

Afro-Arab rapport

Afro-Arab relations have been in steep decline in recent decades, and attempts at boosting them ended up in failure. Before reviewing the history of Afro-Arab relations as well as the obstacles to the promotion of these ties, I would like to point out that two thirds of Arab populations are living in Africa, which is a natural and geographic extension of the Arab world. Also, there are ten countries that combine the Afro-Arab identity and are members of the two regional organizations, the African Union and the Arab League, which makes Afro-relations inevitable.

Honorable women MPs,

The colonial countries have played multiple roles in the attempts at dismantling the components of African identity. Accordingly, several strategies were laid down to separate the north of Africa from its south on Afro-Arab sectarian grounds. Western documents to the effect abound.

During this period, false rumors spread that Arabs enslaved Africans. However, the national liberation from colonization project, led by late Egyptian president Jamal Abdul Nasser, foiled the western schemes by declaring the establishment of African Unity Organization in 1963, which united Arabs and Africans to withstand such strategies aimed at fragmenting or weakening the continent, and maintaining colonial masters' control over it.

The strong orientations towards the unification of the continent reversed due to the historic incident, called "Arabs' genocide in Zanzibar, which occurred during the revolution, led by John Ocolo, which put an end to Arabs' power on the island. During the uprising, Arabs were also killed, arrested, displaced and even raped in what was described at the time as "Ethnic cleansing".

Arab Africans were fully aware that the incident was designed to inflame strife between them and other African countries. However,

they opted for supporting Africans to get rid of colonization and wipe off apartheid. Arabs' support to Africans included financial and military assistance, as Cairo turned into a springboard for all African liberation movements, and African issues figured high in the speech delivered at international fora by Arab-African leaders.

Furthermore, the African bloc politically championed Arabs' rights and positions, as happened in 1973 when it diplomatically boycotted Israel. Yet, the conditions Arabs experienced following Madrid conference in 1971, which debated the peace process between Arabs and Israel, distracted Arabs' attention away from African issues. In addition, Arabs heavily engaged in the attempts at finding solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which coincided with Arab regime changes as well as the global trends towards formulation of stances based on cost and revenues.

Such transformations fell in line with several factors that occasioned the Afro-Arab rupture. Arabs' growing problems restricted them from helping Africans find solutions to their own woes as international competition intensified over the continent and the exploitation of its resources.

However, the Israeli cultural approach to Africa was the most serious: it was premised on false grounds that Jews and Africans suffered from racial discrimination and suppression, and that Arabs used to enslave Africans.

The Great African trench project emerged in June 2002, which was presented to the UNESCO's world heritage committee. The project was designed to achieve cultural cooperation among the countries that formed the gorge straddling Jordan valley up to South Africa.

In my opinion, however, the project actually seeks to further widen the rift between Arabs and Africans, and to convince Africans that Israel is their own friend that works towards supporting them. This is evident in the book by Theodore Hertzl, the founder of Zionism, which stated that Africans and Jews have a common history of oppression. The issue was raised as the author enumerated the reasons for choosing Uganda as a nation for Jews.

In effect, Arab race is the closest to that of Africans. As we have mentioned above, a high rate of Arab and African populations belong to the same continent, which scotches the rumor that Arabs had oppressed and enslaved Africans. Further, North African civilizations extended up to sub-Saharan countries, and evidence of this galore; most African languages were heavily influenced by Arabic. For instance, Swahili is a hybrid of Arabic and African languages, and the same goes for the Somali and Hausa languages.

East African populations were influenced by Arab culture and civilization, as trade movement helped increase the number of Arabs who put down roots in Africa, intermarried with Africans, and got integrated into their society. The rise of Islam which was embraced by Africans further boosted Afro-Arab communication. Arabs got as far as Mozambique and Madagascar. Afro-Arab communication only regressed when Europeans colonized Africa.

Moreover, Israel attempted to ignite African tribal and ethnic sentiments, and to convince ethnic groups to opt for separation and create ethnic entities in order for Israel not to become the only state established on religious and ethnic basis.

Consequently, Afro-Arab relations got lukewarm at times, and even strained at others. The problems that occurred in some areas were portrayed as disputes between Arabs and Africans, such as the standoffs occurred in Darfur, Chad, Niger and Mali. Even the Moroccan desert issue was also treated as such.