debt: economic, financial, political and moral. A debt that hurts and sabotages the future, particularly of the youngest. We'll come back to this aspect in a moment. In the meantime, allow me to share with you a few observations about Haitian youth. In a collective book published three years ago and in which I took part, entitled «Jeunes Africains et Caribéens face à l’avenir» (Young Africans and Caribbeans facing the future), edited by Cameroonian sociologist and historian Jean-Célestin Edjangué, I had the chance to diagnose the state of Haitian youth.

Based on reliable statistics, I was able to point out the following: one-fifth of young Haitians are excluded from both the education system and the job market, all age groups combined. Mass unemployment is around 20% among young people, and gender inequality is the norm rather than the exception. Young people living outside the capital, Port-au-Prince, are much more affected by problems of access to education. Higher education provision remains weak, if not mediocre, with pseudo-universities springing up like mushrooms, unchecked. Finally, the number of so-called NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) is very high, especially among girls. Finally, I’d like to add that the HIV prevalence rate, particularly among young Haitians, is one of the highest in the world.

Unfortunately, this observation does not only concern young people, as it is partly linked to the situation of the rest of the Haitian population, a population which, without needing to be burdened with further figures, is currently facing a situation of multiple distress. These
distresses are: poverty, misery, the threat of famine, endemic violence, endogenous terrorism fuelled by armed groups in league with circles of power, environmental degradation and depravity. Politically speaking, Haiti is, in my view, what might be considered an UPO (Unidentified Political Object). By way of illustration, the country, as we speak, has no elected representatives, either local or national, and struggles in a maze of parallel political agreements fuelled by dirty tricks, reversals and the petty arrangements of big and small crooks. There is no prospect, as we speak, of a return to a form of constitutional normalcy, and the whole thing is a challenge to common sense. What are the origins of this evil, to use a rather esoteric vocabulary? There are many. They are a combination of political, geopolitical, socio-cultural and economic factors. The economy, money, debt.

And that's where I need to reiterate what I told you, in other words. The Republic of Haiti was born in 1804, from the violent and merciless confrontation between two worlds. One full of hope, driven by the universal values of human rights, not just the rights of the white man, a world which, despite the thick darkness, wanted to make its way towards the light. This world, in short, is Haitian. The other world, it's colonial, it's bitter, it's outrageous, it's slave-owning, it's resentful, all devoted to its reproduction and maintenance. I'm talking about resentment because it's on the basis of this resentment, this bitterness, that this colonial monster wanted, and unfortunately succeeded, in making Haiti pay what you know as the Haitian «independence debt».

This debt is not a fiction, this debt is not a figment of the imagination, we're talking about money and lots of it. We're talking about 150 million heavy francs; reduced to 90 million francs; the equivalent of 21 billion euros today. All paid between 1825, when this deeply imperialist and confiscatory debt was imposed, and 1950, i.e. 125 years during which Haiti was stretched, skinned, stripped, ransacked, pillaged, and cut to ribbons to satisfy the appetites of French colonists who couldn't stomach losing their domain, their so-called pearl of the West Indies, because pearls were only for nigrillons, Africans, junk, sub-humans...

This loot, now worth 21 billion dollars, has never been returned. Even if this capture alone is not responsible for today's tragedies, it bears a heavy responsibility. For more information, I invite you to read Thomas Piketty's «Capital et Idéologie», or an interesting little book called «Haïti-France - Les chaînes de la dette. Le rapport Mackau (1825)», Mackau being the name of the person who published the book, under the signature of Jean-Claude Bruffaerts, Marcel Dorigny, Gusti-Klara Gaillard and Jean-Marie Théodat.
This chain of debt, ladies and gentlemen, has never been broken, but it's not impossible. In fact, I invite you right now, immediately, to tackle the task of breaking this chain of debt, helping Haitians to get rid of this chain of debt and recover what has been stolen from them. To do this, you can rely on the young people whose plight we mentioned earlier. As far as young people are concerned - and we'll come back to this - there is certainly what I described earlier, but there are also these reasons for hope. Allow me to refer again to the text I quoted earlier, «Jeunes Africains et Caribéens face à l’avenir», edited by Jean-Célestin Edjangué.

There are three reasons for hope. Young Haitians have the law of numbers in their favor, even if in the space of 4 years, between 2015 and 2019, around half a million of them have had to leave their country for Brazil, Chile and Argentina in search of better living conditions. These young people represent a breeding ground for new projects. Of the 12 million Haitians, half are under 21. Young Haitians have ambition, great, great self-esteem and great confidence in their ability to set in motion a different dynamic if given the opportunity. Young Haitians are persevering, they are determined, and more and more of them are going to school.

Haitian youth are also connected, engaged on social networks, and it's thanks to these networks that they are able to mobilize en masse to defend the causes they hold dear. This last element, the connection, the fact of being in direct contact with the rest of the world, is absolutely essential, in fact it's an essential element in the construction of any project linked to Haiti.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Haiti's youth is in a state of fusion, it's creative, it's dynamic, it's committed, it's projecting itself into the decades to come, with the aim of writing its own history, with the aim of writing history itself. But it can't do it alone. Haiti is surrounded by friendly countries, except that some malicious tongues would say, and I'll do nothing to contradict them, «with friends like that, you don’t need enemies».

In what my friend, Eugène Ebodé, calls the great dismemberment of the world, at a time when slightly stunted, finite planetary entities are busy reviving old moons of fading imperialism, Haitian and African youth can only have their eyes riveted on their own horizons.

I willingly linked the two, attempting and succeeding, I hope, to bridge the great divide between this eldest daughter of Africa and Mother Earth, separated by oceans, by centuries of deportation, but so close... Because our hearts beat on the same side.

Hence my appeal, even if I'm all alone. Don't abandon Haiti. Don't look away. Remember that we are children of the same womb: Africa, and that our destinies are forever linked. I invite you to build, and I invite us to build, everything that will enable Haiti and Africa to join forces, to become one body, to form a matrix within the framework of a rediscovered brotherhood and sisterhood. Take an interest in this history, which is also yours, find out about the chains of debt, and play your part in this transatlantic project to create, why not, a new horizon. And to achieve this, more concretely, why not work towards setting up a permanent watch mission for Haitian-African relations, whose mission would be to rekindle the Haitian-African flame, through concrete projects. This mission de veille permanente des relations haïtiano-africaines could help to reinvigorate the memory, to establish in time and forever what makes us unique. We are Africans.

That, it seems to me, is our future. Thank you for listening.
First of all, I'd like to thank Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi for inviting me. I'm honored to be here for the celebration of the World Day of African and Afro-descendant Culture. I was connected to this notion of Afro-descendence and Africa when, to my great surprise, I was selected by MIPAD (Most Influential People of African Descent) in its list of the most influential people of African descent, including Virgil Abloh who has sadly left us, and Sir David Adjaye, a huge architect who was knighted by the late Queen Elizabeth II.

I was quite moved when I heard all these prestigious speakers, and to see how much Africa needs to make its voice heard and to exist even more. I can testify to this because, for the past 7 years, I have been active within the World Design Organization, an organization founded in 1957. I was appointed by the organization's first African president, Professor Mugendi K. M'Rithaa from Kenya, as Community Liaison, a sort of representative for Africa. I'd like to talk a little about the efforts that were made, how I managed to get young people involved, and do what I could with the limited means and support I had, to implement initiatives in the field of design. So I proposed the organization of the Africa Design Awards, a pan-African prize to showcase young designers, in connection with established designers. The Award was presented at the New York Forum Africa, and in Libreville, Gabon, organized under the High Patronage of President Ali Bongo Ondimba, with the support of Richard Attias. It was after this that I came up with the idea of organizing Africa Design Days, both digitally and physically, to showcase young and established designers through panels.

And here I am, fighting to find funding, trying to talk to decision-makers here about the importance of design in Africa. And when most Moroccans travel to Africa south of the Sahara, they keep saying, «I'm going to Africa», as if they were in Stockholm. Morocco, like all North African countries, is in Africa. So, explaining to the populations of this part of the continent that they are Africans remains a battle to be fought. It's important to fight this battle, particularly at a time when, thanks to the African Continental Free Trade Area, Africa, from North to South and from East to West, is aspiring to integration and unity.

What is Africa? It's the world's largest continent, it's the mother of humanity, it's five regions with the 6th region being the diaspora, it's over 2,000 languages, and it's an extraordinary youth bursting with talent and creativity to be proud of.

In 2017, I organized the Africa Design Days in Rabat with 300 participants. Following this, I was asked to stand for election to the World Design Organization's Board of Directors. I didn't believe in it at all, but I went and got elected. Now I'm the only African on the Board. Since then, I've been fighting to impose Africa, to give it more space on the WDO agenda, to build bridges, and it's not easy.

At the end of my mandate I was appointed WDO Regional Advisor for Africa, and since March 2022 I've been Special Envoy and Advisor for Africa and the MENA region.

If we're all here today, it's out of love for Africa and its daughters and sons scattered around the world. Like all of you, I want to do concrete things as an
African. I'm fighting to create a partnership between UNIDO and the WDO (World Design Organization). My brother Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi is very interested in establishing a partnership with the WDO and trying to see how we can get African cities to rally around the issue of design, and carry their voice so that the design sector is also a creator of businesses and jobs in Africa.

So today, there are plenty of talented but isolated young people in African countries, and because there's no real political will to make creative industries like fashion and design a lever for human, economic and social development, professionals in the arts, culture and creative industries are still largely perceived as a kind of public entertainer.

But today, African contemporary art and design are recognized the world over. Burkina Faso architect and designer Diébédo Francis Kéré was named the world's best architect in 2022. So, Africa is now. My dream is to organize, with UCLG Africa, a huge event on creative and cultural industries at the African Union, and for us to go and interact with politicians and tell them «get a move on, it brings in money, it creates jobs, and we have what it takes on the continent to drive a winning dynamic in these fields». Thank you.
Good afternoon, I'm Harold Love Junior and I represent the State of Tennessee. I'm glad to be here, thank you all. I'm going to talk a little bit about reconciling young people with their culture and the opportunities offered by digital technologies.

The major challenge facing Africans and the African diaspora, as far as their culture is concerned, is the lack of connection. For people in the diaspora, and particularly those in the USA, technology has been used to create a false narrative about Africa and its culture. Books, films and television have all been used to minimize the importance of Africa. As a result, the founding of African-Americans was seen through the prism of child slavery. Young African-Americans were made to believe that their existence began with slavery, instead of pre-slavery. Young African-Americans were taught that their ancestors were slaves, when they should have been taught that their ancestors were kidnapped and subjected to slavery.

The digital technology that is now available to African youth and the diaspora can connect young Africans on the continent and elsewhere across the globe to discover the foundations of who they are.

When we use digital technology, we can reshape the image of Africa in the minds of young people in the African diaspora. When we use digital technology, we can connect the young people of the African diaspora to the young Africans of this continent, in a way that will resemble a big family reunion. When young Africans see themselves as a connected offspring, they will collectively begin to reconcile with their collective culture. It was mentioned earlier that technology will enable an iPhone or Android to shoot a film at a lower cost than before to shoot a film. Why is this important?

It would enable a young indigenous African to be able to film the landscape of this continent and share it with someone hundreds and thousands of miles away, who may never physically be there. But in this moment and this experience, it's transforming images of what Africa is. What would it look like for young Africans to shoot a documentary about their daily lives, their neighborhoods, their way of life, and connect with someone across the world? I'll tell you what it looks like. It will dispel the myths and negative images that have flooded African-American youth for so many years.

When we hear of proposed legislation, even now, in Florida, to ban the teaching of African-American history, it reminds us of the importance and urgency of what we're talking about today. What would it look like, for young people of the African diaspora, attending school at a historically black university, to have actually made a connection with another young African here on the continent, and to establish a friendship, a connectivity, a relationship, and then to be able to say that the first time they heard about Africa for real, it wasn't in the course in college, but it was with their friend who communicated with them all those years they were in high school? What would that be like? I'll tell you what it would look like: it would give them self-esteem, the need to aim for high achievement, in everything they do. It would give them the assurance that they are the descendants of a great people who have done and are doing great things.

We can no longer depend on textbooks to sugarcoat Africa's greatness: it's our history. We can no longer...
depend on images taken by someone else's lens to capture the beauty of Africa. In the words of Maya Angelou, «if you don't know where you come from, you can't know where you're going».

I'm a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the moment Richard Allen fought for his freedom in 1787, he had the courage to put the word African on the front of that Faith, even in the face of death at the time, and courage is what we still need for our young people so that they themselves can be strong. And how do we do that? Through digital technologies. To break down these barriers, let's move forward together. Thank you.
Will Mbiakop, Executive President, African Sport and Creative Institute (ASCI)

Hello everyone. Thank you to the Secretary General of UCLG Africa for the invitation. You've been listening to some extraordinary presentations all day. I have five to ten minutes to talk to you about my area of expertise, which is the business of sport.

According to a study carried out by the consulting firm A. T. Kearney, the global sports market is worth 450 billion euros, with development potential estimated at 1,000 to 1,200 billion euros. As reported in the African Sport and Creative Institute publication, in 2019, global investment flows into sport and the creative industries amounted to $1,540 billion, with Africa capturing just 2.9% of these flows, or $45 billion.

Africa's assets are not lacking, making it possible to envisage a significant increase in investment in the field of sport and related activities. Home to 1.3 billion people in 2020, Africa will account for 25% of the world's population by 2050, and 40% by 2100. 60% of Africa's population is under 25 (800 million people). Given the demographic dynamics at work, it is estimated that Africa will have the highest proportion of working-age population in the world by 2060. Under these conditions, the development potential of sport in Africa is unrivalled worldwide. Africa will represent the most important talent pool for the sport business. The widespread practice of sport among young Africans has the potential to save between 16 and 20 billion dollars in healthcare costs by 2060.

Africa therefore has undeniable assets for the development of sport business. However, this development remains limited due to structural obstacles such as the inadequate business environment; the limited number of investment opportunities to achieve sufficient profitability; and the difficulties in capturing the revenues generated by sport due to insufficient knowledge of the corresponding value chain, as well as of the players and their modus operandi.

This is why we need to make sport, like the creative industries, a focus for development at both regional and national levels. Frameworks and conditions need to be put in place to attract investment in the sports sector, accelerate the development of infrastructures, and encourage public-private partnerships. We need to make sport business a vector of excellence for youth employability and wealth creation. To achieve this, we need to understand how the four revenue components in the commercial value chain of sporting events and activities work: ticketing, transmission rights, sponsorship and merchandising. Understanding this ecosystem is essential if we are to capitalize on the potential represented by sport business or sport spectacle. The development of broadcasting sporting events on mobile media or platforms is making the ecosystem of players even more complex, with Internet and cell phone service providers now also involved.

This complexity calls for even greater professionalism in order to be able to negotiate rates with the various players on advantageous terms. It is important that this aspect of sport business is mastered from the territorial to the pan-African level, so that the value chain of sport spectacle also serves to finance amateur sport, which is the breeding ground for talent that will later feed sport spectacle.
That's why it's advisable to forge partnerships between the local authorities represented by UCLG Africa and the major international and continental sports federations. The key issue here is reconciling young people with culture. The previous session focused on the economy. I don't think we talked much about the economy. We talked about our concepts, we talked about our policies, but we didn't talk about the economy. We haven't given any figures. With you today, we're going to take 10 minutes to talk business. As Alphadi says, it's not just about music. There's an Afro momentum today, afro-culture in terms of afro-fashion, etc.
Panel 3: The contribution of the Diaspora and Afro-Descendants to the international influence of African culture

World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture

Panel 3: The contribution of the Diaspora and Afro-Descendants to the international influence of African culture

Moderator: Farida Moha, Journalist

Speakers:
- Carolina Maíra Morais, Historian (Brazil)
- Gordon Williams, Grammy Award winner (USA)
- Rachida Kaaout, President of the Haut-Commissariat des Diasporas Africaines de France.
It was a pleasure to be invited to this conference. As I sat and listened to all the panelists, I was just thinking and hoping that next year, for the same January celebration, more Brazilians could come to learn and collaborate with the African brothers and sisters who are here.

Today, I’m going to talk about Yoruba culture in Brazil and how we need to break out of the isolation we currently find ourselves in. I’m going to start with the figure of Eshu-Elegbara. Eshu-Elegbara is a deity from Yoruba culture who represents the philosophy of movement and communication.

The key question I’d like to highlight, is a question one of my students in Brazil asked me in 2018. I was preparing for the arrival of an African king in Brazil for the first time. The day I showed a documentary, a teenager stood up at the end and said «but professor... Is there a black king alive in the world? Has his family ever been enslaved? Is there any wealth in Africa?», and with these questions that the 14-year-old student was asking me in the city of Petrópolis, I began to think about the extent of the damage caused by the lack of education in Brazil. There’s a very profound lack of knowledge for Afro-descendants in Brazil, but at the same time, these people keep the traditions of the Yoruba land that have been passed down orally from generation to generation. Yoruba culture in Brazil is very well preserved.

What I mean is that teaching African history in Brazil today is compulsory by law because of the work and pressure of the black movements in Brazil. Our president, in 2003, who is our president today, Ignacio Lula, signed law 10 639 to make the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian culture compulsory in all Brazilian schools. This law will be 20 years old this year, and we still have a long way to go. Nobody needed a law to teach Greek, Roman or Portuguese history. Without Law 10 639, schools wouldn’t even cover certain subjects.

For me, as a historian, and also as a teacher, education goes beyond the classroom. History and the link with Yoruba culture are everywhere in Brazil, and I’ll give you an example of what I’m talking about. We have a place in downtown Rio called «Little Africa». This place was developed by the African community that formed during and after slavery. In the middle of the seats, in one of the main avenues, we have a huge statue that you can see on the screen, which we call Zumbi Dos Palmares. It was placed over 35 years ago to celebrate a warrior who advanced against the Portuguese for freedom in 17th century Brazil. Zumbi was the leader of the largest community of fugitive slaves in the community called Palmares, in northeastern Brazil, and that’s why we call the statue Zumbi Dos Palmares. So, if you’re in Rio, and you ask someone «who’s that statue over there?», they’ll tell you it’s the Zumbi Dos Palmares chief, which is great because it’s true.

The interesting point is that this same head in a place called «Little Africa» in Rio, is not only Zumbi’s head, but any Yoruba person also from Africa who enters Rio and sees the statue will recognize the king of the Yoruba Land, and the person will tell you: it represents Oduduwa, first king of the Yoruba and holder of the title of Olofin of Ile-Ife.

So, the question a Yoruba person might ask me is «Carolina, what was Chief Olofin of Ile-Ife doing in...»
downtown Rio de Janeiro?» And here’s the thing: the person who chose to honor Zumbi dos Palmares chose a Yoruba head to give him the face of an African king, who unfortunately most Brazilians don’t even know who he is. They can’t identify the Yoruba king, but the Yoruba aesthetic is there, the Yoruba philosophy of «Ori», which means «head» in Yoruba, is there, and the Yoruba language is there too. Yoruba culture is alive and kicking, and has been celebrated in Brazil for many years, but it’s sometimes disconnected.

This is a copy of the original Ori Olokun, which was taken by the Germans when they left the kingdom. The original is now in the British Museum. So, if you want to see the original Ori Olokun, it’s currently nowhere to be found in Nigeria. You have to travel to London and visit the British Museum to see Yoruba art, which leads to another equally important conversation about African art in European museums.

Even though African culture is celebrated and protected in Brazil, we Afro-Brazilians and Africans share a common problem, but most of the time we’ve worked in isolation. This year, we celebrate the 20th anniversary of that Brazilian law I mentioned, which makes it compulsory to teach African history in Brazil. But we still lack materials, books, documentaries, films, that highlight the narrative of Africa produced by African intellectuals. My grandmother was a black woman born in Brazil, and it took her almost 95 years to learn that she was not a descendant of a slave, but a descendant of a civilization that was enslaved at one point in history, and that’s what the majority of Brazilians of African descent need to know.

In Brazil, we have the largest black diaspora in the world. We are the largest country of Afro-descendants outside Africa, with 120 million inhabitants, or 56% of the population. And still, we hear questions like «Is there a king in Africa? Is Africa developing?» because the image we’ve been given doesn’t correspond to the reality of African countries. To give an example, the Yoruba culture in Brazil has been preserved alongside the Afro-religion called Candomblé, but many people are unaware that the culture, language, clothing and food associated with this religion originate from a specific period in West Africa. They think that Yoruba culture is present in all African countries. In Rio, we have a law to protect the Yoruba language, but we don’t communicate with the Yoruba people. We have a common history, but as I said, we work in isolation. And I believe that when the Afro-Brazilian diaspora is welcomed home in Africa, it will have a sense of belonging that it lacks in Brazil.

It’s now 134 years since slavery was abolished, and we’ve never had a black president, even though we’re in the majority. Is this what we’re ready to give the younger generations? You have to show African culture from an African point of view so that children like my daughter know that they are the descendants of kings, queens and kingdoms, that they come from a continent with a culture and a history. Thank you very much.
My name is Gordon Williams, professionally known as "Commissioner Gordon Williams". I got this name from an artist called KRS-One with whom I worked closely. I've been responsible for around a hundred million record sales; I've worked with Lauryn Hill, Carlos Santana, Jay-Z, Amy Winehouse and many other artists. But I'm only from the Bronx. I grew up with hip-hop, something that started in my neighborhood. In fact, that's how I got exposed to it. I started out as a DJ, and contrary to what people may think about hip-hop, it's such a global phenomenon. Hip-hop is now the number one musical genre in the world. But it started with just kids in the neighborhood and finding a way to get involved when we had nothing. If people remember, in the '80s we used to have instrument and music classes at school, and a lot of them were shut down by President Reagan. I grew up with hip-hop, something that started in my neighborhood. In fact, that's how I got exposed to it. I started out as a DJ, and contrary to what people may think about hip-hop, it's such a global phenomenon. Hip-hop is now the number one musical genre in the world. But it started with just kids in the neighborhood and finding a way to get involved when we had nothing. If people remember, in the '80s we used to have instrument and music classes at school, and a lot of them were shut down by President Reagan.

Because we ran out of instruments, we ended up using what we had, which was turntables, and that turned into an art form that engaged us all. But it was always about finding ways to get together and have fun, and above all, to say what was going on, to talk about what was happening in the neighborhood and what was happening to us. This practice, which was local at first, spread to the region, the country and the world.

It took me all over the world. I've worked in America, Europe, here in Africa, spent time in Asia and really learned the language of music. I met Quincy Jones when I was 19, and he was my first mentor. It reminds me of talking to Papa Mbassi. Quincy was a person who spoke the language of music. What I learned from music is that it doesn't matter what color you are.

I could have a Jamaican bass player, a Chinese guitar player, a white drummer, a singer who didn't speak English, but when it came to playing music, we could all communicate. You know, I had prepared a speech, but a conversation I had with Papa Mbassi really got me thinking. We all have to think about our children. What's the message we want them to pass on when we're no longer with them? And I think that, like the language of music, which is a language we all speak even if we were different from each other, music is the language we need to find ways of promoting and learning about history, and not being afraid of what is good or bad. You know, there's a lot of bad, just as there's a lot of good. We need to talk about it and get over our barriers, and see that we're all human beings. Where does it start? I think it starts with young people, because as another gentleman said earlier, digital technologies create the means to communicate directly. So young African artists are now reaching audiences all over the world, and they're using their phones.

If this basic technology can be in everyone's hands, then it's a way for people to communicate, and once they're communicating, we can start somewhere. Yes, the creative industry generates a lot of money. When something is a subculture, which hip-hop was in the beginning, it gets to a point where it becomes a dominant culture that is managed differently. That's not where we want to start. People don't necessarily like all the messages and images they see from young people, but it's valid, and that's why it's spreading. Education changes the narrative, so it should be promoted with technology for young people. We could create a platform. Problems like gangs come up through education.

I hope there will be more meetings like this one. Just as Africa looks at Africa, Africa can look at its children, because they are everywhere, and they don't all look like me. Africa's children have different shades and origins. The more we can educate ourselves, the better we can communicate, as with music, which is a universal language, the better. I'm very happy to be here. Thank you Papa and Mama Mbassi for having me.
Hello everyone. Many thanks to Mr Mbassi and UCLG Africa for inviting us. Today, we are pleased to announce the creation of the Haut-Commissariat des Diasporas Africaines de France. It’s a unique organization in that it brings together more than 32 African nationalities, and it’s something of a revolution in France, Europe and the world, because the movement is starting to spread. Today, it’s essential for us to take part in this Day, because on the one hand, it’s completely in line with the work we’re doing, and because, of course, Africa is leaving its mark on the whole world.

As you know, in France and Europe today, there is a rise in populism, nationalism and the rejection of others, particularly on the part of extreme right-wing parties. But what’s happening today is that we don’t know the other, and if we work in this direction, future generations will find the way to live together, understanding our differences, but at the same time benefiting from the richness that the African is heir to. In my opinion, Africa is a land blessed by God or the gods, it doesn’t matter. And the Haut-commissariat des Diasporas Africaines de France has taken up a very difficult challenge: that of getting all the communities around the same table, and asking the question, how can we move forward together to respond to this problem, which is the detestation of the other, the rejection of the other, which has no real basis. And today, we’re proud to have different ethnic groups, different religions, citizens, men and women who come from all over the African continent, and who have a double culture, which is what the African Diasporas of France can bring to Africa in the other direction. The double culture is that inherited from their parents, and the education received in France, or in the country to which their parents emigrated. We need to see all this as a source of wealth and strength that will enable us, in this globalized and interdependent world, to contribute all our skills and positive energies. We need to think positively today, and ask ourselves what kind of dynamism we’re part of. And we need to be part of a dynamic culture, because culture is changing, it’s a mix. And Africans have the ability to remain faithful to their origins and heritage, and to embrace the practices of the host country in which they live.

We currently have a Commission dedicated to various issues linked to the rejection of the other, such as inequality of opportunity and discrimination, and it is working very hard throughout France, with local authorities and town halls, because mayors have direct access to all citizens residing on the territory, and they have the mission and the onerous task of setting up awareness-raising campaigns, and this also involves culture. Because festive moments, when people dance and share meals, are moments that are conducive to discovering who the other is. It’s an opportunity to talk things over, and set in motion a new vision, a new trajectory on which we can move forward together.

We also work with a network of associations, and the one in France is just wonderful. Through them, we can convey this «vivre-ensemble» and above all «eradicate» the scourge of racism and all those other extremes. We offer associations the chance to organize events based on the discovery of others. In terms of culture, we call on writers, artists, singers, dancers... Music, creativity and the culinary arts are all tools that we use in the region, and that the Haut-Commissariat supports. We have over 1,300 affiliated associations, which means that we cover every territory in France, and that’s why I was telling you that this is a unique organization. We also identify personalities and people who bring hope,
and we invite you all to join us, and above all to spread the word about the missions of the Haut-commissariat, because we can’t say it’s impossible - far from it.

France is not racist. In reality, it’s a lack of mobilization, of action in favor of knowledge and how to enable others to understand why you’re different. And it’s not a question of imposing, but of trying to live together. Africa continues to be the continent of the future, but Africa is also now. Let’s take advantage of all the riches we have to go out and shine, rather than continuing to live on what we’ve known in the past.
Towards a Manifesto for the Renewal of African and Afro-descendant Culture

Presentation by: Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, Secretary General, UCLG Africa

Discussants:

Alphadi Seidnaly Sidahmed,
Founding President of FIMA, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Innovation and African Creation

Parfaite Amouyeme Ollame,
Writer, Gabon.

Sansy Kaba Diakité,
Organizer of the 72 Heures du Livre in Conakry, Guinea
When you go around your countries, in our countries, are there reasons for young Africans to build their self-esteem? First challenge: how do we go about setting in motion what it takes to build self-esteem? That's the first point. Second point: when you hear Mr. Will Mbiakop tell you that culture in the cultural world, in the creative industries, is expressed in trillions of dollars. In this, one of the value producers is Africa. Will Mbiakop gave the example of music, he gave the example of sport, he gave the example of creativity. Africa producing value, Africa excelling in the cultural market.

What can we do? If we can't say it in public like this, if we can't denounce it in public, is it possible to take action? Third question: Africa is also its diasporas. You heard Dr. Garvey say earlier: «Here we are, the diaspora.»

We're proud of the fact that this continent is going to find its place again, but how do you welcome us? How can we build together? How can we believe that together we can throw away yesterday's mistakes and build a common future? « And everyone said here, « yes, a common future is possible, since Africa will represent half of humanity by the end of the century. » But if it's true that Africa will already represent half of the world's youth in less than ten years' time, what should we do to put these young people in charge of the world, since if you represent half, you are the world? What should we do?», and everyone here has said «it starts with the brain». How do you free your brain from all the brainwashing that's been inflicted on it for years? I really liked Carolina's question earlier, when she said that a child asked her: «But is it possible that there were black Africans, is it possible that there were people in Africa who weren't slaves? In other words, is it possible for an African to be free? It's the diaspora that's asking these questions. How do you answer? How can we finally regenerate African and Afrodescendant culture so that it brings new hope and a new perspective to African youth and to the world? Because the world has become senseless because, thanks to materialism, it has distanced itself from what is essential, i.e. Humanity. The world is a battle of all against all, and that's what's happening right now. When they were fighting on the periphery, they used to say it's the Africanists, and now that it's the fight in their own midst, they find themselves naked, because welcoming Africa hasn't understood that other parts of the world are essentially fighting and competing against each other.

Maybe that's why Africa endured slavery and colonization, because it was simply welcoming.

How can we move towards a Manifesto for the renewal of African and Afro-descendant culture to reconcile man with Humanity? These are the questions we have been asked.
Mr. Alphadi, Thank you again, Jean Pierre, thank you for the invitation, thank you everyone. We worked hard, we organized an extraordinary FIMA that took place from December 07 to 11, 2022 at the Palais Chellah. There’s been a lot of talk about the Palais Chellah here, but no mention of the fact that FIMA took place there. Built in the 16th century, 12th century, I don’t know, but FIMA took place there. No one who has passed through here has ever said that FIMA took place there. That’s something I didn’t understand. I’m happy to say today that FIMA took place at the Palais Chellah in very good conditions, thanks to Mr. Elong Mbassi, thanks to UCLG Africa, thanks to the image we wanted to give to beauty, creation and African fashion. African fashion is something we celebrated at the 14th edition of FIMA. We wanted to include in the concept of Rabat as African Capital of Culture, a positive image of fashion’s contribution to restoring dignity to the African continent. This contribution was accepted and supported by our political leaders, in particular His Majesty King Mohammed VI, who wrote to us personally to encourage us.

During the 14th edition of FIMA at Le Chellah in Rabat, we organized three round-table discussions: Education to Culture; Economy and Financing of Fashion and Creative Industries; and Protection of Works and Intellectual Property. Festival-goers had the opportunity to follow presentations by renowned speakers such as Professor Célestin Monga from Harvard University in the USA. These presentations were followed by debates and recommendations.

The question of financial support for creation was raised as one of the primary obstacles to the development of fashion and creative sectors in Africa. You know, Yves Saint Laurent wouldn’t be Yves Saint Laurent without Pierre Bergé, the man who supported him financially.

The same goes for Gucci. No great designer has grown his image by acting alone. You need financing behind the scenes, people with money to invest in designers so that they can grow. But we African designers are not so lucky. Yet there is no shortage of African businessmen capable of investing in and financially supporting African fashion and designers. I was the first to open a boutique in New York. But it’s Mr. Armando’s boutique that has received the most support, and is cited as a benchmark.

As far as education is concerned, I’ve been trying for ten years to create the largest fashion and arts school in Africa, and for ten years the government of Niger has allocated a 3,000 m² plot of land for the school, as well as a sum of 1 million dollars (500 million FCFA), of which only 50 million FCFA has been released. This situation stems from the fact that in my country, Niger, people have claimed that educating children in the field of art, creativity, fashion and anything to do with cultural professions is haram. These people who claim to defend the Muslim religion are saying that it’s forbidden to educate children in art or fashion, creativity, beauty. I was almost killed 3 times in my own country because I did a festival, 3 times. They paraded over 1000 people to denounce me on the pretext that I paraded our naked daughters. Who can claim that King Mohammed VI, Commander of the Faithful, has given His High Patronage to an activity that is haram for Muslims, myself included? It’s important to open people’s eyes to these incongruities, because Africa is dying of this, of obscurantism.

Speaking of intellectual protection, all our lives we’ve been talking about protecting our brands. We are shamelessly robbed of our designs and fabrics, copied to manufacture in Europe or China, and then sold
our own creations at exorbitant prices. How can we prevent these practices from continuing indefinitely? The commemoration of the World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture should provide an opportunity to reconcile Africa with its history and culture, to live and celebrate Africa and its diaspora. The cultural, artistic and creative dimension of Africa must be given its rightful place. The four-handed painting I'm doing with my friend Ouardane is also part of this beautiful story of Africans doing things together: Morocco and Niger, Morocco and Senegal, and with all the others, to highlight our values, our work, and so that today fashion and the arts contribute to the structural transformation of Africa. I have a friend called Abdoulaye Konaté who is selling a painting for $1,500,000, because he's starting to be recognized. In other words, culture and the arts have immense potential in Africa, because the continent is full of creative talent.

Africa's image has to be positive from every point of view, but our politicians and businessmen have to support us. Bazin and Wax, which many people call African, are not in fact African, even if they are mainly worn by Africans. What do Africans earn from the billions they sell in Bazin and Wax? 2% or 3%? This is not acceptable. If the market for Wax is Africa, why not fight for Wax to be made in Africa, a continent that is also a major cotton producer? It's just not right. This has to change.

Mr. Mbassi: Dear Alphadi, your plea is extraordinary and deserves not only applause but also commitment, because the most important thing is not to talk about action, but to act.

A number of questions have been posed that are of particular interest to the arts, writing and publishing worlds. Madam, you must answer our questions. How can we move beyond proclamations and declarations to action? We've been working on a proposal for a Manifesto for the renewal of African culture. This draft Manifesto will be submitted to the African Ministers of Culture for approval at their conference scheduled for May 25, 2023 in Rabat, as part of the celebration of Rabat as African Capital of Culture.
Ms Parfaite Ollame: I’d like to thank the organizers of this official commemoration of World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture for inviting me to this ceremony. My name is Parfaite Ollame. I’m a writer from Gabon. I received the proposed theme for my talk by e-mail, and was intrigued by the title: Vers un Manifeste pour le renouveau de la culture africaine. I asked myself why “Vers” in e-mail communication, I did see vers un renouveau and I had already asked why vers, because vers means to tend towards, we still have to wait. As I was saying, I recently received an e-mail outlining this renewal, this manifesto, and I said, “Well, we’re already there, we’re no longer towards, we’re already inside”.

And how do you achieve this in literature? In terms of literature in particular, and art in general, can we build imaginations that recast this African and Afro-descendant culture? What do we mean by building imaginaries? It’s about creating narratives that readers can relate to and that give Africa a positive image. To illustrate this, let’s take the question of myth, myth in Africa, the founding narratives, as Mr. Eugène Ebodé said earlier. It is indeed time to revisit these myths. But why? Because myth has the capacity to give readers the possibility of referring to something great.

Today, African people need to refer to our mythical characters. I’m thinking, for example, of Soundiata Keïta. And such characters can be found even in the history of the African Diaspora. I recently did some research on deported slaves and came across a black slave deported to Mexico, who I recently learned was of Gabonese origin. Gaspard Yanga was at the origin of a rebellion in the 17th century, a rebellion of the maroon negroes, a rebellion that led to the birth and creation of what is today San Lorenzo in Mexico. We need to revisit these heroes.

The question of the imaginary is doubly important today, because what others have done, they have created imaginary worlds. When we ask our children who they want to be like? Many say they want to be like Superman. But Superman is part of an imaginary that was created for American children to magnify the omnipotence of the United States and inculcate this belief in the minds of young Americans. We can also create imaginary worlds that glorify Africans or Afro-descendants. The film «The Woman King», for example, rehabilitates the heroic figure of the black woman. Similarly, a 30-meter-high statue has just been erected in Benin to celebrate the Amazons, the female warriors of the Kingdom of Dahomey who courageously fought to defend the Kingdom.

Dahomey built part of its reputation on its warriors, the Amazons, and a 30-meter statue has been erected to celebrate them. So that’s the kind of vision we need to have today, a rediscovery of the figure of the hero, a rewriting of the mythical and historical characters who have shaped Africa. We need to stop taking an overly miserabilistic view of African culture. We need alternative narratives that can help.

And then there’s the question of knowledge in our literary texts and art. We need to discover the knowledge that African and Afro-descendant texts offer. These texts contain historical knowledge to preserve the memory of peoples. They also contain aesthetic knowledge to show the beauty of Africa.

They also contain philosophical knowledge, which shows that we are a people who have reflected, and this reflection is a source of inspiration transmitted by African wisdom, often embodied in tales, chansons de geste, proverbs or games. But we can also read
this reflection in architecture, which is why in my teaching I often link architecture and literature, and many ask where the link between the two might lie. Finally, I'm interested in the link between literature and architecture, which is currently the subject of my reflections. When I spoke about literature and architecture at university, I was lectured about it, with many people saying «But how?» and «What link?» «Well, there is one.

Today, books are the guardians of memory. Remember, when Notre-Dame-de-Paris burned down, sales of Victor Hugo's book exploded, and people went to revisit Notre-Dame de Paris to relive the masterpiece in written form. So we also need to preserve architecture through books. How is architecture present in writing today? When you write about Rabat, you don't just have to write about Rabat... you have to write about Moroccan architecture. Books must be the guardians of memory. It's true, there is the image, but there is this connection today of the Arts. Today, the arts communicate: writing, architecture, cinema and so on. It's this kind of fusion or artistic ebullition that we need to achieve today. So this is one of the solutions. This renewal must also be seen, must be a perspective through our way of thinking about art, of writing, of making films, of fashion, and so on. We need to rethink it. There's also design, there's also history. We can no longer write our history as a tragedy, we have to write our history as an identity. It's our identity.

Mr. Mbassi: You can't find pride without heroes. The French invented something called Asterix the Gaul, who apparently resisted the Roman hordes, and French children have grown up with this idea. The Japanese came to Luxor with a model and an enormous machine, a huge calculator, to reproduce the construction of the pyramid. They made the first model, they finished the program, they put in all the equations and at the end, before they reached 3 meters, the system collapsed. They looked at it, they said these guys must be physically strong to have done this. Which Africans think that our ancestors were physically strong to have done this? Omotundé, rest his soul, a great contemporary man, an Egyptologist, said that the sciences through Egyptology have shown that Pythagoras, Thales, etc. learned mathematics in Egypt. Who among our children knows that mathematics was born in Africa? Omotundé proved it, and perhaps he died of it. You're right, there's the book. Writing, and Ebodé said earlier that the king of the Bamouns was so challenged by transmission that he invented a script, but men write through their construction and you are right to link architecture and writing. If books are to be remembered, and if the biennials that were suggested earlier are to be an intrusion into Africa, into this world of books and transmission, how do you, as professionals in the book and publishing industries, envisage taking action to get us out of the world of words alone?
Mr. Sansy Kaba Diakité: Good evening everyone. I'd like to thank my father, Dean Jean-Pierre, and also Eugène Ebodé, who has accompanied me for the past 10 years in what I do in Guinea. I'm Sansy Kaba Diakité, publisher, and I founded the «72 heures du Livre de Conakry» because I thought I had to do something. As far as I'm concerned, there are a lot of backers of sound on the continent. There's a lot of talk, but not enough action. For me, action must follow reflection. If there's no action after reflection, we can't move forward.

To answer the question of a manifesto for the renewal of African culture, I have only one answer, dear friends, and that's the book, and the book is the symbol of education. If we want to save the continent, if we want our leaders to wake up and our children to really be the next generation, we need books, and that's why I founded my publishing company 15 years ago. I realized that there was no distribution or promotion. So I created a space that I call the 72 heures du Livre, which takes place every April 23. And I know that many of you here don't know that April 23 is World Book and Copyright Day.

And this day is not celebrated on the continent because we don't know about it. Many writers were born or died on April 23. For the past 15 years, we've been holding «Les 72 heures du Livre» in Conakry. Despite this, the enthusiasm for reading hasn't developed as I'd hoped. So I wondered whether we shouldn't organize the World Book Cup in Guinea. I came up with the idea of Conakry, World Book Capital. President Alpha Condé, who was in power at the time, told me that it was crazy to imagine a Book World Cup in a country where there was no library, no reading space. How do you expect Conakry to become the World Book Capital under these conditions?

So I launched a powerful advocacy campaign, and in 2018, the National Library was created; there were reading points in Conakry's neighborhoods, and today, schools and universities are starting to set up media libraries. That's what we've achieved. Our dream is to make Conakry the African Book Capital, because we believe that in Ouagadougou today, cinema is celebrated, in Bamako, photography is celebrated, in Abidjan, the arts are celebrated, in Niamey, fashion is celebrated, in Dakar, contemporary arts are celebrated. We believe that in Guinea, the country of Camara Laye, Djibril Tamsir Niane, William Sassine and Tierno Monnembo, we can celebrate books every two years. It's not just a question of celebrating the book, but also the creators, the writers and the book industry, and rewarding them on a continental level. I think this is fundamental. That's what we've come here to Rabat to ask.

Mr. Elong Mbassi: When you listen to young people like Kaba Diakité, you realize that the energy of this continent is totally intact, and you can only be confident in its future. Kaba Diakité didn't just make a plea for the book, he didn't just talk, he acted. He talks about what he has done, and invites us to do even more, with the ambition of making Conakry the African Book Capital. Such an effort deserves to be supported.

Manifeste pour le Renouveau de la Culture hopes to harness all this experience and energy to breathe new life into the Charter of African Culture. We hope that the Manifesto will be the basis for restoring pride and dignity to all Africans and the Diaspora. As President Jerry Rawlings, former Head of State of Ghana, said, until the quest for dignity is at the heart of the actions of African nations, Africa will never develop: it may have a certain aspect of development, the surface of things, but no real development in the sense of giving
people back control over their lives. For a long time in recent years, China was poor, but dignified, and it developed because it was dignified even when it was poor. Culture and self-esteem are the foundation of all human progress. It is thanks to its culture that Africa will continue to play the role it has always played, that of being the beacon of the world. To conclude this third round-table discussion on the Renewal of African and Afro-descendant culture, I leave you to ponder the words of Frantz Fanon: "If building a bridge doesn't raise the level of consciousness of the people who are going to use it to cross the river, it's better to let them keep on swimming across".
World Day of African and Afro-descendant Culture

PRESENTATION OF THE JMCA-KÉKÉLI AWARD AND BIOGRAPHY OF THE WINNERS

African Capital of Culture 2022
PRESENTATION

THE JMCA ADOPTED BY UNESCO’S 193 MEMBER COUNTRIES

Draft resolution on the World Day for African and Afro descendant Culture was submitted to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. On 17 October 2019 the Executive Board of UNESCO voted it and on 20 November 2019 the 193 Member States of UNESCO adopted it by acclamation, henceforth recognizing 24th of January as the official and solemn date for the celebration of JMCA World Day for African and Afro descendant Culture.

Finally, a World Day promoting African culture was born. It will now serve as a bridge between the daughters and sons living in Africa and their descendants wherever they are in the world and celebrate their uniqueness.

The JMCA will be a new dynamic between Africans, Caribbean, Polynesians & Melanesians on a socio-cultural and economic level.

And for all humanity to pay tribute to Africa, our cradle and our common birthplace. January 24 has become a date of universality, inscribed on the official agenda of the UNESCO.

The adoption of JMCA by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) represents a subject of great pride for its initiator, the members, supporters and partners of the NGO RAPEC. The JMCA is a historic act for Africa and its descendants. JMCA creates a multidimensional relationship between Africa and its descendants (socio-cultural and economic).

THE CREATION OF THE JMCA–KÉKÉLI

As Frantz Fanon puts it, “Each generation must discover its mission and despite the opacity, fulfill it or betray it”, today’s world is prone to inequality and instability, a breeding ground for conflicts of all kinds. Convinced, however, that it is possible to reverse the trend in this rapidly changing world, we rely on studies whose outcomes suggest that reducing inequalities, fighting injustice, respecting and taking into account the diversity of human experience, as well as the complexity of interactions between the local and the global, can lead us to greater and lasting stability.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE OF THE JMCA–KÉKÉLI AWARDS

• Reward outstanding personalities from all walks of life or institutions that promote social cohesion and peace between nations.

• Promote human values that are at the root of a culture of peace through the search for practical ways to build peaceful relations between nations.

• Encourage our leaders to work towards legality, justice and peace in order to promote the living together.

• Help our youth to assume more responsibility, by developing entrepreneurship and employment with the aim of preserving our environment today.

MISSION OF THE WINNERS OF THE JMCA–KÉKÉLI AWARDS

• Support or sponsor, those who are fighting to meet the major challenges facing humanity today.

• Encourage the leaders of the One Hundred and Ninety-three (193) Member States of UNESCO to work towards justice and peace in order to promote or strengthen the living together and social cohesion.

• Help or pave the way to our youth’s awareness in preserving our environment.

• Promote human values and a culture of peace.

• The Kekelis become Goodwill Ambassadors of the JMCA-Kekeli Award Committee throughout the world. They are not subject to any rules.

• The winner of the JMCA-Kékéli Award will only lose his or her Prize if it is definitively condemned by a statement issued by a court of law (National or International Criminal Court).
PROFILE OF THE BENEFICIARY OF THE JMCA–KÉKÉLI AWARDS

We distinguish five personalities who define and found the best ways of living together. The standard-bearers of an awareness of true KÉKÉLI-JMCA for our world in search of lasting peace and the establishment of harmonized diplomatic relationships.

Grand Prix d’Honneur are granted to
personalities from all walks of life who campaign in favor of the implementation of social cohesion, living together, or contributing to peace between peoples.

Merit Awards are granted to
personalities from all walks of life who, through their work and acts are recognized and respected.

Or .
Traditional Chiefs, Artists and Journalists of all kinds, Entrepreneurs, Associations, Sportsmen, Craftsmen, Patronages, Foundations, NGO’s, or the best Communications Agencies.

CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION AND INEQUALITY

- National, international and corporate structures may nominate candidates for the Grand Prize of Honor and Merit. However, a highly motivated individual application may be selected if the profile meets the defined criteria.
- Each application must be issued along with a motivation letter and a biography mentioning the actions carried out.
- Any application received after the deadline which is set each year will be rejected.

THE JMCA–KÉKÉLI AWARD COMMITTEE

- The Prize Committee is composed of ten (9) members. They sit under the chairmanship of RAPEC or the Chairman of the JMCA-KÉKÉLI Award Committee.
- No Member may be a candidate for the JMCA-KÉKÉLI Award for the season in which he or she sits.
- Voting is met through absolute majority by the members of the Committee to nominate the winners

PERIODICITY OF THE JMCA–KÉKÉLI – AWARD

- The recipient receives an official letter of nomination as the recipient of the JMCA-Kékéli Award no later than September the 30th of the current year.
- The list of winners is announced during the following year on January 24th or another date chosen by the Award Committee in an official setting.
- Their names and backgrounds are published on the official website of the NGO RAPEC, the CM-JMCA and on partner websites.
- A video and audio are produced and broadcasted on all the platforms of RAPEC and its partners to introduce the winners to the audiences.
- The award is delivered in a dedicated ceremony, or in a specific event, before 31st December of the current Year.
JMCA-KEKELI AWARD COMMITTEE

Mr. Julien KILANGA MUSINDA
Executive Director of JMCA-KEKELI Award

Mr. John Ayité DOSSAVI
Président du Comité of JMCA-KEKELI Award

Ms. Laurianne ROSSI
Honorary President of JMCA-KEKELI Award

Mr. Bonaventure AGUISSI
Deputy Executive Director of JMCA-KEKELI Award

Ms. Amel ZRIBI HACHANA
General Director of the Agency for the Valorisation of Heritage and Cultural Promotion. Former Head of Cabinet of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs (Tunisia).

H.E. Ms. Laura FAXAS
Ambassador of the Dominican Republic in Austria

Mr. Khalid TAMER

Ms. Lydia ANTOINE

Ms. Ogechi OGAN-EKANDEM
Former Head of Unit Communication and External Relations of the Bank the ECOWAS (EBID)

Ms. Fiorine AMOUGOU
CEO, Managing Director of FLIMEX

Ms. Marie-Ange LITADIER - DOSSOU
Deputy Mayor, Charge of Health, in the City of Tremblay in France. Secretary of SECAD (Association of Elected Officials).

Mr. Kag SANOUSI
President of the International Institute for Conflict Management (ICMI), author of several books.

Dr. Paul KANANURA
International Public Policy Expert & President of the Mandela Institute.
The Roles of Committee Members

Members of the Award Committee are appointed by the NGO RAPEC & the Mobilisation Committee for JMCA, for a period of four years. They are chaired by the President of RAPEC and administered by the Executive Director.

The Members of the Nominations Committee(e) select the recipients for the JMCA-KÉKÉLI Award of Honour, from among the five nominations selected by the NGO RAPEC & C M - JMCA. Next comes the selection of the two recipients for the JMCA-KÉKÉLI Award of Merit, from among the five applications also selected by the NGO RAPEC & the C M - JMCA.

Deliberations take place by secret ballot. The decision is taken by an absolute majority of the members of the jury in the first three rounds, and by a relative majority in the following round. In the event of a tie, the Chairman has the casting vote.

Deliberation is done either in person or by correspondence. (by digital means addressed to the President of the Prize Committee)

- The Members of the Committee designate the winners and each member must justify the reasons for his or her choice. Their names are then validated by the President of the prize and by the President of the PANAFRICAN NGO RAPEC.
- Designated Committee Members contribute to establishing the notoriety and credibility of the JMCA-Kékéli Award through their media appearances and communications platforms.
- Designated Committee Members use their notoriety, in particular to widely promote the JMCA-Kékéli Prize among authorities and people of good will.
- Members of the designated Committee cannot be candidates for the JMCA-Kékéli Prize during their term of office. However, they may present Candidates.
- JMCA Mobilisation Committee (CM-JMCA) in agreement with the President of RAPEC appoint: a President and a Vice-President of the Award Committee; an Executive Director and an Assistant (appointed for 3 years); an Honorary President; and a Sponsor (appointed for 2 years)
JMCA-KÉKÉLI AWARD OF MERIT

His Majesty AKATSI 2 DJIDJILÉVO
Dr Martine Cécile NGO NYEMB - WISMAN
Elected in 2012 Secretary General of ORRA (Organization of Kings and Queens of Africa) in Accra, Ghana. Also President of the Mono Couffo Kings in the South-East department of Benin. He is also Coordinator of the High Council of Kings of Benin (HCBR).

King of the Watchi Dynasty of Benin-Togo-Ghana. In 2010, he was appointed Ambassador for Peace in Korea by Universal Peace Federation (UPF).

Since 2010, his fight against child abuse has led him to collaborate with local elected officials to raise awareness and eradicate this endemic scourge (particularly forced child labour).

This posture leads him to unequivocally refuse to see a child forced to go and sell in the markets instead of attending school. He also materializes this by giving many donations to children in great suffering such as school supplies and clothing... For him, the future of our humanity passes above all through the education and protection of our children.

His Majesty AKATSII II had to represent in some international meetings, the Traditional African and Beninese Chieftaincy in several countries namely: South Africa, Ghana, Togo, Gabon, Burkina Faso, Mali, United States, Guyana, France, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Cameroon, South Africa, South Korea, Kenya...

His Majesty AKATSII 2 DJIDJILÉVO

With your Association Organisation of Kings and Queens of Africa (ORRA) you have mobilised several of your peers to pose the basis for a major mobilisation and make 24 January the date of the Celebration of the customs, values and traditions of African countries. "Cradle of Humanity and Civilisations" through the JMCA. This process has brought you to South Africa, Burkina faso, Ghana, Mali and many other lands.

Therefore, the NGO RAPEC and the Mobilization Committee of the JMCA-World Day of African and Afro-descendant Culture, make you a KEkELI of Merit.
Holder of a doctorate (PhD) in political and social sciences from the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. Her academic and professional career at the head of economic and associative structures has given her the opportunity to design and implement effective development projects in French-speaking Africa. Technical consultant in the field of gender and development as a designer, operator and evaluator of development projects. She has 15 years of approved expertise in the field of women's empowerment in the popular economy in the socio-political contexts of the South.

Within the framework of her numerous research missions in Africa and more specifically in Cameroon, she has become aware of situations of multifaceted violations of the rights of African and Cameroonian women. She then decided to combine practice with theory by creating a non-profit association in Belgium in 2008 to provide concrete and appropriate responses to African women's voluntarism. Named "Femmes Interface Nord-Sud - Women Interface North-South" (FINS-WINS). The main objective is to strengthen women's entrepreneurship for the development of countries through the promotion of humanist values and international solidarity. A team of practitioners, made up of men and women with multidisciplinary profiles, from different cultures and nationalities, accompany these women, supervise their outreach and actions in the field...

The main lines of its actions:

- **Advocacy**: at national, pan-African and international level and within the limits of means.
- **Micro-financing**: open to women starting or expanding their activities.
- **Dynamic development strategy**... to improve their income, necessary for the transformation of their living conditions and the promotion of peace in the Cities.
- **Information and training**: management, production, conservation, processing and marketing.

To quote: "brought a concrete and appropriate response to women's voluntarism in sub-Saharan Africa", you set up the NGO Femmes Interface Nord-Sud-Women Interface - North-South (FINS-WINS), a powerful tool to support women's empowerment in the popular and solidarity economy in many villages in Cameroon.

Consequently, the NGO RAPEC and the Mobilization Committee of the JMCA-World Day of African Culture, make you a KEKELI of Merit.
Speech by the winners of the JMCA-Kékéli Merit Award

His Majesty AKSATI II - DJIDJILÉVO, Benin

I would like to thank the person who made it possible for us to be here for this award. I thank my brother and friend Monsieur Ayité. And finally, I thank Professor Elong Mbassi. In fact, if we are the deserving ones, as they say, you deserve this Prize too, and I take the liberty of dedicating it to you.

I dedicate it to you because you are here and you have made your contribution to this achievement.

We have remained «Fio» AKSATI II - DJIDJILÉVO for 38 years of enthronement. We represent the traditional authorities of Africa, we are royalty. So, at the same time, I dedicate this prize to King Mohammed VI and to Morocco, to all Moroccans. I also dedicate this prize to them, because we won it here in Morocco and in Rabat. Not forgetting the Mayor of Rabat, who was with us this morning. Finally, I will faithfully report this Merit Award to the people of Benin, Ghana and Togo. May God, Allah the Creator, give us life and fill us with all the graces we need, so that during next year’s JMCA celebration, other Africans can benefit from this Award. I can’t finish without thanking the Minister of Culture and UCLG Africa, thanks to whom this commemoration took place in Morocco. I thank UNESCO and JMCA’s partners for this important initiative.

Dr. Martine NGO NYEMB-WISMAN

I don’t know where to start, but I have to start somewhere, don’t I? So I’ll start with the sky. I’m going to raise my eyes to heaven to say thank you. Thank you to the God who has enabled us to gather here this evening around an extremely important and essential theme for this Africa on the move. And I say thank you to the Lord, to Almighty God, for allowing me to be here with you, and secondly, my thanks go to the people who have organized this event. I’m delighted to meet Mr Elong Mbassi. Thank you for what you do for Africa, thank you for deconstructing the negative images that disqualify Africa and for helping to rebuild the paradigms that underpin Africa’s renewal.

This JMCA-KEKELI Prize is a prize of light. I’m going to paraphrase someone and say: «culture without light is only the flat spot of real development in Africa». And this culture without light has a real face. It’s the face of the African woman. Let it be said, 52% of the African population is female.

Mr. John Ayité Dossavi, when you met me and told me that I had been awarded the JMCA-KEKELI Prize, I cried and thought of the women I work with in the popular economy sector. For me, as an African woman committed to reflection, what is the significance of science and research today if this science is not at the service of real development as it is actually experienced by people, and not as it is conceived, thought out and theorized by scholars, and it is in this context that I meet my brother. Who knows about this popular economy driven by street vendors («Bayam Sellam»)? Isn’t it socially disqualified by discourse and practice when it’s referred to as the informal sector? Is it not financially condemned, despite the fact that it is responsible for the development of a significant proportion of Africans, and that women are in the majority? Who cares about these women who earn two euros a day, look after nine children and manage to send them to school? Africa will never be an Africa of real development if we don’t include this category of actors in the field of development. I dedicate this Prize to them.
JMCA-KÉKÉLI AWARD OF HONOR

H.E. Mr. André AZOULAY
Mr. Jean Pierre ELONG MBASSI
Moroccan journalist, economist and politician. Graduate of the Paris Centre for Training of Journalists. Since 1966 he has been the husband of the writer Katia Brami, with whom he has three daughters, including Sabrina, producer, and Audrey. In 1991, he left Paribas and became advisor to King Hassan II and then Mohammed VI.

Charged with dealing with the economic liberalisation of Morocco, he formed the Q14 think tank. He then took charge of improving the political communication of the Palace. He is notably behind the phrase ”King of the poor” systematically repeated in the media at the beginning of the reign of Mohammed VI.

Man of networks, member of numerous associations and foundations. In 1974, he created in Paris the group ”Identity and Dialogue”, an organisation of intellectuals calling from the beginning of the 1970s for the creation of a Palestinian State living in peace alongside Israel.

He is also one of the founders of the Aladdin project created in 2009, which from Paris works to restore trust between the Arab-Muslim world and the Western world.

Elected President of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, based in Alexandria (Egypt). Member of the Committee of Wise Men for the Alliance of Civilizations at the United Nations, Deputy President of the Foundation of the Three Cultures and Three Religions, based in Seville (Spain), and administrator of the Mediterranean Forum and the Shimon Peres Centre for Peace.

Finally, he is a member of the United Nations High Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations where he was elected President of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation on March 5, 2008 and re-elected on 22 October 2011. The responsibility of civil societies and the centrality of the dialogue of cultures in the construction of the Union for the Mediterranean are at the heart of his action.
Is since 2007 the Secretary General of United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLG Africa). President of the Interim Management Board of Cities Alliance until April 2016. He is one of the initiators of the Africities Summits, the most important event of African cities, regions and local governments, whose organisation he has overseen since the first edition in 1998. **Today, he and his team have just launched, every three years, the election of the most cultural African city under the name “African Capital of Culture”.**

He is also Co-Chair of the World Cities Scientific Development Alliance (WCSDA). Deputy Secretary General of the Sino-African Local Government Forum.

**In 2010 he was awarded the Qatar Olympic Musical Award.** Mr ELONG MBASSI, has nearly 40 years of experience in the field of urban development, land use planning, urban services, local economic development, local government governance, housing and slum upgrading.

From 1996 to 1999, he was the first ever Secretary General of the World Association of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination (WACLAC).

At the same time he was Secretary General of the Municipal Development Partnership (MDP) from 1992 to 2006.

Prior to that, from 1981 to 1991, Mr ELONG MBASSI was the Director of the first urban project co-financed by the World Bank in Cameroon, which involved the restructuring and development of a slum area of 300,000 inhabitants in the city of Douala.

Finally, Mr. ELONG MBASSI whose career started in Paris (France) where he was in charge of studies. Project manager at the Cooperation and Development Agency from 1973 to 1980.
Mr. ANDRÉ AZOULAY, (word of thanks read by his representative)

Mr. Secretary General, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I’d like to say how delighted I am to be here with you this evening as part of the great African family, and also to say how honored I am to represent Mr. André AZOULAY to receive this tremendous award on his behalf. Mr. Azoulay would have been delighted to share this moment with you, and to tell you in person how proud he is to receive the JMCA-KEKELI Prize.

His pride in his commitment to living together, his pride in his commitment to the values of Humanity, his pride in his deep roots in Morocco’s African soil since his early youth and throughout his professional career as a financier, banker and journalist, right up to the present day, where he is Advisor to His Majesty King Mohammed VI, may God assist him. If Monsieur Azoulay were here, he would also tell you of his attachment to this Africa, to the Kingdom of Morocco with its cultural and religious diversity, and of his particular attachment to his hometown Essaouira, because Essaouira is a real melting pot of the values we are celebrating this evening. A melting pot of African values, as history testifies, through the caravan routes that have always linked Essaouira to the depths of Africa, notably to Timbuktu and even as far afield as Cape Verde. Many Cape Verdeans are originally from Essaouira. These links are ancestral, and they have ensured that today, these African values really exist on the ground, and are also the value of the Kingdom of Morocco. Thank you.

Mr. Jean-Pierre ELONG MBASSI

Ladies and Gentlemen of the JMCA-KEKELI Prize Jury, thank you for awarding me the Honorary distinction of the JMCA-KEKELI Prize.

However, I have the feeling that I don’t deserve this honor. For what honor is it? I am challenged by what Professor Monga said this morning.

What merit do we have when those out there who gave us life continue to live an undignified life? What merit do we have? What honor do we have?

Why am I going to accept this prize? I’m going to accept it because those who awarded it probably had good reasons for doing so. I don’t know who they were. What I do know, however, is that I have a deep conviction that we must do everything we can, in the time we have left, to put an end to the indignity, shame and impotence in which we have lived. Yes, it’s a duty of honor, which is why I accept this Prize, which I dedicate to all those who are committed to meeting this challenge.

Once again, thank you!
Photo gallery
World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture

January 24, 2023

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