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Harambee - Africa Day 2022: African Renaissance

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

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According to Maryann Iloha, “The African Renaissance is a reality”, this

can be seen even in the evolution of African fashion. Harambee Africa is a solidarity project which started in 2002 on occasion of the canonization of St. Josemaría Escrivá and has, since then, promoted a good number of projects in Nigeria and lots of them in so many 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 were Africans and each spoke about “the rebirth” of the 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, explained that "*the African Renaissance is a reality that is happening*”. For Maryann, the *fashion industry is leading change in Africa.*

She held that there is a kind of *“rebirth”* driven by the fashion industry in the continent, *“it is happening, it is a kind of revolution, a redefinition of what we call African beauty.”* In her paper she explained this phenomenon from 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 seen by straightening one's hair or buying clothes in thrift shops to meet up with Western fashion trends as much as possible. Starting from her university years she realized that this no longer happened.

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 stressed

that with the current situation: *“I see this as a kind of renaissance because it's a gradual change that embraces a voice and a 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, like 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.*” About the African renaissance, he said, “it is more an issue of the future than of the past and it is to be celebrated as an occasion to remember that we still have a long way to go.”

Building a better continent

According to Ambassador Johannes, African renaissance is an important topic. He held that “*today's theme is pertinent to Africa, which is struggling with some challenges that are new and others that are not*”. He looked at the issue of leadership, specifying that “*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 give way to build a better country." He concluded his speech by sharing a message of hope: "*I believe that the African Renaissance cannot remain just a dream, for it can be achieved.*"

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