

South African President Zuma: Fast-Growing Africa Must Rethink Its Global Role

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Cape Town, South Africa – Propelled by high growth and an expanding middle class, Africa has entered a new chapter in its history; its countries must change the way they relate to the rest of the world and to each other, South African President Jacob G. Zuma told more than 900 business, government and civil society leaders from 60 countries in the opening session of the 21st World Economic Forum on Africa. “You can no longer talk about the old Africa,” he declared. “We need to develop very urgently partnerships that are different from the past, relationships that benefit Africa more.” Reckoned Zuma: “If Africa is one of the fastest-growing regions and has a billion people, then we need to think differently about how we interact with the world. We also need to consider how we interact among ourselves. We need to develop a common approach to the problems of the continent.” The theme of the three-day meeting is From Vision to Action, Africa’s Next Chapter.

Africa is emerging on the global stage at a time of rapid transformation, multiplying risks and enormous opportunities. “We are in a world of velocity, change and volatility,” noted Timothy Flynn, Chairman of KPMG International. Rising fuel and energy prices and the impact of global challenges such as climate change and water scarcity are additional challenges. “We are now moving into a period where food security will be at the forefront of strategic thinking,” added Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, Chairman of the Board of Nestlé, who is a Member of the Foundation Board of the World Economic Forum.

The mounting demands of young Africans, including the youth in Tunisia and Egypt who drove protests that led to recent changes in the political leadership of those countries, are putting even more pressure on the continent’s leaders. “It is an intergenerational power shift,” explained Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum. “The young generation is becoming more powerful. They want to be in control and to feel empowered but are very impatient as far as bureaucracy and corruption are concerned.”

Yet, the potential for Africa has never been greater. “We have seen real improvement in governance and accountability,” Rajiv J. Shah, Administrator of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), acknowledged. “There is now consensus on the idea of Africa as a meaningful growth opportunity that can be harvested at scale,” argued P. Mpho Makwana, Chairman of Eskom Holdings. “We used to deal with Africa as a developmental case but it is now a sizeable market.”

This “new dawn” must be sustained,” warned Jubril Adewale Tinubu, Group Chief Executive of Oando. “We have only started the beginning of the marathon.” He hailed efforts to bring peace to Africa, which he observed was once regarded as “a continent of conflict”. Said Tinubu: “Once there is strife, jobs cannot be created and everything grinds to a halt.”

What Africa needs is strong leadership and a resolve to address critical development impediments such as poor infrastructure, Makwana stressed. Countries also have to focus on promoting inclusive growth – “inclusive of women, youth, civil society and the physically challenged,” said Linah K. Mohohlo, Governor of the Bank of Botswana. In addition she concluded, “We need to strengthen initiatives to diversify our economies.”

Notes to Editors

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