

Africa's Intellectual Sovereignty Key to Development

Academic Conference at UN Tackles Critical Issues Impacting the Continent

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, December 2, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Scholars, policymakers and practitioners from various sectors and disciplines are gathered at the United Nations Headquarters for a global discourse on "Seizing the Moment: The African State and Its Promise."



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Peyi Soyinka Ariewe, Ph.D.

The academic conference, hosted by the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA), underscores how rebuilding the state is at the heart of peace and development. The three-day session beginning Dec. 1, commenced by addressing "The State of the State in Africa:

Presence, Perception, and Performance in a Changing World." Tuesday's theme was "Transforming the State, Reclaiming the Future: Pathways to African Renewal." Wednesday's panelists will explore "Ideas That Build Nations: Leveraging African Scholarship for a New Era of Policymaking."

Cristina Duarte, Special Adviser of the United Nations Secretary-General on Africa, welcomed the attendees by framing the conversation. "The 21st century African state must be intellectually sovereign if it is to become politically, economically, and institutionally sovereign," Duarte said. "There is no sovereignty without a sovereign mindset, and there is no sovereign mindset without sovereign scholarship. It shapes planning frameworks, budgeting tools and evaluation metrics."

When there is low ambition, it reduces the African state to a manager of scarcity and stewards of externally driven reforms, Duarte said. "It defines Africa's reality by what it lacks rather than by what it could become. To change this mindset is not to reject reform, it is to reclaim the right to imagine a different future and to equip the state with intellectual and institutional instruments to pursue it. We cannot build sovereign states on the foundation of dependency."

Somali-born and internationally acclaimed novelist Nuruddin Farah, author of "From a Crooked Rib," delivered the keynote remarks. "Is Africa ready for the 21st Century and its literacy needs?" he asked. Farah, who speaks four languages, said literacy involves more than the alphabet. "One needs to keep up with the expanding and evolving skills that you must master so you can think

of yourself as a fully literate person.”

Human development is not possible without paying full attention to technological, digital and numerical literacy, Farah said, stressing the need for children to learn reading, writing and computer skills in their mother tongue. The literature professor at New York’s Bard College also warned that the continent suffers from a brain drain, where thousands of dollars and more than 20 years are invested in developing highly skilled employees only to lose them in one instance with offers of higher-paying positions and professional development overseas.

“How can we turn the brain drain into a brain gain?” asked Ben Dotsei Malor, the chief editor of the UN News, who presided over the high-level discussion. Malor mentioned that the solution might rely on some of the experts in the room returning to work on the continent. Malor then introduced the panel moderator Peyi Soyinka Ariewe, Ph.D., a professor of African and comparative international politics at Ithaca College.

“This moment is critical because we are tired,” Ariewe said. She expressed frustration with how the world uses words like renewal and transformation to describe African nations. “When do we drop the platitudes? The promises of mobilizations and uprisings happening across the African continent today point us toward hope, but they also tell you of a rise of tiredness and disenchantment of where things are.”

Esteemed panelists presented brief statements before answering questions. Eyob Balcha Gebremariam, Ph.D., a research associate at the Perivoli Africa Research Centre at the University of Bristol, was the first presenter. The second speaker was Mojúbàolú Olúfunké Okome, Ph.D., a professor of political science at Brooklyn College and co-founder of Bring Back Our Girls movement in New York City. Joining remotely was Willy Mutunga, LL.D., is the former Chief Justice and President of the Supreme Court of Kenya.

The program, in collaboration with the United Nations Academic Impact, has financial support from the United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund.

Viewers can watch live from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Eastern time Wednesday, Dec. 3, and view recordings on [UN WebTV](https://webtv.un.org/en) at <https://webtv.un.org/en>

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