Strengthening Africa's Geopolitical Agency and Trade Resilience in a Multipolar World

A Joint Conference of the African Economic Conference 2026, Annual Meeting of the Global Network of Chief Economists of Development and Finance Institutions; and the African Chief Economists Network

OPENING REMARKS

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Co-hosted by the African Development Bank Group (AfDB), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

1. **PROTOCOLS:** His Excellency, Mr. Souleymane Diarrassouba, Minister of Planning and Development, Republic of Cote d'Ivoire and Africa Development Bank Group Governor for Cote d'Ivoire; **Mr. Mathias Cormann,** Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**; Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa,** Assistant Secretary-General, Director Regional Bureau for Africa, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); **Ms. María del Pilar Garrido Gonzalo,** Director for Development Co-operation, OECD; Honorable Ministers, **Prof. Jeffrey David Sachs,** University Professor and Director of the Center for Sustainable Development, Columbia University, United States of America; Distinguished Chief Economists, Development Partners, Private Sector Leaders, Scholars, Ladies and Gentlemen.

2. Good **morning**.

3. It is my great honor to welcome you to the 2026 African Economic Conference, the 2026 annual meeting of the Global Chief Economists Network, and the inaugural meeting of the African Chief Economists Network – the ACE-Network. The theme of the 2026 edition of the African Economic Conference is *"Strengthening Africa's Geopolitical Agency and Trade Resilience in a Multipolar World."*

4. The African Development Bank (AfDB) launched the African Economic Conference (AEC) in 2006 as a platform for intellectual exchange, policy dialogue, and collaboration on Africa's development issues and priorities between the policy and academic communities. The AEC 2026 is convened by the Bank Group in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) - Africa Bureau.

5. This year's AEC is twinned with the annual meeting of the Global Network of Chief Economists of International Development Agencies and Finance Institutions, convened in partnership with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which serves as the Network's Secretariat. This forum brings together Chief Economists from leading bilateral and multilateral development institutions to exchange perspectives on emerging global economic challenges, development finance, research, data, and evidence-based policy solutions.

6. In addition, the African Development Bank Group will launch the African Chief Economists Network (ACE-Network), in collaboration with UNDP. The ACE-Network brings together, senior African economic policy leaders, including Chief Economists of African multilateral and development finance institutions, regional and international organizations, Central Banks, National Treasuries, Regional Economic Communities, leading think tanks and universities, as well as eminent African economists and former senior economic policymakers to harmonise policy diagnostics and advisory services to African countries.

7. The African Development Bank will also host the graduation ceremony for the second cohort of the Public Finance Management Academy for Africa (PFMA) and the first cohort of the Macroeconomic Policy Management Academy for Africa (MEMA), featuring 435 officials

from over 36 countries across the continent to be certified as experts in public finance management and macroeconomic policy management practice, respectively.

8. These events are convened at a pivotal moment in world history. The global order is being fundamentally reshaped. Trade patterns are shifting. Supply chains are being reorganized. Technological competition is accelerating. Financial flows are becoming more fragmented, and geopolitical tensions are increasingly influencing economic outcomes. The world is no longer organized around a single center of gravity. We have entered a multipolar era.

9. These shifts present opportunities for Africa to strengthen its own agency in the global markets, and to actively shape its role in the emerging reforms in the global economy. That is why the theme of this year's Conference – ***"Strengthening Africa's Geopolitical Agency and Trade Resilience in a Multipolar World"*** – is so timely, relevant, and urgent.

10. For decades, conversations about Africa's place in the world have often focused on dependency, vulnerability, and adaptation. Today, we must focus on agency, resilience, competitiveness, and influence. Africa must move from being affected by global developments to helping to shape them.

11. Africa's geopolitical agency will be measured by several factors, prominent among which is its ability to negotiate from a position of strength, shape the rules of engagement, translate its collective interests into collective action, and ultimately influence outcomes.

12. Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. This vision aligns closely with the strategic direction that I have articulated for the African Development Bank Group through the Four Cardinal Points and the New African Financing Architecture for Development (NAFAD).

14. First, Africa cannot mobilize capital at scale unless it can strengthen its geopolitical position and trade resilience. Second, in an era of growing fragmentation, Africa must strengthen its financial architecture, deepen coordination, and amplify its voice in global economic governance. Third, the future of geopolitical influence will belong to nations and regions that can transform human potential into productivity, innovation, entrepreneurship, and leadership. Fourth, Africa must build climate-resilient infrastructure, strengthen logistics, develop regional value chains, and create industries that retain greater value on the continent.

15. Taken together, these Four Cardinal Points provide a practical roadmap for strengthening Africa's geopolitical agency and economic resilience in a rapidly evolving global landscape. In addition, the New African Financing Architecture for Development (NAFAD) will facilitate effective coordination, complementarity, subsidiarity and disciplined risk transformation to allow Africa to mobilize, leverage and deploy capital at the scale required to drive structural transformation in Africa.

16. The themes of the 2026 AEC, the annual meetings of the Global Chief Economists Network and the launch of the African Chief Economists network are mutually complementary to the Four Cardinal Points and NAFAD.

17. Over the coming two days, I encourage all participants to challenge conventional thinking, explore innovative ideas, forge new partnerships, and focus relentlessly on practical solutions.

18. Let us use these events to help shape the knowledge base for the Africa we want. A structurally transformed and resilient Africa that develops on its own terms, based on its own knowledge systems and research evidence, and leverages smart partnerships within the continent and across the world to accelerate inclusive and sustainable development in Africa.

19. I commend Prof. Kevin Urama, the Bank's Chief Economist and Vice President for Economic Governance and Knowledge Management and his team for these initiatives. I thank the UNDP and OECD for the continued collaboration and call on all other institutions to stand together to advance Africa's knowledge sovereignty.

20. I wish you productive and inspiring deliberations, and I look forward to the transformative ideas and partnerships that will emerge from your deliberations.

21. On that note, it is my distinct honor to welcome you to the African Development Bank Group and to the 2026 African Economic Conference.

22. Thank you for your attention.