

Well, first of all, thank you so much for the kind invitation and for hosting this very important conversation and for the team that produced the report.

It's not about solving Africa's energy crisis.

It's about preserving a global economic and geopolitical hierarchy.

It's about preserving a global system of technological dependency, financial extraction, and geopolitical control.

Africa has been told, once again, that our future depends on technologies owned, financed, patented, insured, controlled, and politically leveraged by others, not by sovereign African nations. And we've seen this movie before.

Colonialism extracted our minerals, structural adjustment programs dismantled our public institutions, debt traps created structural traps for our economies to this day. And now, under the banner of this green transition, Africa has been offered another full solution. Not because nuclear is the best option, but because Africa has become the last frontier for an industry that is economically failing elsewhere. Only Africa has sort of its survival lifeline.

And the report that's been produced here that we're discussing today documents this alarming reality very well. Across the continent, from Ghana to Kenya, Nigeria to Uganda and beyond, governments are being courted by nuclear exporters, foreign banks, geopolitical powers from the global north, and corporate lobbyists. Whether it's Russia, China, the US, France, South Korea, or Japan, everybody wants a piece of Africa's future energy system.

And why wouldn't they?

Africa, by the end of this century, will be the largest market on the planet.

Africa's population today is 1.5 billion. By 2050, will be 2.5 billion people on the continent. And by the end of this century, and in about 75 years, Africa will be 4 billion consumers, the largest single market on the planet. So you can't really blame these guys for wanting a piece of this gigantic market.

But here's the fundamental question: Why is Africa the continent with some of the greatest solar, wind, geothermal, and hydro potential on the planet?

Why is Africa being pushed towards the slowest, most expensive, most centralized, and most geopolitically dependent energy system that you can imagine?

Think of the report produced by IRENA, the International Renewable Energy Agency, in 2021 or 2022. I can share the link.

IRENA's report says that within 15 years, Africa can produce 1,000 times its anticipated energy needs from renewables, existing renewables, not new innovations, and can completely replace all the fossil fuel exports from the continent. That is a massive potential. And that doesn't include nuclear, by the way.

And despite this massive potential, what we have is the continent receives about 1% of global financing that goes towards renewables. And the continent is denied, systematically denied access to the manufacturing technology, the life-saving technology, to manufacture and deploy renewables at scale, to use our own green minerals to unleash this massive energy potential in the middle of a climate crisis. And now we're told, well, nuclear is going to be the better solution.

There's a reason for this, because what we describe as this massive potential is actually being perceived as a threat, as an economic and geopolitical threat. Because unleashing this green energy potential on the African continent means unleashing an industrialization potential, which means disrupting the global economic and geopolitical hierarchy. That is not meant to be disrupted.

So instead of that, we're offered the tranquilizing drug of nuclear energy, of false solutions, of dangerous distractions. So that should immediately raise alarm bells, because this is not about a climate logic.

And every time I go to the COP meetings, when I come out of those things, I realize that these negotiations were not about climate finance. The negotiations are not even about a climate. They're about a geopolitical hierarchy that is not meant to be disrupted.

And that's fundamentally what these negotiations were.

Whether you go to climate negotiations, debt negotiations, trade negotiations, it's always about not disrupting the hierarchy. And where does Africa sit in that hierarchy?

In the same colonial position at the bottom of the hierarchy.

And that's fundamentally what we're talking about. So it is about power, real power, geopolitical power, financial power, technological power, and control over the future architecture. Of African industrialization.

And the defenders of nuclear power tell us that this is about clean energy. But nuclear is not clean, as you know.

The entire nuclear value chain from uranium extraction to waste storage is deeply extractive, environmentally destructive, and very carbon intensive. And perhaps most importantly, nuclear is too slow.

Think about the construction process from the moment you decide we're going to build a nuclear power plant to the moment you actually start delivering electricity. You typically have about 10 years, if not more. And Africa does not have 10, 15, or 20 years to wait. Climate breakdown is happening now.

Energy poverty is happening now.

Food insecurity is happening now.

Industrial collapse is happening now.

And young people need jobs today.

Farmers need irrigation now.

Clinics need electricity immediately, not in 15 or 20 years.

And schools need access to electricity immediately.

This cannot wait.

When we have the option to deploy solar literally within weeks, if we wanted to. We're told we should wait 15, 20 years for these nuclear power plants to be built. And that's really the problem.

And we're told that the answer is a technology that routinely takes 15, 20 years and often arrives massively over budget.

This is not just when it comes to, you know, future expectations on the African continent. Massively over budget in Europe and the United States, everywhere these things are built. And locks countries into decades of debt repayments. And this is definitely going to be the case on the African continent.

And this is, to me, this is not a development strategy.

This is an intergenerational financial entrapment, economic entrapment.

And we must understand something much deeper here, that Africa's energy crisis is not fundamentally a shortage of electrons. It's a structural development crisis. So we can't really separate the decolonization of our economy from the process of delivering a just energy transition and an energy system that works for the African continent.

Energy systems are not neutral technologies.

They shape economic geography. They shape industrial policy. They shape ownership structures, political power. And when it comes to nuclear power, it's centralized by design. It concentrates technical expertise. It concentrates capital. It concentrates political control. And it exacerbates the system of dependency.

Renewables, on the other hand, our biggest potential, again, according to IRENA, according to so many technical studies.

Renewables, on the other hand, create the potential and the possibility of democratized energy system, distributed energy systems, localized energy systems, and community controlled energy systems. Publicly owned energy systems.

This is extremely important in the global south in general, and Africa in particular. Systems that can support agro processing, refrigeration, public transportation, local manufacturing, water systems, and digital infrastructure. This is another frontier of digital sovereignty.

And of course, climate resilience.

And it can do all of these things simultaneously. This is not separate processes that require separate plans. This is the real battle for structural decolonization, for transformation. This is not merely a debate about megawatts and gigawatts. It's a debate about the future political economy of Africa. And it's being decided as we speak.

And let me be honest here about the economics of this.

Nuclear energy is among the most expensive forms of electricity generation in the world. Meanwhile, the cost of solar, wind, has dramatically collapsed over the last decades.

And the reports that you've seen for this meeting cites the evidence showing renewables costs declining rapidly while nuclear costs continue to rise. And this is very well documented. So when African governments borrow tens of billions for nuclear infrastructure, what are they sacrificing?

I mean, this is serious here. They're sacrificing decentralized solar. They're sacrificing transmission upgrades, public transportation, schools and hospitals, climate adaptation, food sovereignty. This is the cost benefit analysis that all of us need to pay attention to. And this is the opportunity that costs conservation that rarely appears in mainstream debates.

We're just told there's this magical solution, nuclear power. And we're not told about all the other things that we're losing. So every dollar that we put into a nuclear mega project is a dollar not invested in resilient local productive capacity. And that matters enormously for the African continent because Africa's vulnerability is not because of the lack of resources.

Africa is rich, extremely rich. Africa possesses the green minerals required for the energy transition, the minerals required for the lifeblood of the economy of the 21st century. We have the youngest labor force on the planet. The median age, as you know, is under 20 today, which is a tremendous advantage. Most of the world is facing a demographic decline.

And we have this tremendous potential which can only be leveraged if we have an industrial policy to unleash the potential of that young labor force. And we have this massive renewable energy potential that I just described.

We have everything that we need to unleash this potential. What Africa lacks is not wealth.

What we lack is control over the value chain of manufacturing and deploying the building blocks of development and prosperity.

What we lack is control over finance, over technology, over industrial policies and industrial strategies.

And that is why I always argue that the real energy transition challenge is not about decarbonization. It's about decolonization.

And I always say you can't decarbonize the system that hasn't been structurally and economically decolonized yet. So we must decolonize energy systems, decolonize finance, technology, development itself is a colonial and postcolonial concept, at least a mainstream approach to development.

And I don't use references to colonialism as a kind of reference to a distant past that no longer exists. I use a reference to colonialism to be very precise in terms of an economic description of the system in which we actually live today.

So here's what I mean by that.

Colonialism imposed on Africa three basic economic functions.

Number one, Africa was supposed to be the producer of cheap raw materials for the industrialized world. We still play that function to this day.

Number two, Africa was supposed to be the consumer, not the producer, the consumer of technologies and industrial output from the industrialized world. We still play that role to this day.

And number three, and most importantly, Africa is supposed to be the place where obsolete technologies, assembly line manufacturing that is no longer needed in the industrialized world is outsourced to us under the guise of development and cooperation and partnership. But effectively what it does is that it permanently locks us at the bottom of the global value chain at the bottom of the hierarchy. And we still play that function to this day.

So the three core economic functions of colonialism persist to this day.

And remember, colonialism was never meant to develop justice or development or industrialization or the sustainable development goals or democracy or human rights.

So why do we expect somehow the exact same economic functions somehow today to deliver justice or development or industrialization or a just transition or democracy for that matter?

It's impossible by design.

So if you want to achieve any of these noble, important goals for us on the continent, we cannot do it without undoing the three economic functions imposed by colonialism. So I'm not talking about a system that is alive and well in every single corner of the African continent to this very moment. The discussion about nuclear is just the latest distraction from paying attention to these structures that need to be transformed.

So everything I said in the last couple of minutes, think about how the introduction of nuclear energy as envisioned by all the proposals that we see everywhere on the continent, how will that undo the three basic roles imposed on the continent during colonial times and to this very moment?

And to this very moment, they're not designed nuclear is not designed to change any of that. If anything, it reinforces the entire entire system.

We export raw minerals and imported technology and depend on technical expertise and financial support from outside. And so what we're talking about is another form of recolonization, whether it's with solar panels imported or with nuclear reactors imported from abroad. So we have a system that will impose fuel dependency, maintenance dependency, security dependency, insurance dependency, waste management dependency, technical dependency, and ultimately, this is the thing, geopolitical dependency.

So some nuclear agreements extend for decades. Some involve foreign control over fuel cycles. Some require foreign security arrangements. So when you talk about losing your sovereignty, I mean, what else can be worse than this? Some effectively create permanent technological lock-in. So that is not sovereignty. That is outsourcing your sovereignty.

That is abdicating your sovereignty to another authority. In some cases, private authorities. In some cases, other foreign national authorities.

So now let me say something a little bit provocative to close this.

Africa does not need to imitate the energy system of the 21st century industrial powers. Africa has an opportunity to leapfrog entirely into a new form of industrial development. The old model was centralized fossil fuels.

And many of you are sitting in Nigeria today, the largest producer of oil on the continent, which until very recently, before the opening of the Dangote refinery, and we can, you know, Dangote refineries, 50 years too late, in my opinion. We can have a debate about that.

But before the introduction of the Dangote refinery, Nigeria used to import 100% of its gasoline from international markets. The largest producer of oil on the continent.

Why?

Because Nigeria has always been denied access to the technology to look for oil, to drill for oil, to refine oil. So always in that dependency.

Think about the nuclear technology. Do you think there's going to be transfer of technology? If it didn't happen in the fossil fuel system, the simpler system, you think it's going to happen in nuclear, which is the weaponizable system? It's not going to happen. Right?

So the new model must be decentralized renewable energy sovereignty.

And this is where we must insist and bargain for transfer of technology, not just importing the technology, transfer of technology so that we can have full control over the production of our own energy system.

The old model was extraction. The new model must be regeneration.

The old model concentrated wealth. The new model must distribute prosperity across the continent.

The old model externalized ecological destruction. The new model must restore ecological balance.

Nuclear can't deliver that.

And this is why I reject the argument that Africa must choose between development and sustainability. Because our goal is to produce a model of sustainable prosperity.

There is no choice between the two. We must deliver both. And there is a way to deliver both.

That is a false choice imposed by global economic systems that created abundance for some through extraction from others. Africa can industrialize. It can industrialize. In fact, it must industrialize.

But industrialization in the 21st century cannot replicate the carbon intensive dependency model of the past, the injustices of the past. In my opinion, instead, Africa should become the global center of renewable powered industrial transformation.

It is a global center of renewable energy. It is a global energy.

Nuclear power is often marketed to African political elites as a privilege and prestige projects.

Right?

A symbol of modernity. A symbol of, you know, arrival. A symbol of technological advancement. But it is a facade, of course.

But true development is not measured by prestige of mega projects. True development is measured by whether the average person have, has access to a dignified life. Access to food. Access to health.

Can they access reliable electricity? Can they irrigate their crops to have food sovereignty? Can small businesses operate? Can children go to school and study? Can hospitals function? Can economies industrialize sustainably?

This is the metric that matters. Not whether a country can display a nuclear reactor as a monument to elite ambitions.

And finally, let me end with this thought.

The climate crisis is real. But it also exposes the moral bankruptcy of the existing global economic order. The countries most responsible for emissions, for the climate crisis, are now competing to dominate the technologies of the transition, to double down on their control over the global south.

Meanwhile, Africa, which contributed the least to the climate crisis, is being pressured into new cycles of dependency, of neo-colonial relations with the global north.

We must reject that option.

Africa does not need charity. We don't need saviors. We don't need false solutions and tranquilizing drugs.

What we need is policy space, transfer of technology, debt cancellation, not debt rescheduling, climate reparations for damage done, regional, joint industrial policies, pan-African industrial policies, public investment, publicly owned energy systems. And democratic control over our energy system.

The future of African energy must be not the radioactive option, but the renewable option.

Renewable that is public, democratic, decentralized and sovereign.

Because the real question before us is not whether Africa will have energy. The real question is who will own the future.

Thank you.