

COMMUNIQUÉ

Umeme Flashpoint Series Roundtable Dialogue:

Africa's Future Amid the Ongoing Geopolitical Reset and Global Trade Realignment

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Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

Issued by the Institute of African Studies (IAS) and the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA) with Ugochukwu Okoye, Hottensia Njambi Kamau, and Rosemary Kasiobi Nwadike as Program Research Assistants

Preamble



The Institute of African Studies (IAS) and Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA) jointly organized the Umeme Series Roundtable Dialogue on “Africa’s Future amid the Ongoing Geopolitical Reset and Global Trade Realignment,” which convened on March 18, 2026, at Carleton University, Ottawa. This communiqué has been issued to reflect the principal findings, divergent perspectives, shared concerns, and calls to action arising from the dialogue.

The roundtable brought together scholars, policy practitioners, and members of the public, including students, academics, policymakers, diplomats, and diaspora leaders, for a candid and rigorous examination of Africa’s strategic position in a rapidly shifting global order. The discussion was facilitated by Dr. Firoze Manji (Publisher, Daraja Press), Dr. Joseph Atta-Mensah (Former Principal Policy Advisor, UN Economic Commission for Africa), and Professor Yiagadeesen (Teddy) Samy (Director, NPSIA, Carleton University), with Professor Nduka Otiono (Director, IAS, Carleton University) moderating the discussions.

Context

The roundtable was convened at a time of heightened global uncertainty: sweeping tariff measures, the renegotiation of major trade agreements, shifting foreign policy, the call for rise of middle power and deepening geopolitical fragmentation are redrawing the architecture of global trade and security. These disruptions carry direct and immediate consequences for African countries, from destabilised national budgets tied to volatile commodity prices to the re-routing of supply chains that bypass the continent's productive capacity.

Participants noted that while Africa is often seen as peripheral in global negotiations, the evidence suggests the opposite: the continent is a central arena of great-power competition, with numerous military installations, over \$340 billion in China-Africa trade, and intensifying rivalry among the United States, China, Russia, and Gulf states for access to Africa's critical minerals and strategic geography across the continent. The challenge, therefore, is not one of relevance but of agency: will Africa participate in shaping the new global terms or merely be subject to them?

Key Findings and Declarations:



- 01.** Africa Is Central to the Global Reset, not Peripheral to It
- 02.** The "Seat at the Table" Framing Obscures Africa's Internal Class Divide
- 03.** Collective Bargaining Is the Most Viable Path to Meaningful Leverage
- 04.** Africa Possesses Significant but Underutilised Financial Resources
- 05.** Value Addition and Industrial Upgrading Must Replace Raw Extraction
- 06.** Africa's Youth Demographic Is Both an Opportunity and an Urgent Challenge
- 07.** Democratic Governance Must Deliver Beyond Electoral Cycles
- 08.** The Diaspora Must Be Engaged as a Strategic Actor, Not Only as a Source of Remittance



1

Africa Is Central to the Global Reset, not Peripheral to It:

The roundtable firmly rejected the framing of Africa as marginal to the current geopolitical realignment. Panelists demonstrated, through evidence of increasing external military presence, trade volumes, and resource competition, that Africa is in fact a primary site of contestation among global powers – a continent the global system has not forgotten, but instead actively targets for resource extraction and strategic geopolitical positioning. The first strategic imperative for African countries, institutions, and citizens is to acknowledge this centrality and to translate it into deliberate bargaining leverage rather than passive exposure.



The "Seat at the Table" Framing Obscures Africa's Internal Class Divide:

The roundtable interrogated the prevailing call for Africa to secure a "seat at the table," redirecting the question from how the continent might gain entry to what kind of table is being set, and on whose behalf. Participants drew attention to stark internal contradictions: the wealthiest 5% of Africans hold more wealth than the remaining 95% combined, and an estimated 75% of African multimillionaires keep their assets in offshore accounts. It follows that the "Africa" likely to exercise meaningful leverage in negotiations with global powers is not the continent as a collective, but a narrow elite whose interests align more closely with the global oligarchy than with the African majority. Any strategy of bargaining leverage must therefore reckon with a prior question of representation: whose interests are actually being advanced when "Africa" speaks?

3

Collective Bargaining Is the Most Viable Path to Meaningful Leverage:

Participants recognized that individual African states, many with relatively small economies and populations, cannot negotiate effectively with major global powers on their own. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was identified as the most promising institutional vehicle for converting “integration talk” into genuine bargaining power. The roundtable called for the deepening of continental integration, including the free movement of people, mutual recognition of professional credentials, and the harmonisation of trade standards, as preconditions for effective collective action on the world stage.

Africa Possesses Significant but Underutilized Financial Resources:

The dialogue highlighted that Africa's own financial resources—\$91 billion in annual diaspora remittances, \$417 billion in pension fund assets, and substantial domestic savings—exceed the combined value of Foreign Direct Investment and official development assistance received by the continent. The roundtable urged the creation of innovative financial instruments, such as diaspora bonds and pan-African investment funds, to mobilise these resources toward infrastructure development, industrialization, and reduced dependence on external capital.

Value Addition and Industrial Upgrading Must Replace Raw Extraction:

There was shared concern on the need for Africa to move beyond the export of raw commodities. While recognizing the continent's limited capital for scaling industrial growth, participants made a case for value addition through pragmatic means of monetizing Africa's own limited capital and technology capacity to allow Africa to better partner with other nations to gain a higher degree of control over its value chain. Participants pointed to successful precedents—such as Botswana's diamond beneficiation arrangements and the African Mining Vision—as models for ensuring that resource extraction contributes to local industrialization, job creation, and technology transfer. The roundtable affirmed that African states should collectively establish minimum requirements for local content, technology transfer, and skills development in all major resource agreements.


Africa's Youth Demographic is Both an Opportunity and an Urgent Challenge:

With a median age in the twenties across much of the continent, Africa's demographic profile was recognized as both a potential dividend and a pressing risk. The roundtable noted that without accelerated industrialization and job creation, the large population of educated but unemployed young people could become a source of instability. Harnessing this demographic potential requires deliberate investment in skills, productive employment, and meaningful participation in governance.

Democratic Governance Must Deliver Beyond Electoral Cycles:

Participants observed a growing disconnect between the formal structures of democracy in many African countries and the lived experience of citizens who report dissatisfaction with the delivery of basic services, including education, healthcare, safety, and employment. The roundtable called for a rethinking of governance that centres accountability and service delivery, drawing on both institutional reform and the energy of grassroots movements and civic organizations that are increasingly shaping political discourse outside of electoral politics.

The Diaspora Must Be Engaged as a Strategic Actor, Not Only as a Source of Remittances:



The roundtable recognized the African diaspora—particularly in countries like Canada—as a critical constituency whose role extends well beyond financial transfers. Diaspora communities were identified as potential agents of accountability, capable of advocating for ethical corporate conduct, supporting knowledge transfer, and mobilizing capital and professional networks in service of the continent’s development. The convening called for structured mechanisms to integrate diaspora expertise and advocacy into Africa’s broader strategic agenda.

Calls to Action

In light of the foregoing, the Umeme Series Roundtable Dialogue calls upon:

01

African governments and regional bodies to accelerate the operationalization of the AfCFTA and deepen continental integration, including the free movement of people, mutual recognition of qualifications, and harmonization of trade and investment standards.

02

African policymakers and finance ministries to design and deploy innovative financial instruments—including diaspora bonds and pan-African investment vehicles—to mobilize domestic and diaspora capital for industrialization and infrastructure.

03

African states negotiating resource agreements to insist on enforceable provisions for local content, technology transfer, value addition, and skills development, drawing on models such as the African Mining Vision.

04

African Union institutions and regional economic communities to strengthen governance frameworks that ensure the benefits of trade and investment reach citizens, with particular attention to youth employment, service delivery, and anti-corruption safeguards.

05

Diaspora organizations, civil society, and academic institutions in the Global North to exercise their unique position in holding multinational corporations and home governments accountable for ethical engagement with the African continent.

06

Scholars, think tanks, and public intellectuals continue to generate rigorous, policy-relevant research and public commentary that equips African negotiators, citizens, and movements with the evidence and analysis needed to advance the continent's interests in global forums.

Conclusion



The Roundtable Dialogue affirmed that the current moment of global disruption is not merely a threat to Africa’s development prospects—it is a window of strategic opportunity. Whether that opportunity is seized depends on the capacity of African states, institutions, and citizens to act collectively, to mobilize their own considerable resources, and to insist on terms of engagement that advance structural transformation, industrial development, and democratic accountability.

The roundtable did not resolve the productive tension between pragmatic reform within existing global systems and the call for more fundamental structural change. Instead, it affirmed that this tension is itself a source of strategic creativity—and that the most effective path forward will draw on both traditions. The question before Africa is no longer whether the global order is changing, but whether Africans will become co-authors of its next chapter.

