

Africa helping to shape the world

By [Kingsley Ighobor](#)

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Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, Nigeria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, was on 4 June elected President of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly. His tenure will begin in September 2019. In this interview with *Africa Renewal's* **Kingsley Ighobor**, Professor Bande talks about his vision, Africa's socioeconomic challenges including eliminating poverty, addressing climate change, promoting gender equality, and deploying multilateralism to achieving global agenda. These are excerpts:



Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, Nigeria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

***Africa Renewal:* Congratulations on your election as President of the UN General Assembly. What is your vision for your tenure which begins in September 2019?**

Tijjani Muhammad Bande: My vision for the presidency of the 74th General Assembly encompasses the fundamental issues that define the United Nations. They are: peace and security, climate action, zero hunger, eradication of poverty and quality education. As you know, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals agreed to by the United Nations in 2015 have all these elements. Achieving these will be less likely unless we deal with issues of inclusion and partnership.

What specifically would be your agenda for Africa?

This is an African presidency only in so far as it is the turn of Africa to produce the leadership of the General Assembly. However, most issues discussed by the Security Council are African issues, and include peace and security, the disintegration of states, the issue of terrorism that has ravaged parts of Central and West Africa. Ending poverty is a challenge that is most urgent on the continent, because by every objective measure, the proportion of the poor is higher in Africa than in other regions. By addressing poverty, you are tackling a huge percentage of the problems that bedevil the continent.

The African Union has the *Silencing the Gun by 2020* agenda. What can the UN do to support Africa and foster peace and security?

There is a formal memorandum of understanding between the African Union and the United Nations in the areas of conflict, peace and security. Already, there is coordination in understanding the nature of conflicts in Africa. There are agreements approved by the UN Security Council that allow the UN to support African peacekeeping missions. Other agreements

involve capacity building extended by the UN to the AU. The UN has a very robust office in Addis [Ethiopia] that fosters coordination and joint analyses of conflict situations on the continent. At the UN headquarters in New York, there is a special adviser to the SG on Africa. And you have seen the frequency of visits of the Secretary General to the continent. So, the UN is fully engaged with Africa.

Is an Africa without war a realisable dream?

Oh, it is possible! The way African states are improving their governance structure, the way sub-regional organisations like ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States], SADC [Southern Africa Development Community] and the others are operating, you will increasingly find improved governance and improved coordination in dealing with local conflicts before they become global problems. Most of the conflicts are really failures of governance. The very idea that Africa has a formal declaration of not accepting a non-democratic change of government is a step forward. When you remove yourself from the immediacy of the conflicts in countries, you see progress is being made. But then again, even a single conflict is not acceptable. I see a period in which there will be no large-scale conflict of the kind we have seen in Africa before. The issue is not whether there will be conflict because conflicts are a part of life; the issue is whether we can avoid violent conflicts and that we have a robust political system.

You have canvassed gender equality. What is the underlying rationale?

It is obvious. In most societies you find equality between men and women in terms of the numbers. If you are dealing with social issues, with development issues, and you are unable to allow the participation of a significant proportion of your populace, you will have deprived yourself of the contribution of that group. When you have a robust participation of men and women, you are likely to have more creativity than if you allowed only one gender.

What would you tell African leaders regarding women's empowerment?

Every country in Africa has subscribed to the concept of equal participation and equal rights of citizens, male and female. We want African countries to hasten and make this a reality not only through legislation, but also by dealing with whatever practices exist that hinder the participation of women in national life. That is the meaning of equality. Gender equality is a global issue, but inequality is more evident in places where there are serious development challenges.

Climate change is causing conflict and internal displacements in Africa. What can Africa do about it?

The evidence of linkages between migration, climate change and conflict are clear in many parts of the continent and there is a need to address these. The AU and its member states have made a commitment to tackle climate change. But when there is mass poverty, the things you commit to doing become difficult to do. Africa is also aware that it doesn't contribute a lot of greenhouse emissions but it suffers the consequences in a direct manner. There are policies related to this and many countries in Africa are taking the lead. We also note that African countries were active in the Paris climate agreement.

How does Africa deal with its bulging and largely unemployed youth population?

Youth unemployment is a global problem, and Africa has recognised this. That's why the youth agenda is a crucial element in the AU agenda. The youth need education that can lead them to jobs. We need a vibrant private sector that can create jobs—in the past, only the government created jobs for graduates, which is no longer possible. We must look at our educational system, at the economy itself and ask: what kind of jobs are available? How do we create the things that we consume?

Given the latest developments in international affairs, what is your take on multilateralism as an effective tool to advance global agenda?

Frankly I do not see any large-scale problems that can be solved outside multilateralism. You have health pandemics. How

do you deal with an Ebola outbreak as a national or local government issue? How do you deal with climate change as a national issue? How do you deal with terrorism as a national issue? Today, thanks to technology, many things that happen in one place can happen elsewhere—there are means of disseminating them. That doesn't mean that there are no local problems, but many of the issues we deal with are multilateral. So, multilateralism does mean we can gain from the contributions of countries, their ideas and creativity, in support of global effort. The multilateral approach is predicated upon respect of nations regardless of their size.

What final message do you have for Africans?

The message is clear: that Africa is not a peripheral part of the world. It is as important as any other region. So, as a responsible part of the global community, Africa must be making contributions that shape the world, solving the problems of the world. African youth must be confident as they engage in the world. We should celebrate the many African youth who are already making meaning contributions to solving the world's problems.

Source: Africa Renewal.

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