

'Don't agonise, organise': Analysing modern-day Pan-Africanist thought through Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem

Sarah Muhonja Andambi*

►Received: 5 September 2025 ►Accepted: 29 November 2025**

Abstract

This paper examines the Pan-African legal and political thought of Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (1961-2009), analysing how his vision offers critical insights for contemporary African legal systems and governance reform. Drawing from extensive archival research and analysis of his institutional leadership, this study positions Tajudeen as an important figure who translated Pan-African ideals into practical frameworks for legal transformation and democratic accountability. Through his roles as General Secretary of the Pan-African Movement, Director of Justice Africa, and Deputy Director of the UN Millennium Campaign for Africa, Tajudeen articulated a transformative approach to law that challenged postcolonial legal fragmentation and elite capture while advocating for grassroots participation and continental integration. This paper demonstrates how Tajudeen's critique of postcolonial legal orders, which he viewed as trapped by colonial borders,

* Sarah Muhonja Andambi is a fourth year LL.B student and an Associate at *Kabarak Law Review*. She takes great interest in environmental law, energy law, decolonial studies and human rights. ORCID iD: 0009-0003-1951-5290 (<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1951-5290>).

** This article has undergone single blind review.

external dependencies, and serving elite rather than popular interests, provides a blueprint for reimagining African jurisprudence. This study contributes to contemporary debates about African governance by positioning Pan-Africanism as a living legal and institutional imperative rather than merely a historical memory or political ideal. Tajudeen's legacy offers crucial guidance for current efforts to deepen democracy, promote continental integration, and develop legal frameworks that serve African peoples' needs while challenging global structures of dependency and inequality.

Keywords: Pan-Africanism, Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, African legal systems, governance reform, postcolonial legal orders, democratic accountability, continental integration

Introduction

Tajudeen Abdul Raheem (1961-2009) was a renowned Pan-Africanist pushing for African unity and a strong believer of decolonisation. He was not just a Pan-Africanist by ideology – he approached Pan-Africanism with urgency, and recognised contradictions such as ‘defining Africa, corruption, resources, imperialism, struggle, gender justice and equality’.¹ His life serves as a living critique of Africa’s leadership failings and a call to the continent’s potential.²

Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem was an Afro-optimist whose Pan-African vision on what the goals and approach of Pan-Africanism should be in the 21st century are the kind of Pan-African ideals that should be passed down to future generations.³ His commitment to African unity was anchored in a practical critique of the postcolonial legal order; a system that remains deeply shaped by colonial borders, external dependencies, and elite capture.⁴ Through his writings, public advocacy, and leadership of institutions like Justice Africa and the Pan-African Movement, he articulated a vision of law as a tool for social justice, not just state power.⁵

By situating Tajudeen – as he was fondly called – within the broader tradition of Pan-African legal thought, this reflection seeks to reframe Pan-Africanism as more than a political ideal or historical memory. Rather, it positions it as a living legal and institutional imperative that

¹ Dana Wagner, ‘A day for Tajudeen’s truth and Africa’s power’, *Pambazuka News*, 26 May 2010.

² United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), ‘Democracy, governance and the Pan-African idea: Whither Africa? In honour of the late Tajudeen Abdul Raheem’, Report of colloquium, UNCC Conference Centre, 24 May 2012, 2.

³ Global Pan African Movement, ‘8th Pan-African Congress and legacy of Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem’, Global Pan African Movement.

⁴ UNECA, ‘Democracy, governance and the Pan-African idea: Whither Africa? In honour of the late Tajudeen Abdul Raheem’, 10; Richard Dowden, ‘Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem: Thinker, writer and prodigious orator who campaigned for the peaceful unification of Africa’, *The Independent*, Friday 29 May 2009.

⁵ Wilson Idahosa Aiwuyor, ‘Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem and African liberation: Don’t agonise, organise’, *OurLegaci*, 2011.

calls for structural transformation, grassroots engagement, and the re-imagination of sovereignty itself.⁶ His legacy challenges African lawyers, policymakers, and scholars alike to rethink how the law can serve the people, not merely the state. This reflection is equally grounded within the search of a practice of Pan-Africanism.

This paper is divided into four parts with the present part being the introduction. The second part explores how Tajudeen's life experiences, education, and ideological commitments shaped a legal worldview grounded in continental unity. The third part analyses how Tajudeen translated this vision into practice through his institutional leadership, public advocacy, and efforts. It seeks to understand whether his vision for Africa has been fulfilled. The last part serves as the conclusion, highlighting key areas African leaders and their citizenry could enhance Pan-African values within their capacities.

Constructing a Pan-African jurisprudence

Tajudeen was born in 1961 to a Nigerian family in Futuna.⁷ He attended Madrassah alongside Catholic School during his developmental years.⁸ Upon completion of his secondary education, he joined Bayero University in Kano. He later proceeded to St Peter's College Oxford where he won a scholarship as a Rhodes Scholar to pursue doctoral work. Afterwards, he served as General Secretary of the Pan-African Movement, Director of Justice Africa, and Deputy Director of the UN Millennium Campaign for Africa. His life was cut short after he was involved in a fatal car crash in Nairobi on 25 May 2009.⁹

⁶ Paul Nantulya, 'Pan-Africanism reborn?', Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 19 March 2024.

⁷ 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem', 3(1) *The Journal for Pan-African Studies* (2009) 242.

⁸ Dowden, 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem: Thinker, writer and prodigious orator who campaigned for the peaceful unification of Africa'.

⁹ Fatoumata Toure, 'Celebrating Tajudeen: Horace Campbell reflects on Pan-Africanism', *Pambazuka News*, 26 July 2012.

Tajudeen pursued his undergraduate studies in Political Science at Bayero University Kano, graduating with First Class Honours in 1982.¹⁰ His academic excellence earned him the Nigerian government's Merit Award as the best political science student between 1980 and 1982.¹¹ At Bayero, he was actively involved in student political debates and youth activism, sharpening his ideological commitments to decolonisation and governance reform amidst Africa's post-independence struggles.¹² His university years coincided with a generation of African intellectuals who sought to marry scholarship with active political engagement.

A defining moment in his early intellectual journey was his successful application for the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship to St Peter's College, Oxford. During his scholarship interview, Tajudeen famously arrived dressed in traditional African attire and challenged the Selection Committee by asking why he should desire association with Cecil Rhodes: a symbol of British imperialism and colonial oppression in Africa.¹³

This act was both a courageous critique of imperial legacies and an assertion of African dignity and identity. Despite this bold stance, he was selected, highlighting his extraordinary intellect and the compelling force of his political convictions. His challenge also reflects a wider movement in African thinking that questions colonial history and demands respect for African identity and self-rule.

At Oxford, Tajudeen deepened his critical engagement with Pan-African thought and global decolonial scholarship.¹⁴ He earned his PhD in Politics, immersing himself in debates on sovereignty, legal reform, and African unity.¹⁵ He also served as President of the University's Africa Society, invigorating intellectual discourse with sharp political analysis,

¹⁰ Alfred B Zack-Williams, 'Tributes to Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (1961-2009)', 36(122) *Review of African Political Economy* (2009), 637.

¹¹ 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem', *The Journal for Pan-African Studies* 242.

¹² Zack-Williams, 'Tributes to Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (1961-2009)', 637.

¹³ 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem', *The Journal for Pan-African Studies* 242.

¹⁴ Adagbo Onoja, 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem: A warrior goes home', *Daily Trust*, 6 June 2009.

¹⁵ Kaye Whiteman, 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem', *The Guardian*, 10 June 2009.

humour, and irrepressible optimism.¹⁶ At Oxford, his engagement with the Africa Society and exposure to Eurocentric academic structures further sharpened his conviction that African perspectives had to be centred and defended against exclusion.¹⁷ This intellectual rigour and political awareness fortified his lifelong dedication to bridging theory and practice in Pan-Africanism.

During his formative years, Tajudeen forged a vision of Pan-African unity not as enforced uniformity but as a pluralistic federation grounded in diversity and federalism. He famously argued, 'Whether you call it *majimbo* or devolution ... Unity instead must be expressed through the multiplicities of diversities'.¹⁸ This was matched by his institutional advocacy where he urged the African Union to adopt mechanisms that empowered ordinary Africans, including women and civil society, to participate in governance.¹⁹

He challenged post-colonial legal and academic orthodoxies, criticising Western social science for replicating imperial fractures under the guise of neutrality.²⁰ In his encounters with policymakers, he rejected development blueprints imposed from afar, insisting on strategies rooted in local realities and empowering ordinary citizens to become agents of change.²¹

Tajudeen's character and convictions were consistently demonstrated through personal anecdotes and public acts. Beyond academia, he inspired younger activists and civil society actors. Further, he was also known for his humour, sharp critique, and his refusal to spare

¹⁶ Global Voices Online, 'Africa: Remembering Dr Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem', *Hungry for truth, peace and justice Blog*, 29 May 2009.

¹⁷ Dowden, 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem: Thinker, writer and prodigious orator who campaigned for the peaceful unification of Africa'.

¹⁸ Horace Campbell, 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem and the tasks of Pan-Africanists', *Pambazuka News*, 16 July 2009.

¹⁹ 'AU must be relevant to Africans', *The New Humanitarian*, 10 July 2002.

²⁰ Kayode Fayemi, 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (1961-2009): A celebration of a life in full', *Pambazuka News*, 10 July 2009.

²¹ Aiwuyor, 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem and African liberation: Don't agonise, organise'.

even friends or powerful leaders from scrutiny.²² His life embodied the Pan-African maxim 'don't agonise, organise,' (which he regularly used in his Thursday Postcard writings and speeches) reflecting a dedication to pragmatic, action-oriented solidarity.²³

Law in action: Institutions, mobilisation, and reform

Tajudeen's most significant contribution to Pan-African legal thought lay not in theoretical formulations alone, but in his practical efforts to translate Pan-African principles into institutional reality. His leadership across multiple organisations demonstrated how continental unity could be operationalised through strategic institution-building, grassroots mobilisation, and targeted legal reform initiatives. The life and thought of Tajudeen point to a broader project: realising Pan-African ideals through law and policy. In his final writings, he repeatedly emphasised that Africans must work collectively to change the system, not merely rehearse old debates.²⁴ And importantly, Tajudeen's jurisprudential thought was fundamentally shaped by his understanding of how colonial legal systems continued to operate in postcolonial Africa.

Tajudeen insisted that African states remain burdened by 'artificial states' created by European colonialism, referencing Somalia, and Nigeria as products of arbitrary borders drawn by colonial powers.²⁵ These observations resonate with broader critiques that Africa's legal systems, particularly rule of law, are often harnessed by elites, sustaining dependency rather than serving ordinary citizens.²⁶ His critique extended

²² Dowden, 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem: Thinker, writer and prodigious orator who campaigned for the peaceful unification of Africa'.

²³ Whiteman, 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem'.

²⁴ Chidi Odinkalu and Alex de Waal, "'Don't agonise, organise!' Remembering Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem's advocacy on Sudan', *African Arguments*, 30 May 2023.

²⁵ Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, 'Globalisation and recolonisation', 490 *African Transitions*, 2000.

²⁶ Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 'The rule of law in Africa: A reappraisal', *The Elephant*, 20 December 2024.

beyond formal legal structures to encompass the broader political economy of law in Africa.²⁷

During his time as Secretary General of the Pan-African Movement, Tajudeen played an important role in organising the Seventh Pan-African Congress in Kampala, 3-8 April 1994, which brought together delegates from 47 countries. He served as the Secretary General of the Secretariat of the seventh Pan-African Congress.²⁸ This Congress marked a crucial turning point in contemporary Pan-Africanism, shifting focus from purely ideological debates toward practical questions of governance, democracy, and social progress.²⁹ The meeting's theme, 'Africa: Facing the future in unity, social progress and democracy', reflected Tajudeen's commitment to grounding Pan-African ideals in concrete political action.³⁰

The Kampala Congress introduced several innovations that would become central to Tajudeen's approach to Pan-African organising. First, it established the Pan-African Women's Liberation Organisation (PAW-LO) demonstrating commitment to gender equity as fundamental to African liberation.³¹ Second, the Congress confronted difficult questions about inclusion and identity within Pan-Africanism, particularly regarding Sudan's place in the movement and the centrality of the grassroots women in the movement for freedom.³²

²⁷ Campbell, 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem and the tasks of Pan-Africanists'.

²⁸ Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, 'Introduction: Reclaiming Africa for Africans - Pan-Africanism, 1900-1994', in Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (ed) *Pan Africanism: Politics, economy and social change in the twenty-first century*, New York University Press, 1996, 1; Global Pan African Movement, 'The road to the 7th Pan-African Congress in Kampala 1994', Pan African Congress, 2023; Horace Campbell, 'Rebuilding the Pan-African Movement: A report on the 7th Pan-African Congress', 1(1) *African Journal of Political Science / Revue Africaine de Science Politique* (1996) 8.

²⁹ Campbell, 'Rebuilding the Pan-African movement: A report on the 7th Pan-African Congress', 5.

³⁰ Websolve, 'In memoriam: Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem', *African Arguments*, 25 May 2009.

³¹ Global Pan African Movement, '8th PAC and legacy of Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem'.

³² Campbell, 'Rebuilding the Pan-African movement: A report on the 7th Pan-African Congress', 2-3, 5-6.

This emphasis on gender justice aligns with the African Union's institutional commitments, such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol),³³ and the AU's Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa.³⁴

Perhaps most significantly, the Congress, which was held 3-8 April 1994, was forced to grapple with the Rwanda genocide, which tragically began during the seventh Pan African Conference. This crisis compelled Tajudeen and other Pan-Africanists to take principled positions against genocide and genocidal violence, establishing precedents for how Pan-African institutions should respond to mass atrocities.

Tajudeen personally accompanied a delegation to Rwanda for first-hand assessment of the situation, embodying his belief that Pan-Africanism required direct engagement with Africa's most pressing challenges.³⁵ Notably, at the time of writing this paper, the African Union Peace and Security Council had held its 1,272 meeting, commemorating the Rwandan genocide. During this session, the Council underscored the urgent need for member states that have not yet done so to enact legislation and establish national institutions aimed at preventing and combating hate ideology, hate crimes, and the risk of genocide.³⁶

Justice Africa and governance reform

As a Director of Justice Africa, founded in 1999,³⁷ Tajudeen helped build an organisation deeply rooted in Pan-African principles. Justice

³³ Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, 11 July 2003, 3268 UNTS 26368.

³⁴ African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, 6 July 2004, Assembly/AU/Decl 12 (2004).

³⁵ Global Pan African Movement, '8th PAC and legacy of Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem'.

³⁶ African Union Peace and Security Council, 'Press Statement of the 1272nd meeting of the Peace and Security Council, held on 2 April 2025, during an open session on the theme: "Hate crimes and fighting genocidal ideology in Africa" and the 31st anniversary commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda', AUPSC, 2 April 2025, PSC/PR/PS.1272.

³⁷ 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem', *The Journal for Pan-African Studies* 242, 244.

Africa's mission involves working with civil society and local communities to develop inclusive judicial and governance systems, epitomised by its guiding principle, 'nothing for me, without me'.³⁸ In this role, he operationalised Pan-African ideals, designing institutional structures that elevated ordinary Africans rather than elite interests establishing a living legal-political framework, not just aspirational rhetoric.³⁹

Through Justice Africa and in his influential *Postcards*, Tajudeen called for a shift in African solidarity; from the OAU's passive principle of 'non-interference' to a more active ethos of 'non-indifference,' asserting that what happens within any African country is a legitimate concern for others.⁴⁰ This shift reflects a foundational transformation in regional governance, embraced in doctrine and structure by the AU's Constitutive Act, which now enables intervention in cases of mass atrocity.⁴¹

Tajudeen's activism helped push this change by challenging old ideas and calling for stronger action from African institutions. This evolution is grounded not just in legal architecture but in Pan-African ethical conviction where activists like Tajudeen helped bring into political life. The institutional pivot was cemented by figures like Salim Ahmed Salim, whose diplomatic leadership helped reframe African solidarity toward accountability.⁴²

³⁸ Justice Africa's mission is to promote human rights, democracy, and justice, Justice Africa, 'Overview of Justice Africa', Justice Africa.

³⁹ Fayemi, 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (1961-2009): A celebration of a life in full'.

⁴⁰ Abdul-Raheem, 'Introduction: Reclaiming Africa for Africans - Pan-Africanism, 1900-1994', 19, where he comments on colonial borders accepted by the founding fathers and how this works hand-in-hand with the logic of non-interference; Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, 'Pan-African perspectives and the African Union', *Pan-African Postcard*, 1 February 2007. See generally, Arthur Gakwandi, 'Towards a new political map of Africa', in Abdul-Raheem (ed) *Pan Africanism: Politics, economy and social change in the twenty-first century*, 181-192.

⁴¹ Constitutive Act of the African Union, 11 July 2000, Article 4(h).

⁴² Salim Ahmed Salim, 'OAU and the future', in Abdul-Raheem (ed) *Pan Africanism: Politics, economy and social change in the twenty-first century*, 234. See also, Antony Karol Muma, 'Transforming African diplomacy: Salim Ahmed Salim's vision of non-indifference and the evolution from OAU to AU', 3 *Kabarak Law Review* (2024) 237.

A concrete example of this approach was his analysis of Sudan's failed bids to chair the African Union.⁴³ Tajudeen observed that 'the isolation of Sudan on the Darfur issue also demonstrates how dialogue between civil society activism and progressive African governments, union bureaucrats and other concerned Africans can yield positive results.'⁴⁴ He argued that this represented a fundamental evolution in African governance, where 'a new sense of shame has arrived'.⁴⁵ This reflected the emergence of a new sense of political shame, whereby misconduct by leaders and states is no longer shielded by diplomatic discretion but is instead exposed to public critique and institutional rebuke.⁴⁶

The weekly Pan-African Postcards columns published in newspapers across the continent were one of Tajudeen's most innovative contributions to Pan-Africanism which were easily readable, sharp political analysis.⁴⁷ These postcards were a practical manifestation of his belief that popular education was the bedrock for meaningful political mobilisation and substantive legal reform.

The postcards addressed pressing continental issues while maintaining focus on how ordinary Africans could engage with and influence political processes. Topics ranged from analyses of AU summits and regional integration initiatives to critiques of specific governance

⁴³ For context, Sudan's successive attempts to secure the rotating chairmanship of the African Union were repeatedly blocked: in 2005-06, concerns over the Darfur conflict led to the extension of Nigeria's President Obasanjo's term; in January 2006, Sudan was again passed over, despite hosting the summit, in favour of President Sassou Nguesso of Republic of Congo; in January 2007, Sudan lost out to President Kufuor of Ghana; and in January 2008, even when East Africa's turn arrived, the chair was awarded to President Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania, underscoring Sudan's continued isolation. See, Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) and Oxfam, 'Strengthening popular participation in the African Union: A guide to AU structures and processes', Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) and Oxfam, 2009, 8.

⁴⁴ Abdul-Raheem, 'Pan African perspectives and the African Union'.

⁴⁵ Abdul-Raheem, 'Pan African perspectives and the African Union'.

⁴⁶ Abdul-Raheem, 'Pan African perspectives and the African Union'.

⁴⁷ Salim Ahmed Salim, 'Preface', in Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, *Speaking truth to power: Selected Pan-African postcards*, Compiled by Ama Biney and Adebayo Olukoshi, Pambazuka Press, 2010, x, where he notes, 'What will never cease to amaze Taju's friends, comrades and acquaintances was how he found time to write' a testament to his calling as a political activist and thinker.

failures and celebrations of democratic innovations.⁴⁸ Through this work, Tajudeen modelled how Pan-African intellectuals could maintain rigorous analytical standards while remaining accessible to broad popular audiences. This approach to political communication reflected his broader understanding that sustainable legal and governance reform required informed citizen engagement. He recognised that technical legal reforms would remain superficial unless accompanied by popular understanding of their significance and ongoing citizen mobilisation to ensure their implementation.⁴⁹

The UN millennium campaign and mass mobilisation

As Deputy Director of the UN Millennium Campaign for Africa (his last job),⁵⁰ Tajudeen helped translate Pan-African organising into continent-wide mobilisation while keeping a firm link to grassroots activism. In October 2006, the Campaign's 'Stand Up Against Poverty' action drew about 3.6 million participants in Africa as part of more than 23 million globally, demonstrating how African-led civic pressure could be scaled to a global arena.⁵¹ He publicly wrote and spoke about pressing leaders on poverty, accountability and the Millennium Development Goals, and engaging civil society networks across the continent.⁵² Subsequent iterations of the campaign expanded dramatically, with UN records noting over 116 million participants worldwide in 2008.⁵³

The Millennium Campaign work revealed Tajudeen's sophisticated understanding of how domestic African governance connected to broader patterns of global dependency and inequality. He recognised

⁴⁸ Abdul-Raheem, *Speaking truth to power: Selected Pan-African postcards*, 197-199, 93-96, 45-47, 23-26.

⁴⁹ Abdul-Raheem, *Speaking truth to power: Selected Pan-African postcards*, 226-227.

⁵⁰ 'UN millennium campaign loses deputy director', *MyJoyOnline*, 25 May 2009.

⁵¹ Gumisai Mutume, 'Millions of activists for a day', United Nations, 2007.

⁵² Abdul-Raheem, *'Speaking truth to power: Selected Pan-African Postcards'*, 218-227.

⁵³ United Nations Information Service (UNIS Vienna), 'More than 116 million people – nearly 2 per cent of World's population – stand up and speak out against poverty and for the Millennium Development Goals', United Nations, 23 October 2008.

that achieving the Millennium Development Goals required not just technical interventions, but fundamental changes in how African states related to international financial institutions, donor countries, and global markets.⁵⁴ This analysis led him to advocate for alternative sources of financing for African regional institutions.⁵⁵

He argued that dependence on external funding compromised African institutions' ability to pursue policies that genuinely served continental interests, echoing broader critiques of how aid dependence often undermines accountability, distorts domestic priorities, and sustains corrupt elites.⁵⁶ All this notwithstanding, he emphasised that through mutual accountability, both of African leaders and leaders of the West, Africa could realise the set Millennium Development Goals.⁵⁷

Throughout his institutional leadership, Tajudeen maintained that meaningful legal and governance reform required genuine grassroots participation. His approach to organising centred on mobilising ordinary Africans, ensuring that continental institutions like the African Union reflected popular needs rather than elite or donor priorities.⁵⁸ This commitment to participatory governance, reflected Tajudeen's understanding that postcolonial legal systems had failed precisely because they excluded ordinary Africans from meaningful participation in their design and implementation. He therefore consistently argued for governance structures rooted in grassroots participation,⁵⁹ gender equity,⁶⁰ and transformative approaches to democracy as essential foundations for Africa's liberation.

⁵⁴ Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, 'Africa's challenges to deliver on the MDGs', *Zim Standard*, 2006.

⁵⁵ His critique anticipated institutional responses like the African Union's 2016 decision on financing of the Union (Assembly/AU/Dec.605(XXVII)), which introduced a 0.2% levy on eligible imports to reduce reliance on donor funding. This encourages developing countries to strengthen domestic resource mobilisation.

⁵⁶ Abdul-Raheem, *Speaking truth to power: Selected Pan-African postcards*, 177-78.

⁵⁷ Abdul-Raheem, *Speaking truth to power: Selected Pan-African postcards*, 223.

⁵⁸ Abdul-Raheem, *Speaking truth to power: Selected Pan-African postcards*, 175-178, 241-243.

⁵⁹ Abdul-Raheem, *Speaking truth to power: Selected Pan-African postcards*, 175-178.

⁶⁰ Abdul-Raheem, *Speaking truth to power: Selected Pan-African postcards*, 1-14.

Tajudeen conceived of participation not simply as casting ballots but as the continuous involvement of citizens in shaping policies, monitoring public resources, and holding leaders accountable.⁶¹ He argued that when communities are directly engaged in governance, they develop a stronger sense of ownership, and governments in turn become more responsive to their needs.⁶² For him, this people-centred vision sought to transform modern institutions to serve democratic and developmental goals.⁶³

Pan-African legacy and the African Union's evolution

Tajudeen's Pan-African vision remains relevant to the African Union (AU) today. His insistence on citizen-driven governance and broad popular participation anticipated the AU's current emphasis on citizen inclusion and integration.⁶⁴ Likewise, his critique of elite capture and external dependency finds echoes in debates over neo-colonial influences and unaccountable leadership in Africa. Contemporary continental frameworks, notably Agenda 2063, explicitly invoke Pan-African ideals, portraying integration as the Pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom and collective prosperity.⁶⁵ Similarly, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is justified as advancing a Pan-African vision of an integrated, prosperous, peaceful continent.⁶⁶ These developments suggest that many of Tajudeen's core themes, from grassroots empowerment to continental unity, are now part of official AU policy.

In practice, the AU has adopted several measures aligned with Tajudeen's ideas, though implementation has been uneven. Agenda 2063, adopted in 2015, calls for deep political and economic integration. This

⁶¹ Abdul-Raheem, *Speaking truth to power: Selected Pan-African postcards*, 175-178.

⁶² Whiteman, 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem'.

⁶³ Campbell, 'Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem and the tasks of Pan-Africanists'.

⁶⁴ 'AU must be relevant to Africans', *The New Humanitarian*.

⁶⁵ African Union, 'Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want', 2015, Aspiration 2.

⁶⁶ Ernest Tooche Aniche, 'African Continental Free Trade Area and African Union Agenda 2063: The roads to Addis Ababa and Kigali', 41(4) *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* (2023) 385-386.

includes the creation of a federal or confederate united Africa and the eradication of poverty; explicitly linking these goals to an African renaissance and Pan-Africanism.⁶⁷ As one of its flagship projects, Agenda 2063 advanced the AfCFTA, whose trading objective of a single market and customs union is framed as fulfilling the Pan-African vision enshrined in the Constitutive Act and Agenda 2063.⁶⁸

Other concrete innovations echo his thinking: at the 2016 AU Summit in Rwanda, the African Union announced the possibility of a new AU passport to promote free movement as a symbolic act of Pan-Africanism. Although the AU aimed to roll out the passport in 2020 to all citizens in African countries,⁶⁹ this is yet to happen. The AU under Article 3(q) of its Constitutive Act (as amended), has also moved to engage its diaspora more fully; through inviting Africans abroad to participate as a sixth region of the Union, and an African Diaspora High Council has been established to coordinate diaspora input to AU affairs.⁷⁰

Visibly, Tajudeen's vision exceeds these accomplishments, and many aspirations remain unrealised. For example, he fervently argued (as at the 2007 AU Summit in Ghana) that true Pan-African unity must be the end-point of continental politics.⁷¹ In Accra he noted that 'unity has always been the destination' of the AU's predecessors.⁷² In reality, however, AU member states have consistently postponed union in favour of loose regionalism. As one analysis observes, at that 2007 Sum-

⁶⁷ African Union, 'Agenda 2063', Aspiration 1, 'We are determined to eradicate poverty in one generation' and Aspiration 2, 'An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's renaissance'.

⁶⁸ African Union, 'The African Continental Free Trade Area'; Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, 21 March 2018, Preamble para 4 and Article 3(a).

⁶⁹ Kieron Monks, 'United States of Africa? African Union launches all-Africa passport', *CNN World*, 19 July 2016.

⁷⁰ African Union African diaspora sixth region High Council, 'About us'. The description of the Council's main task to unite the African diaspora globally to implement Article 3(q) of the Protocol on Amendments to the Constitutive Act of the African Union and related programmes.

⁷¹ Global Pan African Movement, '8th PAC and legacy of Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem'.

⁷² Al Jazeera, 'AU summit debates unity', *Al Jazeera*, 2 July 2007.

mit leaders rejected the idea of full unification and opted to strengthen regional blocs instead.⁷³ To date the Pan-African Parliament remains only consultative with no binding lawmaking power and the AU lacks a central budget funded by independent taxes. Many continental decisions still rely on voluntary national contributions or external donors, undercutting Tajudeen's call for African self-reliance. Only in recent years has the AU begun urging full African financing of its budget and peace operations.⁷⁴

Moreover, Tajudeen's emphasis on linking ideas with grassroots organisation evidenced by his motto 'don't agonise, organise', highlights an area where the AU falls short. The AU's institutional architecture remains highly intergovernmental and distant from ordinary citizens. At the same time, contemporary African youth are reviving Pan-African ideals outside official channels. Young Africans today are notably active in national and transnational movements that embody solidarity, justice, and calls for inclusive governance.⁷⁵ These developments reflect Tajudeen's argument that sustainable change requires popular participation. In line with his vision, several recent AU initiatives such as the African Youth Charter⁷⁶ and Agenda 2063's flagship projects explicitly endorse youth engagement and cross-border exchange. But critics note that these instruments often lack teeth in practice, and real influence by youth remains limited.⁷⁷

In sum, the AU of 2025 is partially the Union that Tajudeen envisioned: it has embraced many of his slogans and goals⁷⁸ in its founding Act and subsequent policies. Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA explicitly trans-

⁷³ Global Pan African Movement, '8th PAC and legacy of Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem'.

⁷⁴ African Union, 'African Union passport launched during opening of 27th AU summit in Kigali', Press Release, 17 July 2016.

⁷⁵ Joshua Muhammed, 'Pan-Africanism reimagined: Youth, culture and social movements', *African Leadership Magazine*, 2025.

⁷⁶ African Youth Charter, 2 July 2006, Reg No I-55376, Article 11.

⁷⁷ Hannah Mukami, 'Unlocking youth potential for peacebuilding in Eastern Africa', Mashariki Research and Policy Centre, 24 June 2025.

⁷⁸ Goals such as Pan-African unity, integrated markets and justice frameworks. See, African Union, 'AU theme of the Year 2025: Justice for Africans and people of African descent through reparations', African Union, 29 January 2025.

late Pan-African ideals into planned institutions. However, the reality remains that the AU is not yet a true union of peoples in Tajudeen's sense. Power is still held by postcolonial political elites and integration is cautious and incremental. Achieving the Union he dreamed of could be advanced through policy steps such as: empowering the Pan-African Parliament, establishing genuine fiscal autonomy for the AU, fully implementing diaspora representation, and enshrining direct citizen participation, for example, by constitutionalising referenda or participatory budgets. Only by closing the gap between its constitutive promises and on-the-ground practice can the AU fulfil the Pan-Africanist agenda that Tajudeen championed.

Conclusion

Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem's life and work offers an illustrative case study for how Pan-African thought can address contemporary challenges in African legal systems and governance. His institutional leadership demonstrated that Pan-Africanism need not remain a historical memory or abstract ideal, but can serve as a practical framework for legal reform, democratic innovation, and continental integration.

Tajudeen's critique of postcolonial legal orders remains particularly relevant as African countries continue to grapple with the legacies of colonial legal systems and external dependency. His vision of law as a tool for social justice rather than state power provides important guidance for legal reformers seeking to develop more responsive and accountable governance systems.

Perhaps most importantly, Tajudeen's emphasis on grassroots participation and popular mobilisation offers crucial insights for contemporary efforts to deepen democracy and promote good governance across the continent. His work demonstrates that sustainable legal reform requires not just technical institutional changes, but fundamental shifts in the relationship between citizens, law, and political power.

The institutional innovations that Tajudeen pioneered, from continental organising frameworks to mechanisms for civil society engagement in governance, continue to influence contemporary Pan-African initiatives. His legacy challenges current generations of African lawyers, activists, and scholars to maintain the same combination of analytical rigor and practical commitment that characterised his approach to Pan-African organising.

He speaks directly to the African Union's current struggles with financing, enforcement and citizen participation. His principles point to concrete measures, stronger civil society input, more transparent oversight and genuine inclusion in initiatives like the AfCFTA and Agenda 2063, that could help the AU move from elite-driven integration to people-centred governance. His legacy thus offers not just inspiration but a practical template for meeting the Union's present and future challenges.

As Africa continues to navigate questions of sovereignty, integration and democratic governance, Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem's advanced the principle of 'organise, don't agonise' which remains as relevant. His work provides both inspiration and practical guidance for those seeking to realise the Pan-African vision of a continent governed by and for its peoples, where law serves justice rather than domination, and where vanity enhances rather than diminishes popular participation in shaping Africa's future.