

May 25: Africa Day

The Moroccan Factor

Boosting a continent on the move

Ever since the Organization of African unity (OAU) was created on May 25, 1963 to bring together an emerging continent of newly independent nations — reinforced by the African Union (AU) which later took up the reins — the celebration of that anniversary has come to be known as Africa Day. But building the cause of a united Africa has never been as legitimate as it is today, May 25, 2017!

Morocco's commitment to African unity, though, was present from the start. And so, on January 30, 2017 with a vast majority of African countries and their leaders voting yes, Morocco's reintegration into the African Union, after its 32-year absence, has given the continental body a much-needed and greatly welcomed impetus, a fresh-start, and an intensified sense of vitality and purpose. It was indeed a great, celebratory day, when the 28th Summit of the African Union overwhelmingly welcomed back Morocco at its Addis Ababa headquarters in the Ethiopian capital thereby closing a prolonged chapter of absence and Morocco's expression of displeasure on the handling of the debate surrounding the sensitive Sahara and its southern provinces.

It is greatly significant that King Mohammed VI himself chose to lead a senior and highly diversified delegation to Addis Ababa to validate his country's re-admission to the AU. This was rightly seen as a clear sign of the momentous decision that that occasion truly represented. Morocco's renewed role in Africa caps now decades of effective and fraternal diplomacy in political, economic, social and religious terms, and which characterizes Morocco's emergence as one of the most dynamic African players in promoting African solidarity and

sustainable development, as well as a leader in the beginning of a new African era of wealth-creation and exemplary leadership.



King Mohammed VI at the African Union, Addis Ababa

Morocco's return to the African fold marks the end of an anomaly in the process of African integration. Independent observers once noticed that Morocco's absence constituted a void in African development considering the importance of the country's initial role in pan-African affairs. History cannot forget that it was the Moroccan King Mohammed V, the grand-father of the current monarch, who spearheaded the most vocal and influential group that called for the creation of Africa's first pan-African political organization following the early phase of independence and statehood of African nations at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s.

It was in fact the Casablanca Group, led by the voice of the King and those of other progressive African leaders, that insisted foremost on the need for the continent to achieve federal integration as now advocated by the AU and not to be satisfied merely with a gradual integration process.

Morocco's return to the AU, it could be said, fills a gap and provides the organization with a new legitimacy in its accelerated march towards becoming a force in an unfolding century in which strong new forces driven by the internet, telecommunications,

social networks, new trade relations, and big data are reshaping the whole planet.

To a large extent, as Africa celebrates today its own embrace of African integration, as defined by its founding fathers, Morocco's global vision is reaffirmed. Rabat's Africa policy has been built coherently around a sound internal institutional framework, which places the monarchy at the heart of a global geo-political outlook that has been inspired by the developmental model of the nation's southern provinces, a model aimed at bridging the Kingdom of Morocco with its natural African extended family. Morocco's ultimate objective is to serve as an African hub of peace and stability in the Sub-Saharan region, and to reactivate the rich network of social and commercial links that once graced the larger region.

Morocco's return to the AU comes at a particularly fortuitous time. Now, more than ever, the African continent is being recognized indeed as a hugely promising territory and market. Gone are the old, dark expressions for describing the African continent.

With its demographic dividend of a youthful and growing population that will reach over two billion people by the 2050, Africa, where so much of the planet's untapped natural resources are located, with over 60 percent of Earth's remaining arable land, and an attractive market consisting of hundreds of millions of middle-income consumers live and work, Africa is the world's next frontier of development and opportunities.

To this end, Morocco more than any other nation is most qualified within the African Union to help the continent transform a shining moment into an enduring success. Morocco—a nation that has always been present in this belief—is back at the helm transforming these goals into a glorious reality.

Happy Africa Day! — AG

Leadership built at home

In heart and soul, Morocco is firmly among the drivers of a changing continent. To be just, the projection of its African strategy is nothing but another vindication of an old tenet of any sound diplomatic ambition which posits that foreign policy begins at home.

All has in fact started over the years as, since the advent of King Mohammed VI, internal efforts have been deployed to consolidate the Kingdom's already solid institutional foundations by entrenching next to its royal institutions an open and pluralistic democracy. Political pluralism is thriving while a clear consensus has been reached within its shores on at least two aspects: the territorial integrity and the overarching acceptance of the constitutional monarchy.

Whereas most nations in Africa, including its Arabic area, have been shaken by political turmoil, Morocco has progressively and steadily sailed forward. This is due to a set of effective national institutions allowing it to forge cohesion around a new vision placing among others Sub-Saharan Africa as a top priority.

Even before what has been hailed as the Arab Spring, bringing about a seemingly new wave of democracy in countries long excluded from political openness, the process had been engaged in Morocco.

King Mohammed VI understood instinctively that domestic adaptation, consolidation, and a new African strategy, grounded on solidarity and mutually profitable relationships, constituted the two sides of the same coin.

The many examples highlighted in these pages speak to this, as is the case with the huge gas pipeline already jointly agreed with Nigeria, the Kingdom's close ties with regional institutions like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the innovative religious training offered in the holy city of Fes to African Muslim scholars in order to promote a tolerant version of Islam, and the contribution of Moroccan banks and insurance companies in funding developmental projects on the continent. As host of the Africa 50 Fund set up by the African Development Bank (AfDB), Morocco has in fact become a key hub in the implementation process of the Africa 2063 Agenda adopted by the AU as the blueprint for the continent's development over the next fifty years.

Peaceful, stable, and clear about its goals at home and elsewhere in Africa, Morocco has naturally found its way at a time when Africa is looking to leadership to claim this century. —AG



King Mohammed V, grandfather of King Mohammed VI, with founding fathers of African integration process, 1960s

“With its geographical location and its elaborate history, Morocco has always been a bridge between Europe and Africa. Today, its stability, its clear support of an open and tolerant Islam, its African diplomacy, and its economic dynamism renders Morocco a major player on the international scene.”

— Eric Besson, international consultant and former French Minister of Industry, Energy and the Digital Economy

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