

Speech by George N Njenga on:

A Moment For Africa –

To Professor Kurt Spang, my fellow students of the masters program, my friends...

I come to share with you some thoughts about Africa hoping to engender in your hearts a thought or a worthy passionate thought for that southern continent.

If you had to chose a home, you would chose where your heart, your memories, your passions are; where the “odor of dry grass” remind you of sacrifices made by those you love: The beautiful country where you come from; in which you long to watch the starry nights and hear the sweet

sounds of the birds crying for their happiness. For me that beloved continent is Africa.

But what would an insight of Africa add to you? What is Africa that it should be worthy of a part of your precious time? What darkness or light makes Africa attractive that I should long to share a moment of it with you; about its history; about its people and about its riches? To what purpose would these serve?

All I would desire more is but that you should extend it your warm handshake of friendship.

When I think of the beautiful coasts of in Mexico, Chapala; Argentina, home to Tango and to the natural wonders of Patagonia, Santa Cruz; the monasteries of Roman, Gothic or Baroque beauty I too romanticize Africa. It

is endowed in such diversity, beautiful mountains, valleys, violent gorges, a diversity of flora and fauna that none a like exist away from it. My mother land Africa.

Its bosom is 30.3 million Km² of land, larger than the aggregate sizes of China, United States of America, Western Europe, the British Isles, Argentina, India and Kenya, all rolled into one. It has more than 2,000 spoken languages, not counting the extinct ones. In Nigeria alone there are 250 languages.

Europe colonized and divided Africa into 54 countries. In 1886 and the ensuing 20 years, Otto Von Bismarck presided over a conference in Berlin, where the desires of many a European King gloried at the demarcating of Africa for themselves. But it was not until 1918 after the First World War that Europe finally colonized Africa for faith and commerce.

What history did Colonizers patronize? Africa contributed to the dawn of civilization; Egypt and its pyramids still scintillate the minds of many; its gold, its diamonds and its many valuable endowments. To crown it all, it has contributed wisdom and saintliness in such illustrious men as St Augustine, St Cyprian, Origen, warriors, Kings and many more. The Lord Most High laid his gaze upon Africa when pursued by his enemy Herod Agrippa. Remember the fame of the Ethiopian Kandake who so bewildered the great King Solomon! Yes, Africa has its illustrious history.

In the history of Western philosophy Rene Descartes' articulated a version of individualism when he declared "I think therefore I am – Cogito Ergo Sum." On the other hand the African socio-economic ethos rest on a much more communal identity. The African equivalent of "I think therefore I am" would be closer to, "I am because I belong. We are because we belong." In this context, people represent wealth, not possessions. This means for instance

that the African concept of the "slave" significantly differed from that of the European. The African definition of "enslavement" or "slaving" comes closer to "taken-away"; taken out from ones communal or social identity and "taken-in" to another. There are no direct 17th century African equivalents for Western concepts like national identity, individual equality under the law, or social and political categories of race. Every human being has a place in the African's heart until he or she proves otherwise. Probably, there is a certain naivety in the African, for material wealth counts for little and the wealth of companionship for much. Probably, it is true that the leaders so far have only shown our disrespect for the dignity of the human being. Probably we have lived long enough in naiveté considering ourselves bewildered or not, as lesser than the endowments nature has bestowed on us. While some pursue wealth for powers sake others seek companionship. I

suppose that time will give its judgment and those who choose Africa rise to restore a semblance of its glory.

Africa is indebted to Europe. But “debt is a trap in which a man baits himself and catches himself”. Africa cannot rely on debt and donor funds; it has to find its own path to prosperity. And where there is a will there is a way; for everything that is done in this world is done by hope. Over the past 60 years, it is estimated that “at least \$1 trillion of development-related aid has been transferred from rich countries to Africa; yet more than 50% of the population, over 350 million people, still live on less than a dollar a day, a figure that has nearly doubled in two decades.” Why?

Because the trillions of dollars donated to Africa, made possible by taxing middle income and poor Europeans and Americans, is largely stashed away in foreign bank accounts; and has corrupted the very donor organizations. It

is also used to strengthen inefficient and corrupt governments. The poor continue to be bought through the democratic process.

Still, there lies a vast beauty in its flora and fauna. There you will find the great Lion, the Rhino, the giraffe and the African Elephant in their natural habitat. Its country side beauty stares in the face any other. But still it is the people we must look to move our minds. The many that lie in squalor elevate our minds to passion. What shall we do?

I leave it to you to make your judgment as we see a panorama of both grandeur and poverty a mixture of the sweet and sour of human life. Probably, from our seats we can only but make a wishful prayer and conjure-up a warm thought, a good word and a lasting idea that Africa, my Africa is but a worthy human brother waiting to embrace whoever will see Africa as a friend rather than foe.

To close my speech there are some words that come to mind by William Shakespeare ...they come from the tragedy of Macbeth, in Act 5, written. "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day, To the last syllable of recorded time; And all our yesterdays have lighted fools; The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Our moments in this life are but like a flickering of a candle. We can only burn our light and wisdom for a moment and then Eternity....Tempus breve est!