

Reflecting on 25 years of the AU Constitutive Act: Unconstitutional changes of government

Donald Deya*

► Received: 7 August 2025 ► Accepted: 26 November 2025**

Abstract

This essay is a write-up of the oral reflections by Donald Deya on 25 years of the Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU), interrogating its achievements, limitations, and the reforms necessary to revitalise continental governance. It delineates a broad historical and normative trajectory, from the transition from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the AU, to the development of the norms, institutions, and practices governing unconstitutional changes of government. This essay argues that the AU's credibility has been steadily eroded by inconsistent implementation of its own standards. The AU has made significant progress in norm-setting and institutional design. This has included the adoption of the African Charter on

* Donald Deya is the Chief Executive Officer of the Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU) based in Arusha, Tanzania. He was previously Chief Executive of the East Africa Law Society (EALS), and before that, Acting CEO of the Kenyan Section of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ-Kenya), and Deputy CEO of the Law Society of Kenya (LSK). He, through his work at PALU, is a leading litigator before the East African Court of Justice and the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights. He also led the consulting team that drafted what became the Protocol on Amendments to the Protocol on the Statute of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights (Malabo Protocol).

** This article has undergone single blind review.

Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) and the establishment of the AU Peace and Security Council. However, it has struggled to address constitutional manipulation by incumbents with the same vigour applied to military coups. As global democratic recession and weakened continental institutions intensify political instability, the essay calls for a repoliticised AU and procedural reforms that enable early and principled intervention. Ultimately, it argues that addressing both military and civilian coups with consistency and courage is essential if the AU is to reclaim moral authority and advance democratic governance on the continent.

Keywords: Constitutive Act of the African Union, unconstitutional changes of government, civilian coups, military coups, electoral justice, democratic governance, political courage

Introduction

The year 2025 marks a quarter-century since the adoption of the Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU).¹ This landmark instrument has redefined continental governance by shifting the African project from the Organisation of African Unity's (OAU) doctrine of non-interference to the AU's ethos of non-indifference.² The transformation reflects a continental resolve to respond more robustly to conflict, human rights violations, and unconstitutional changes of government. These issues had long undermined Africa's political stability.³ Yet, as the continent reflects on this 25-year journey, persistent challenges, new geopolitical realities and institutional fatigue raise critical questions about the effectiveness and future of the AU's governance architecture.

This essay, as a write-up of my insights during the International Law Month webinar convened by Kabarak University Press and the Pan-African Lawyers Union on 21 August 2025,⁴ revisits the historical and political foundations of the AU's approach to unconstitutional changes of government. It situates the contemporary crisis within broader global trends, including democratic recession, the rise of new geopolitical actors, weakened multilateralism, and declining external support for human rights norms. It further considers how internal dynamics, ranging from constitutional manipulation by incumbents to institutional depopulation within the AU Commission, have hampered the operationalisation of continental norms.

I must sincerely thank, appreciate, and congratulate Kabarak University Press for hosting the International Law Month 2025, and also for the work you are doing in anchoring Pan-Africanism, African unity,

¹ Constitutive Act of the African Union, 11 July 2000.

² Ben Kioko, 'The right of intervention under the African Union's Constitutive Act: From non-interference to non-intervention', 85(852) *Revue Internationale de La Croix-Rouge/International Review of the Red Cross* (2003) 807-814.

³ Kioko, 'The right of intervention under the African Union's Constitutive Act: From non-interference to non-intervention', 807-810.

⁴ Reflecting on the first 25 years of the Constitutive Act of the African Union: Webinar 2, Kabarak University Press YouTube Channel, 21 August 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HWyH26UO4I>.

and regional integration. Not only from an academic platform, but also one that engages the public so robustly. It is really, really needed at the time we find ourselves.

The discussion proceeds in three parts. First, it traces the AU's normative evolution, from the 1990 Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa to the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG). Second, it assesses the institutions created to support these norms, including the Peace and Security Council, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the African Governance Architecture. It highlights both their successes and the inconsistencies that have weakened their authority. Third, it interrogates the contemporary recurrence of coups, military, electoral, and civilian, and examines how selective enforcement has diminished the AU's legitimacy and emboldened unconstitutional actors.

The paper concludes by proposing concrete reforms such as recalibrating election observation as an early warning tool, strengthening the interface between citizens and continental organs, enhancing the role of regional economic communities (RECs), and revitalising Pan-African civic solidarity. These measures, it is argued, are urgently required if the AU is to reclaim its founding promise of promoting democratic governance, peace, and constitutionalism across the continent.

The legal regime and action on unconstitutional changes of government

The prior webinar⁵ discussed the dilemmas, debates, and divergences around the Casablanca group and the Monrovia group in African history in the early 1960s.⁶ Those divisions have continued to plague

⁵ Reflecting on the first 25 years of the Constitutive Act of the African Union: Webinar 1, Kabarak University Press YouTube Channel, 7 August 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97KIBcgExlk>

⁶ Gerrit Olivier, 'Regionalism in Africa: Cooperation without integration?', 32(2) *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* (2010) 27; Kwame Nkrumah, *The autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, International Publishers, 1957, 164 where he famously states, 'seek ye first the political kingdom'.

the continent, and they are partly responsible for where we find ourselves today on unconstitutional changes of government in Africa.

There were those who pushed for faster unity and stronger institutions. There are those who advocate for slower unity, and I believe there were actually actors who did not want unity at all. We are not often courageous enough to state that or call it out. Had we achieved unity more quickly, had we had stronger and more powerful institutions, especially the AU in Addis, along with many other organs and institutions of the AU, we might have been able to deal with the issue of unconstitutional changes of government more robustly.

The second foundational premise I will present is that unconstitutional changes of government are part of the AU's very foundation. This issue animated the transformation and transition from the OAU to the AU, and has been central to the AU's engagement ever since. I would argue that the lack of a concrete breakthrough on how to handle this issue on the continent is part of the reason for the malaise the AU suffers from to this day.

When I describe the various steps and norms we have developed, you will see why I say that unconstitutional changes of government, are part of the very umbilical cord that animated the transformation from the OAU to the AU. This shift marked a move from non-interference to non-indifference, bringing us to where we are now.⁷ However, we must also consider the broader context.

What is the context in which we are discussing unconstitutional changes of government in 2025? Globally, there is a general trend towards democratic regression or recession, and Africa is not immune. Over the past 20 years, the rising influence of China, and more recently Russia, has shifted the dynamics around how we discuss democracy, governance, human rights, and peoples' rights. At the same time, the influence of colleagues from Europe and North America, who once

⁷ Kioko, 'The right of intervention under the African Union's Constitutive Act: From non-interference to non-intervention', 807-810.

contributed significantly to democratisation and human rights efforts on the continent, has waned.

In recent years, the rise of the far-right in Europe has further undermined the global standing of human and peoples' rights. This context shapes the AU's efforts on unconstitutional changes of government. When assessing what the AU has done, or can do, on unconstitutional changes of government (UCGs), I usually frame it as a journey in three steps: norm setting, institution building, and implementation.

From the year 2000, when we adopted a new set of norms, an effort both Professor Hajer, the AU Legal Counsel, and Honourable Kioko, former AU Legal Counsel, elaborated on last week,⁸ we have typically followed the process of setting norms, then building institutions, and finally implementation. Reflecting on the continent's norm-setting journey regarding UCGs, we begin with the 1990 Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and the Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World. Then came the 1995 Cairo Agenda for the Relaunch of Africa's Economic and Social Development.

In 1999, the Algiers Declaration on Unconstitutional Changes of Government was adopted, followed in 2000 by the Lomé Declaration for an OAU response to unconstitutional changes.⁹ This pivotal moment marked the transition from the OAU to the AU, also in Lomé. In 2002, we saw the Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa.¹⁰ Then in 2003, several important legal instruments were introduced, most notably the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union.¹¹

⁸ Reflecting on the first 25 years of the Constitutive Act of the African Union: Webinar 1, Kabarak University Press Youtube Channel, 7 August 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97KIBcgExlk>

⁹ Chidi Odinkalu, 'A ruler's shield? Re-evaluating the norm against unconstitutional changes of government in Africa', 25(1) *African Human Rights Law Journal* (2025) 27.

¹⁰ Chidi Odinkalu, 'A ruler's shield? Re-evaluating the norm against unconstitutional changes of government in Africa', 14.

¹¹ Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, 1st ordinary session of the AU Assembly, 9 July 2002.

All of these efforts were consolidated in 2008 with the adoption of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), a seminal legal instrument for the AU. The AU has, in practice, implemented this Charter across the continent, even in countries that have not ratified it. We can jump ahead to 2014, which marked the beginning of the Silencing the Guns Initiative.¹² Originally aimed at silencing the guns by 2020, the timeline has since been revised to 2030. Unfortunately, the guns are not growing silent; they are, in fact, becoming louder.

Another turning point was in 2014 with the adoption of the Malabo Protocol.¹³ This Protocol aimed to expand the jurisdiction of the African Court to include international crimes, particularly by criminalising unconstitutional changes of government.¹⁴ It is worth noting that discussions on unconstitutional change of government were one of the issues that delayed adoption of the Malabo Protocol from 2011 until 2014. Some states expressed misgivings about the treatment of popular uprisings, arguing that citizens exercising constituent power should not be criminalised. Eventually, a compromise was reached.

In 2015, the African Union adopted Agenda 2063, which emphasised good governance and the rule of law as fundamental pillars. On the institutional side, we can refer to the establishment of the African Union Commission during the interim period starting in 2000, and the election of Professor Alpha Oumar Konaré, himself the retired president of the Republic of Mali, as its first substantive chairperson.¹⁵ This period also saw the creation of the AU Peace and Security Council and a strengthening of the African human rights system.

¹² Victor H Mlambo, 'Silencing the guns in Africa beyond 2020: Challenges from a governance and political perspective', 7(1) *Cogent Social Sciences* (2021) 3.

¹³ Protocol on Amendments to the Protocol on the Statute of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights (Malabo Protocol), 27 June 2014.

¹⁴ Ssenyonjo Manisuli, 'The crime of unconstitutional change of government and popular uprisings in Africa: Issues and challenges', 28(3) *African Journal of International and Comparative Law* (2020) 434-438.

¹⁵ Ofeibea Quist-Arcton, 'Africa: Alpha Oumar Konare elected new chairperson of AU Commission', *AllAfrica*, 11 July 2003.

Key continental human rights institutions include the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in Arusha, Tanzania; the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul, The Gambia; and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, initially based in Addis Ababa and now relocated to Maseru, Lesotho. Beginning in 2010, further institutions were established, such as the African Governance Architecture, the African Peace and Security Architecture, and the African Governance Platform. These bodies were designed to coordinate all AU organs and specialised agencies involved in democracy and good governance.

In terms of implementation, the AU Peace and Security Council initially responded robustly to military coups, suspending affected countries and engaging to ensure a prompt return to democracy. Typically, countries were given a six-month window to implement necessary reforms and hold democratic elections. There have been notable successes, such as The Gambia in 2017, where the AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the UN aligned to remove an incumbent who had rejected election results and to install the rightful winner.¹⁶

However, there have also been significant failures. The AU has sometimes applied its norms inconsistently, especially regarding unconstitutional changes of government. This selective enforcement has undermined the credibility of these norms. Cases in point include Egypt in 2013, Burundi in 2015, Zimbabwe in 2017, and Chad in 2021.

The Burundi case stands out. When President Pierre Nkurunziza sought a third term, interpreting the Constitution to allow a third term, the AU Commission under Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma initially responded decisively.¹⁷ They refused to send an election observation mission due to the unfavourable conditions, a rare move. The Peace and

¹⁶ African Union, 'Joint Declaration by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) on The Gambia', AU Press Release, 25 May 2017.

¹⁷ Tasnim News Agency, 'Burundi President unexpectedly sworn in for third term', *Tasnim News Agency*, 20 August 2025.

Security Council's Permanent Representatives Committee even authorised intervention in Burundi in December 2015.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the AU Summit in January 2016 reversed this decision, weakening the AU's response to such constitutional manipulation.

Beyond Addis Ababa and the AU's political organs, judicial institutions like the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights have taken meaningful steps. In 2016, the Court ruled in Application No 001/2014 (*APDH v Côte d'Ivoire*), asserting its role in interpreting and applying core human rights instruments within electoral contexts.¹⁹ This decision led to Côte d'Ivoire and Benin withdrawing their Article 34(6) Declarations, revealing resistance to judicial scrutiny over democratic processes. We have also litigated related issues at the East African Court of Justice and the African Court concerning Burundi. The AU Peace and Security Council has repeatedly discussed unconstitutional changes of government, yet key challenges remain.

One of the most persistent issues is the AU's failure to address unconstitutional power retention by incumbents. While the AU has often responded quickly to military coups, it has been slow and ineffective in addressing incumbents who manipulate constitutions and institutions to remain in power, practices that are clearly unconstitutional. This disparity has damaged the AU's credibility and emboldened soldiers to justify coups, arguing that if citizens cannot change leadership through the ballot, they must resort to the bullet. This sentiment is evident in instances where citizens celebrate coups, not because they support military rule, but because they see no other viable alternative for change.

The AU's influence has waned since a hopeful period between 2000 and 2015, when there was optimism about institutional reform and stronger continental leadership. Over time, the African Union Commis-

¹⁸ African Union PSC, 'AU Peace and Security Council, 'Communiqué of the 565th Meeting of the PSC on the Situation in Burundi', PSC/PR/COMM.(DLXV), 17 December 2015, para 13.

¹⁹ *In the matter of Actions pour la protection des droits de l'homme (APDH) v Côte d'Ivoire*, Application 001/2014, Judgment of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights at Arusha, 18 November 2016.

sion, a vital but not sole actor, has become increasingly bureaucratic and depoliticised. Rather than proactively driving action, it has become reactive, waiting for instructions from political leaders.

A further issue is the depopulation of the AU. The 2016 Summit's reform mandate, led by President Paul Kagame from 2017, focused heavily on streamlining and downsizing. As a result, crucial departments now lack analysts, legal experts and early warning capacities, thus undermining the AU's ability to take preventive action.

Looking ahead

Looking ahead, we must acknowledge that we have failed Africa. The legal instruments exist and are relatively well-articulated, and the institutions have the authority and a record of action. However, over time these institutions have grown weaker, lost their courage, and failed to act decisively. This has contributed to democratic backsliding across the continent.

We must *repoliticise* the AU and the RECs so they can offer real political leadership. Regarding rules, it is essential to refine procedures for dealing with unconstitutional changes of government, particularly when incumbents are involved. This may not require amendments to the Constitutive Act or the Peace and Security Council Protocol, but rather new procedural rules that promote predictability and enable early, meaningful action. These could take the form of AU Peace and Security Council rules or the operationalisation of the African Court of Justice, which is designed to ensure compliance across the full spectrum of AU law, not just human rights.

A concrete recommendation is to overhaul the AU's approach to election observation. Observation missions must be used to trigger early intervention, well before voting day, when undemocratic practices are already apparent. We must return to the letter and spirit of AU instruments and declarations. I believe the current AU leadership, under HE Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, still has the opportunity to make a lasting impact. This could be a pivotal moment for the organisation.

Institutional reform amidst lack of political will

With respect to the problem of institutional reform in the context of the poor political will discussed above, we face two major challenges. First is the ratification of legal instruments, painstakingly developed, negotiated and adopted by the 55 member states. The second challenge is implementation. Implementing decisions, policies, and common African positions that originate from AU policy organs in Addis Ababa or from African international courts and tribunals.

Both ratification and implementation are national responsibilities. I would like to turn this challenge back to the citizens, especially those acting within their countries. It is up to us to push our governments to ratify and implement these instruments. There's often an unspoken assumption that these decisions will enforce themselves, but they won't.

So, the big question is: When we come together as national actors, how do we effectively push our governments? How do we influence our executive branches, legislatures and other stakeholders to ensure ratification and implementation? This might involve developing ratification strategies, submitting motions, working through foreign affairs ministries, line ministries, or parliamentary committees. Most countries require parliamentary approval for ratification, so these are key steps.

I know that the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union (ECOSOCC), which serves as the AU's civil society body, is actively working on rolling out national chapters.²⁰ I also know that countries undergoing African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) assessments are required by law to form national peer review structures that must include citizen participation.²¹

So how can we use these processes to push for action? That, I think, is the real opportunity. As for the AU's relationship with the RECs, this

²⁰ See Report of the African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), EX.CL/1261 (XXXVIII), 38th ordinary session of the AU Executive Council, 3-4 February 2021, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, para 20.

²¹ APRM Secretariat, 'Guidelines for countries to prepare for and to participate in the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)', November 2003, 12, para 36.

is ultimately a matter of political leadership and courage. We need the political leaders at the AU level to foster meaningful conversations, not just bureaucratic or ceremonial ones. We need political courage on the part of the leadership of these institutions.

Much of this responsibility falls on the Chairperson of the AU Commission, the chief international civil servant of the AU, and their deputies and commissioners. They must be more proactive and courageous in pushing the various organs, institutions, and member states to act.

On 'soft coups'

'Soft coups' involve a quick change of power that does not follow legitimate processes. If the AU is supposed to be the institution that recognises legitimate versus illegitimate governments, what role should the AU play in addressing these situations?

I reiterate. It is the AU's inconsistency in implementing its own norms on unconstitutional changes of government has led to a situation where the AU lacks legitimacy, influence, and authority to intervene effectively.

We have seen cases where the AU has been able to act when soldiers take power in a military coup. However, when it is the incumbent leader engaging in clearly unconstitutional acts, what you might call a 'civilian coup', the AU tends to remain silent.

For example, as Mr Ikechukwu Uzoma mentioned,²² when an incumbent manipulates the system to bar key opponents who have a strong chance of defeating them at the ballot box, this is an unconstitutional act. Yet the AU often does not respond, especially when it's done through the electoral commission or legal channels controlled by the incumbent.

²² Making reference to a preceding discourse by Ikechukwu Uzuoma. Reflecting on the first 25 years of the Constitutive Act of the African Union: Webinar 2, Kabarak University Press YouTube Channel, 21 August 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HWyH26UO4I>.

Some regimes declare opponents ineligible or use the courts to persecute them, securing convictions that disqualify them from running for office. This is what Hon Macky Sall attempted in Senegal last year, not entirely successfully, but it is the same strategy currently being used by those around Paul Biya in Cameroon, and similarly by allies of Alassane Ouattara in Côte d'Ivoire. These patterns are unfolding without any visible intervention from the AU or the RECs, even though either one can and should act. It is not an either/or situation, both have the mandate and capacity to initiate action.

We should see, for instance, the AU's Panel of the Wise deploying delegations to affected countries. These delegations must engage with all stakeholders, not just the incumbent, but also the political opposition, faith-based leaders, civil society organisations, trade unions, and ordinary citizens. They should make it clear that the AU is aware of what is happening, that such actions are unacceptable, and, where possible, work to broker political solutions.

The problem lies in the inconsistency of both the AU and the RECs when it comes to intervening, especially when incumbents are clearly abusing the law and the power of their office. This inconsistency has brought us to the current situation. The path forward requires our institutions to demonstrate greater political courage, and for citizens to be empowered to demand action, not only from their governments, but also from the AU and the RECs.

We must build solidarity across borders. If it is Cameroon today, then citizens from all 55 African countries must speak out in support of Cameroonians. If it is Côte d'Ivoire tomorrow, or Tanzania or Uganda, where we are currently facing serious challenges, it must be a collective response. The people of Africa and its diaspora must push together, using every tool and platform available.

Concluding reflections

As I conclude, let me speak to the question of to which component of the AU is most concerned with acting to ameliorate the situation described above. Are we asking the AU to do more, or are we asking more from its many organs, institutions, specialised agencies and ad hoc mechanisms, even its high-level panels? The answer is both yes and no. It is important to recognise that all of these components still form part of the AU. The AU Assembly is the African Union. The heads of state can speak directly to one another to prevent situations from worsening. For instance, in 2011, a delegation of five heads of state came together to speak with Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.²³ Although they were ultimately unsuccessful, their efforts were still significant.

An important precedent set was that heads of state can proactively form delegations to engage one of their peers to prevent a complete breakdown. We should think of the AU in this way.

But I also want to challenge us, the people. At times when we lack leaders who are strong or courageous enough to initiate action, it is up to us, the citizens, to explore the various ways we can intervene. Consider the same Libyan situation: in 2011, Libyan citizens went to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and submitted a complaint under Article 58, stating that there were serious and massive violations of human and peoples' rights in their country.²⁴

Upon receiving the complaint, the Commission immediately referred it to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, a perfect example of complementarity. The Court, even without a specific request to do so, issued provisional measures against the Gaddafi administra-

²³ African Union, 'Visit of the African Union High-Level ad hoc Committee on the situation in Libya to Tripoli', AU Press Release, 10 April 2011.

²⁴ Judy Oder, 'The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights' order in respect of the situation in Libya: A watershed in the regional protection of human rights?', 2(2) *African Human Rights Law Journal* (2011) 496-498.

tion.²⁵ Gaddafi promised to engage with them. This demonstrated how the system, even with its imperfections, can still work.

We saw a similar situation in Ethiopia. In February 2022, Ethiopian citizens approached the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, highlighting serious and massive violations occurring in the Tigray region.²⁶ They invoked Article 58 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Within 10 months, the Commission issued provisional measures,²⁷ instructing the Ethiopian administration to protect all citizens in Tigray and elsewhere, and to report on the actions being taken. We believe this partly influenced the Pretoria Agreement that followed a few weeks later.

These are examples of what we, as citizens, can do. But we should not limit ourselves to court action. How can we, for example, organise ourselves to engage the Pan-African Parliament to discuss specific country situations or broader thematic issues? We must show that we care, and we can send recommendations or demands to member states or other AU organs and institutions.

How do we, as academics or public intellectuals, engage with the African Union Commission on International Law to propose draft rules on issues such as unconstitutional changes of government? These proposals can then be submitted to the relevant policy organs to begin formal discussions, rather than waiting passively.

My final thought is that we need a resurgence of Pan-Africanism, especially among the people of Africa and the African diaspora. We need to build, or rebuild, strong solidarity across the continent so that

²⁵ Oder, 'The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights' order in respect of the situation in Libya: A watershed in the regional protection of human rights?', 499.

²⁶ Lawyers of Africa, Press Release on seizure and provisional measures in case concerning Tigray', Lawyers of Africa, 14 October 2022.

²⁷ Letter of "Request for Provisional Measures under Article 100 of the Rules of Procedure of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2020), sent by Commissioner Remy Ngoy Lumbu, Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, to HE Mr Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, on 28 September 2022, with Reference: ACHPR/PROVM/ETH/782/22/933/22 (on file with the Author).

we are invested in one another's struggles, and we collectively push the system to function effectively.

We must intensify our demands for good governance and for the realisation of economic, social, and cultural rights. In the context of global crises, this is a crucial moment for African leaders and citizens to assert moral and political leadership, speaking truth to power and demanding a rules-based international order. Civil society must lead this charge.

We have a rich legacy of civic leaders such as Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem. Faith-based organisations can lead too; we have the legacy of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Artists also have a role, think of Miriam Makeba, Fela Kuti, Angelique Kidjo, and others. The youth must also be at the forefront. Generation Z in Kenya, Nigeria, and elsewhere are bringing energy and experience to this struggle.

We must fight for economic sovereignty, for a fair global economic system, and for greater domestic resource mobilisation. These resources must be used to deliver essential goods and services, not to be looted. I celebrate the leadership of organisations like Tax Justice Network Africa, led by my sister Chenai²⁸ and others, who are fighting illicit financial flows, working to reform the global tax order, and addressing sovereign debt.

In two weeks, we will meet in Accra, Ghana, led by African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD), to discuss sovereign debt and its impact on our continent. Following that, ITUC Africa, the International Trade Union Confederation, will lead a large citizen rally and demonstration on Friday, 29 August 2025, focusing on sovereign debt.

We must also use the AU's theme of the year, Reparations for Africans and Persons of African Descent, as a powerful mobilising tool. This is a moment to build stronger solidarities across the continent and throughout the diaspora, in the Caribbean, South America, and the Global North, to push the system to work for us.

²⁸ Chenai Mukumba also spoke at this webinar. Reflecting on the first 25 years of the Constitutive Act of the African Union: Webinar 2, Kabarak University Press YouTube Channel, 21 August 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HWyH26UO4I>.