

3rd African Union Studies Annual Symposium

“AU and the New Scramble for Africa: Conflict, Reparations and Resource Sovereignty”

Concept Note and Call for Papers

Co-organised by the Department of
Politics and International Relations;
Institute for Pan-African Thought and
Conversation (IPATC) at the University
of Johannesburg, South Africa and
TrustAfrica in Dakar, Senegal.

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1. Introduction

Following the successful hosting of the 1st and 2nd **African Union Studies Annual Symposium**, the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), in collaboration with the Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC) at UJ, South Africa and TrustAfrica in Dakar, Senegal, is pleased to announce the 3rd Edition of the symposium.

The **3rd African Union Studies Annual Symposium** will be held from 8–10 October 2025 in Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa, under the theme, “**AU and the New Scramble for Africa: Conflict, Reparations, and Resource Sovereignty.**” This document serves as both a concept note and a call for papers, structured into several key sections to guide prospective contributors.

2. Context: Background and Rationale

Over the last two decades, Africa has re-emerged as a central battlefield of global geopolitical contestation. As the world transitions from a conventional multipolar order to a complex multilateralism defined by the declining role of the US, shifting alliances, strategic competition over resources, influence, territories, and contestations of normative leadership, Africa’s natural wealth has placed it squarely at the heart of renewed global interest. While the ‘Curse of Berlin’¹ has haunted Africa since the infamous 1884-85 partitioning of Africa, this intensifying interest has been described as a ‘new scramble for Africa’ or ‘renewed imperialism’, characterised by intensive socio-economic and political engagement by both traditional powers and emerging global actors.

The African Union (AU), as the continent's intergovernmental institution, was established to promote Pan-African unity and solidarity, peace and security, as well as facilitate integration and strengthen Africa's voices in the global order. However, this vision is increasingly being impeded by the forces of external interference, elite complicity, extractive geopolitical interests, and internal institutional fragility. Conflicts fuelled by resource extraction and exploitation, and foreign interventions have destabilised regions such as the Sahel, the Great Lakes, the Horn of Africa, and Central Africa, threatening the attainment of Agenda 2063, a continental blueprint for peace, political stability, and socio-economic development.

Agenda 2063, and the AU’s call for reparations and its declaration of 2025 as the *Year for Reparations and Recognition of People of African Descent*, reinforce the imperative of acknowledging Africa’s historical injustices, including slavery, imperialism, colonialism, and resource exploitation. For over 400 years, the transatlantic slave trade subjected more than 15 million men, women, and children to unimaginable suffering and displacement, marking one of the most harrowing and morally catastrophic epochs in the annals of human history. The pursuit of reparations by the AU and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) forms a critical part of the just effort to secure compensation, restitution, and other forms of redress for the enduring socio-economic and psychological harms caused by these dehumanisations of Africans and their forced transfer across the Atlantic Ocean. An estimated 2 million Africans perished during the ‘Middle Passage’, with an additional 15 to 30 per cent dying en route to or while confined at the coast. As the calls for reparations continue to gain more traction in the Caribbean, African leaders and scholars are

¹ Adebajo, Adekeye (2010) “Curse of Berlin: Africa after the Cold War”, KwaZulu-Natal Press.

increasingly recognising the need for reparations and climate justice, framing these demands within broader struggles for resource sovereignty, debt justice, and equitable global governance.

The present phase of external engagement with Africa is characterised by increased militarisation, asymmetrical relations, aggressive resource extractions, and trade and economic diplomacy. While founded within the frameworks of development, infrastructure, and security cooperation, many of these partnerships mirror modern slavery and colonial patterns of exploitation. From the strategic mineral race driven by the green energy transition to the deployment of foreign mercenaries and security contractors by foreign states and non-state actors, the exploitation of Africa's resources continues to deepen, particularly in resource-rich countries like the DR Congo.

The AU and its organs and agencies, including the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), African Union Development Agency – New Partnership for African Development (AUDA-NEPAD), and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), are key institutional instruments for continental oversight and coordination. However, there is a growing perception that the AU has been unable to design and implement effective strategies to address the deeper systemic and structural roots of violent conflict and development, extractive relations, and foreign interference on the continent. For instance, between 1989 and 2023, global conflicts resulted in approximately 3.8 million deaths, with Africa accounting for over 2 million of these fatalities.²

Despite its vast wealth of natural resources and expanse arable land, Africa continues to be confronted with multidimensional poverty and dwindling economic performance. Due to historical land dispossession and misguided policies, particularly in Southern Africa, the continent, once celebrated for its agricultural productivity, now relies on food imports, deepening food insecurity and aggravating poverty. Based on the international poverty threshold of \$1.90 per day, Africa's extreme poverty rate was recently estimated at approximately 35.5 per cent. African leaders and regional stakeholders have now acknowledged the link between centuries of historical injustices and the persistent inequalities facing the continent today. Within this framework, demands for security, inclusive development, and resource sovereignty are not only political, economic or environmental but also historical and ethical.

Africa stands at a critical moment in its post-colonial dispensation. The new scramble for Africa's resources, foreign interference and complicity, and the resurgence of historical justice claims demand a renewed, assertive, and visionary continental response. The AU, in partnership with civil society, academia, and progressive leadership, must rise to the challenge of defending Africa's sovereignty, securing reparative justice, and advancing a developmental path that favours African people and their diaspora communities.

3. Objectives

This symposium offers a timely and critical platform to reflect, reimagine, and reposition the AU and its member-states in the face of contemporary global disruptions, regional alignments, and internal challenges. Thus, this symposium aims to interrogate the AU's role, responsibility, and potential in responding to the new scramble for Africa, and to explore how conflict, reparations, and

² Bastian Herre (2024) "Millions have died in conflicts since the Cold War; most of them in Africa and intrastate conflicts". Available online at <https://ourworldindata.org/conflict-deaths-breakdown>.

resource sovereignty intersect, and what forms of African agency are necessary to secure a just and sovereign future for the continent. It seeks to provide a platform for deep reflection, evidence-based conversation, and the articulation of bold, forward-looking ideas to reclaim African agency and institutional efficacy. Its outcomes aim not only to inform policy but to inspire collective action toward a just, sovereign, and self-determined Africa. This serves as a foundational step toward actualising *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*.

The specific objectives of the symposium are to:

- i. Critically assess the nature and drivers of the contemporary scramble for Africa and its implications for peace, governance, and development.
- ii. Generate and disseminate locally grounded knowledge in the pursuit of reparations and to explore strategies for financing peace and development.
- iii. Examine and strengthen the AU's institutional and normative responses to external interference, resource conflicts, and demands for reparations.
- iv. Explore the historical and legal foundations of the reparations movement and its potential to transform Africa's engagement with the international system.
- v. Identify and adopt viable strategies for advancing resource sovereignty and ensuring equitable and sustainable resource governance.
- vi. Stimulate interdisciplinary scholarship and cross-sectoral dialogue among academics, policymakers, civil society, diplomats, and AU officials.

4. Major Themes

The symposium will be constructed around the following interrelated themes:

- i. ***The Geopolitics of the New Scramble for Africa:*** strategic interests of global powers (U.S., China, Russia, EU, Gulf States) in Africa; new forms of imperialism (military bases, infrastructure deals, and debt diplomacy); the role of foreign private military companies, foreign fighters, and mercenary networks.
- ii. ***Resource Exploration, Resource Conflicts and the Crisis of Sovereignty:*** case studies of land and resource-driven conflict (South Africa, Sudan, DR Congo, Mozambique, Sahelian countries); elite complicity and rentierism in natural resource governance; displacement; the AU's peace and security architecture (strengths, gaps, and opportunities).
- iii. ***Reparations, Historical Justice, and Decolonial Futures:*** conceptualisation of reparations (by whom and for whom); legal and moral claims for reparations (slavery, imperialism, colonialism, climate change); lessons from CARICOM and African reparations movements; and reparative and reparatory justice as a foundation for global equity and African dignity.
- iv. ***Resource Sovereignty and Transformative Governance:*** community rights, free prior informed consent, and extractive justice; redefining ownership, value chains, and beneficiation strategies; and the role of youth, women, and marginalised groups in resource governance.

5. Dates, Format, and Structure

The symposium, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, between **8 and 10 October 2025**, will feature:

- i. Public lecture and keynote addresses by esteemed African scholars, regional actors, and policy practitioners.
- ii. Thematic panel discussions featuring academics, diplomats, and policy experts.
- iii. Policy roundtables with AU, AUDA-NEPAD and REC officials.
- iv. Interactive dialogues with youth, civil society, private sector and community leaders on developing research agendas and advocacy strategies.

While the symposium will target specific key actors, it includes a call for papers to attract high-quality research and policy papers from a diverse group of scholars, diplomats, civil society actors, stakeholders and policy practitioners.

6. Expected Output and Outcomes

- i. A deeper understanding of the contemporary scramble for Africa and its diverse impacts on the state, economy and society.
- ii. A set of policy recommendations for the AU and member states on reparations, resource governance, and sovereignty
- iii. Establishment of a Community of Practice (CoP), comprising African scholars and think tanks, leaders of institutions, diplomats, and civil society organisations.
- iv. Publication of a peer-reviewed edited book on the intersection of conflict, reparations and resource sovereignty.
- v. A communiqué or declaration summarising key insights and an action plan from the symposium.
- vi. Public debate through various media outlets, including radio, television, Newspapers, and social media.
- vii. Publication of a policy brief on the symposium's theme.

7. Paper Submission Modalities

We invite the submission of a **750-1,000-word** paper proposal for consideration. Each proposal must clearly include the title of the paper, the full names, institutional affiliations, and email addresses of all contributing authors. The **Proposals should be submitted via email to the project coordinator at: africanunionstudies@gmail.com**. All submissions will undergo an initial review process. Only authors whose proposals meet the required standard will receive feedback and an invitation to submit a full paper. Successful authors will be expected to submit a full-length paper of 7,000–8,000 words, which will be subjected to both internal and external peer review to ensure academic quality and relevance. Accepted papers will be presented at the symposium and considered for inclusion in a forthcoming edited volume based on the symposium's theme.

Paper proposals should be submitted by 05 August 2025. Feedback will be sent to successful authors by **10 August 2025**. Full papers should be submitted by **20 September 2025**.

8. Target Participants

The meeting will attract the following high dignitaries:

- i. Scholars and the think tank community.
- ii. AU officials, RECs representatives, and diplomats.
- iii. Officials of global, continental, and regional organisations.
- iv. Civil society organisations and social movements.
- v. Students, youth networks, and women's organisations.
- vi. International partners and solidarity actors committed to African agency, such as the CARICOM.

9. Venue and Dates

The symposium will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, between **8 and 10 October 2025**.

10. Coordination Arrangements

The management of the project will be the responsibility of IPATC. The project's coordinator is Prof. Adeoye O. Akinola, Department of Politics & International Relations, and IPATC, email: aoakinola@uj.ac.za. He will be supported by Ms Ratidzo Makombe, Researcher at IPATC, email: ratidzom@uj.ac.za, and Mr Abdaramane Wone, Communication Officer at TrustAfrica, email: wone@trustafrica.org.

11. Supporting Partners

The symposium is supported by the AUDA-NEPAD Africa Policy Bridge Tank Programme and the Economic Social & Cultural Council (ECOSOCC).

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