



## ADEDEJI CAUTIONS AGAINST HASTY EMERGENCE OF AFRICAN UNION

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Rotimi Oyekanmi, The Guardian, Mercredi 6 mars 2002  
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**FORMER** Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Executive Secretary Adebayo Adedeji highlighted the causes of Africa's political and economic woes yesterday with a warning to the continent's leaders against rushing the formation of an African Union.

Delivering a lecture on "Defining Priorities for Regional Integration in Africa" at the on-going third African Development Forum (ADFIII) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Adedeji said such union as widely believed by its proponents, could not possibly be formed within two years.

To the eminent scholar who also gave a step-by-step approach on how the continent can achieve a positive regional integration, it would amount to "eternal disgrace" if the idea turned out to be a failure like several others Africa had embarked upon.

What African leaders need to do at the moment, he said, is to lay emphasis on the prospects for a sustainable African Union, as against a union in which anything goes.

Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Secretary General, Amara Essy had said that the OAU Summit of Heads of State would ratify the African Union in July in Pretoria, South Africa.

Adedeji said that only a positive, dynamic interaction between politics and economics, with the political process assisting economic integrations, could take Africa to its desired goal.

According to him, the "economism" of regional co-operation is principally responsible for the slow progress made by Africa in the last 40 years. By focusing

virtually exclusively on economic co-operation and integration, while ignoring political and social factors, he noted, African leaders had contributed significantly to the lack of progress in the actualisation of the vision of African fathers.

His words: "Political fragmentation has brought about the problem of a large number of minuscule states ñ nations which, with the best *will* in the world, have no chances of becoming viable, vibrant, dynamic and prosperous. The partitioning and fragmentation of Africa into nation states, without regard for history and culture, without respect for the integrity of different nationalities and ethnic groups, has made virtually impossible the task of nation building in Africa.

"A state where ethnic ties supersede national allegiance, is forced to encounter a condition of perennial political instability, with national solidarity and cohesiveness always under threat. In such a nation-state, the viability of the national economy is compromised and inevitably, regional economic co-operation is superficial rather than intensive. How can the collective of a group of non-cohesive and unstable nation states form a cohesive, stable and dynamic region? The African state, as invented by the Europeans, has neither been deconstructed nor reconstituted.

"This is why there is so much incongruence between the need, desire and search for economic co-operation, integration and its substantive achievement. Therefore, for the future, the pursuit of economic integration must go hand in hand with the pursuit of political stability at the national, regional and sub-regional levels. The people in the region must have a shared vision, share values, and shared social economy in which the welfare of the people and the community is paramount, and the transformation process is socially and politically participatory, and culturally vibrant."

Earlier, Adedeji advised African governments to avoid appointing members of their national parliaments to the African Parliament, since it has the potential of reversing the ideals of the proposed Union.

"The members to the African Parliament must as a necessity be elected," he said, adding that they must qualify like the national qualifications to their own parliaments require," he warned.

At a different forum, another prominent Nigerian, Bamanga Tukur stressed the link between poverty and conflicts in Africa.

Leading the African Business Roundtable, which was participating in ADF proceedings for the first time, Tukur told the delegates that there were 17 wars being fought on the continent at the moment.

"We in the private sector believe that these conflicts arise because of poverty and because people have lost hope and believe that they have nothing to lose by

fighting. Political instability in our context, is intricately linked to poverty, and the lack of income generating opportunities for the people, particularly the youth. Hence, they have become easy prey for the so-called rebel leaders. Our challenge is to create sustainable jobs and establish an environment that allows the expansion of entrepreneurship and wealth creation within our economies," he said.

Tukur decried the lack of implementation of several trade protocols over the years, saying that the development had hindered the flow of free trade.

He noted that civil servants, the customs and the police in member countries, particularly resist the implementation of free trade because of their belief that it would lead to a loss of revenue. The team leader also listed lack of awareness on the part of the private sector and the civil society, lack of trust between the business community and governments, and the absence of an understanding of global trends in technology, as additional constraints to free trade.

To strengthen private sector dialogue with the OAU and ECA, Tukur canvassed the establishment of a private sector consultative group for ECA and OAU, organisation of a joint-conference on trade facilitation in all the sub-regions, as well as the bringing together manufacturers, associations, private sector representatives, key customs representatives and other stakeholders.

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