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Africa Day 2022: "The African renaissance is a reality"

On 25 May, a meeting entitled “African Renaissance: Fact or Fiction?” was held in Rome, organized by Harambee Africa International and the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross on the occasion of Africa Day 2022.

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Harambee Africa is a solidarity project which started in 2002 on the

occasion of the canonization of Saint Josemaría Escrivá. Since then, it has promoted many undertakings for social advancement in a number of countries in Africa.

The event, which was titled ***African Renaissance: Facts or Fiction?***, had three speakers: Maryann Iloha, Filomeno Lopes and Ambassador George Johannes. All three are Africans and each spoke about “the rebirth” of their continent.

Leading change through fashion

In her paper ***The Evolution of Style***, Maryann Iloha, who holds a bachelor's degree in Nursing (BNSc) from the University of Nigeria, said that *"the African Renaissance is a reality that is happening right now."* According to Maryann, *"the women's fashion industry is leading the change in Africa."*

She said that *"we are witnessing a kind of revolution, a redefinition of what we call African beauty."* In her paper she made reference to her personal experience in Nigeria, looking at the evolution of fashion.

She underlined the fact that up until a few decades ago it was normal to let oneself be influenced by European culture, mostly expressed by straightening one's hair or buying clothes in thrift shops to keep up with Western fashion trends as much as possible. Starting from her university years she realized that this was no longer happening.

She explained how designers like Folake Folarin-Coker, Deola Sagoe and Duro Olowusi developed a new African style that is spreading around the world. Maryann said that *"I see this as a kind of renaissance because it's a gradual change that embraces a whole culture."*

While Maryann Iloha highlighted the possibility of African fashion bringing about change in the continent, journalist and author Filomeno Lopes delved into the issue of breaking a country's paradigms, changing the mindset and mentality of Africans. *“We are still the only continent that thinks what it does not live and lives what it does not think. If you constantly think what you do not live and live what you do not think, you are forced to eat what you do not produce and produce what you do not consume. Africa has been in this position for centuries and this is the challenge of the renaissance.”*

Lopes continued his speech by mentioning the painful issue of leadership, earlier mentioned by Ambassador George Johannes: *“Today we have so many chiefs but no leaders because there is no life project for the people. That project is done*

elsewhere, and in fact, there is no thinking that is ours.”

Building a better continent

According to George Johannes, South African Ambassador to the Holy See, the African renaissance requires above all new leaders who build on the past example of others. *“When we look at the history of the continent, we must remember the great leaders of the past who have left their mark.”* He then continued: *“Future generations of leaders must continue to build on the legacy of those who came before them and must help shape those who will come after them. This will help build a better society.”* He concluded his speech by sharing a message of hope: *“I believe that the African Renaissance will not remain just a dream, for it can be achieved.”*

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