

Speech by the President of the French Republic during the opening plenary of the Africa Forward Summit

Thank you so much.

Mr President, dear William, Your Majesty,
Heads of State and Government,
Secretary-General,
Secretary-General of [the Pan-African] Parliament, of the African Union Commission,
Secretary-General of [La] Francophonie,
Ministers,
Ambassadors,
Entrepreneurs,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Asante sana.

Mr President, I will switch into French, if you allow me.

The President put that all very well. I would just like to add a few views before we move on to our work. This is a new type of Summit, with a new philosophy, and we are going to fully follow this philosophy.

Firstly, this Summit began with encounters between young people and businesses and the culture and sport sectors. and just after this session, we are going to meet with businesspeople who are going to tell us about their conclusions, which we will discuss together with them. The first view that I would like to share is that the agenda that is needed between the African continent and France, in any case the one I believe in, is definitely not about looking back, or looking left or right, as my friend President Ruto would put it. It is about looking forward. That is what I have worked to do for the last decade: build a relationship that looks clear-sightedly at the past. Work has been done with Algeria, Cameroon, Rwanda and several other countries. This work envisages the present with courage, and has brought the return of artworks. It aims to reinvent monetary and economic relationships. It involves investing in sport and in the cultural and creative industries, through co-investment with African stakeholders. It involves standing respectfully alongside Africa in support of its own agenda.

The relationship between Africa and France, as we view it, as we conceive it, as we are conducting it, is founded on clear-sightedness, courage, respect and the will, ultimately, to share an agenda. That is what we have been doing for the last decade. We discussed this at length here and I do not want to dwell on this now. Why am I convinced that this need is even truer today than it was ten years ago? Because the challenges faced in Africa and in Europe are the same. We want peace, prosperity and sovereignty. Europe has fought for them. Following the Second World War, it built the European Union, first to ensure peace, then formed the common market to ensure prosperity. Today, the European agenda is one of strategic autonomy, so as not to depend on Chinese or American domination and to try to stick to a middle path in line with international law. It involves belief in the multilateral order we have built. In open trade. But it does not involve the hegemony of certain players over the others. It sees science as the best way to address both climate and health challenges. It involves belief in the rule of law. That is what Europe is doing today.

The challenge for Africa is exactly the same. Africa wants peace, prosperity and sovereignty. The partnership we want from this Africa Forward Summit, the partnership I believe in between Africa and Europe, is one that serves peace, prosperity and that independence and strategic autonomy. It is very powerful and will, if we succeed, enable us to together rebuild a multilateral order that has been shaken so much and that has been weakened, and of which the failings are, moreover, affecting us all. It can offer a future for everyone.

Firstly peace. The President has spoken about this, and I'm not going to repeat him. Peace will stem, and I believe this most profoundly, from the unity of the African continent. I am very happy to see my peers here, Heads of State and Government and ministers, who have taken the trouble to come to Nairobi. I know how busy your schedules are, and I would like to express my gratitude. That is a magnificent image, because it is the image of the united African continent. From the Magreb to the Indian Ocean, in West Africa and Southern Africa, there are not several Africas, even if, often, people have attempted to divide it up. There is one continent, which must be respected as such, with this agenda.

That requires us to stand with you for better representation in both financial bodies and UN forums. I subscribe to everything President Ruto has said. France supports this agenda whereby Africa is present on the United Nations Security Council. Just as we fought for the African Union to have a permanent seat at the G20 a few years ago, and won that seat. There were just a few of us at first, and we managed to do that. Similarly, we support an agenda, which the Secretary-General himself greatly supported a few years ago, for an African Union that has greater capabilities and resources for its peace and security operations and which, in close coordination with the United Nations, can form its own mediation initiatives, with the means to build its own peace and security solutions. But the unity of the African continent, better representation, African peace and security capabilities and a Europe that stands with you to help finance these peace and security solutions, in an overhauled security partnership like that which France has forged in recent years with many States, respectful of the sovereignty of each African country, in close partnership but never in substitution, is the key to peace across the continent. Similarly, I am pleased that our discussions today will help us foster a common agenda to lift the obstacles that we currently face at the Security Council, and to continue moving forward so that, in the event of mass crimes, the United States can advance and decide. So, peace.

Then, prosperity. I subscribe to everything President has said about this, so I'm not going to repeat him. He is quite right about the continent's prosperity agenda. It is clear and simple. What we want to do is not to bring aid. That approach is a thing of the past. We can see that many countries of the North, some on ideological grounds, some due to fiscal difficulties, are no longer delivering the planned aid.

That is a reality.

We must bring greater clarity to relations between the North and South.

First, we need to be realistic about the main source of financial flows towards African countries: remittances from the African diaspora. They come from all those who have emigrated, who are working hard in many countries to send money back to their families. These flows exceed the aid provided by governments. But the approach we must now embrace is one of co-investment.

And where should this co-investment go? Into human capital, talent and youth. Into building a formal economy. The major difficulty for Africa is having an overly large share of its economy that remains informal and does not allow the middle classes to emerge and move forward. To address this, co-investment must go into moving up the value chain and working together to build a stronger agricultural sector and a robust industry so that Africa is not only where raw materials, critical minerals and rare earths are extracted but also where processing occurs. Co-investment must go into supporting Africa's infrastructure and energy transformation. Talent, the formal economy, moving up the value chain, infrastructure and energy, along with a continent-wide approach, are all key factors, as President Ruto just said.

These factors, which have also been the focus of the round tables here today, will also guide our discussions on health, agriculture, the blue economy and artificial intelligence. This Africa Forward agenda, this agenda for growth and prosperity, is the one we want to support through investment. This is where we will find our place in this agenda for prosperity and sovereignty. Africa's economic success and its achievement of greater sovereignty and autonomy will also ensure that Europeans enjoy greater strategic autonomy through this partnership, and reduce our dependency on two economies that want to dominate. This is a shared agenda. It is not France and Europe today who are coming to absorb all of the rare earths, critical minerals and materials to completely capture the global market. It is not France and Europe who are enforcing their will in guise of security solutions.

Make no mistake – those times are well and truly over. It is in Europe’s interest to support your prosperity and sovereignty, as they are also ours. If you are successful in sovereignty in artificial intelligence, agriculture and industry, you are helping support our success, because you are offering other solutions, because you are offering a future to your people, because you are reducing involuntary migration – which is also an issue for your countries, because it causes brain drain – and at the same time you are providing a solution for Europe’s agenda. What I want to see is a collective awakening when we talk about all this. This is not a one-sided agenda from Europe that looks at Africa as a continent it should be helping, but a partnership between equals, because supporting your success is a condition of our success.

We want to do it together, respectfully, clearly and courageously.

This is why, to succeed, we wanted to engage the private sector. Yesterday, for the first time ever, and thanks to this business forum, private investors, business investors, and entirely private investment funds pledged €23 billion in investments in Africa. This €23 billion in total investments includes €14 billion in investments from French companies in African countries and €9 billion in investments from local African companies and business leaders. This is an achievement in itself that illustrates the power of what I am saying and the fact that this is also a summit for action. As the President said, we must get back to basics: a new growth paradigm for countries which are developing stronger strategies for their resources, agriculture and industry, as well as a fiscal policy that is consistent with this agenda. We must also better mobilize our international financing.

The IMF and the World Bank, which in recent years have allocated special drawing rights, with Kristalina, together, the remobilization of over 100 billion special drawing rights for Africa to better use and leverage these funds. As the President said, the aim is to build an African-wide first-loss guarantee strategy and support the instrument known today as the ATIDI, based in Nairobi. It is precisely this that France commits to supporting alongside you through ATIDI capital investment, to co-develop solutions so the ATIDI can fulfil its role for the whole of Africa and cover first losses. This strategy is part of a new financial paradigm, one which will make it possible to fight for Africa’s prosperity and for its strategic autonomy. As for everything else, President Ruto put things very nicely, so I’m going wrap up my speech here. This illustrates the essence of our partnership in itself. There is no need for me to repeat what he said. He said it better than I could have. I agree with and endorse what he said.

In just a few minutes, we will be meeting with the entrepreneurs here today. For these issues of growth, we will be looking into the financial architecture. We will discuss peace solutions and will be dealing with a series of texts that will illustrate this agenda I have just described. Afterwards, we will have the achievements of this Africa Forward Summit, with its outcomes, investments and our shared commitments. Alongside President Ruto, we will represent our shared agenda on your behalf at the G7 Summit in Évian. Throughout the year, we will see this agenda through, at the United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank, on the basis of the mandate you have given us. This is also why I see this Summit as a place where we can establish a line of action that will allow us to tackle the challenges ahead of us.

And so, colleagues, friends, with that, let me just say that I am grateful that President Ruto agreed to host this next-generation Africa Forward Summit. I am grateful to you, colleagues and friends, for being here, to share your contributions and energy, and I want to tell you that France, and Europe, stand alongside Africa to build this agenda for peace, prosperity and independence to which you aspire. We do this with much respect and humility, to support this continent which is home to the youngest population in the world, and which just last year had the strongest growth in the world – which is not just a continent of the future, but a continent of the present. Be proud of all that you represent. I am proud to be at your side, and to humbly strive to build this agenda with you, in which we invest together and succeed together.

Long live Africa, and long live the friendship between Africa and France.

Thank you very much.

(Translated from French)