

Is Freedom of Movement a Human Right?

A number of social, economic, and political ills that Africa inherited from the colonial era keep revealing themselves through policies subdued by the inferiority complex that informs our attitude towards the outside world, especially the western world. From the use of foreign languages in our administrations to the foreign history taught in our schools, down to the foreign religious concepts ingrained in the society – the list is too long. Similarly, there's a palpable and unquestioned issue that Africans have to continue to endure daily in silence: the denial of their right to freedom of movement through undue visa requirements. Due to its implications in the current ever-changing and highly globalised world with an ever-increasing need for human movement, freedom of movement should be defended as a basic human right.

The [Global Passport Power Rank 2021](#) lists passports from the “strongest to the weakest” by their total mobility score. The mobility score (MS) is the total number of countries that a specific passport can readily access. It's a sum determined from Visa-free, Visa-on-arrival, electronic travel authorization (eTA), and electronic Visa (eVisa) issued within three days. Countries with the same mobility score are grouped together into categories which brings the ranking list to a total of 83 categories. Out of the 83 categories on that list, the first African country appearing in the 41st category is South Africa, followed by Botswana in the 51st category. African countries ought to tackle this issue as a matter of urgency.

As a first measure, our governments should remove visa requirements for Africans travelling within Africa as soon as possible. For one thing, this would partly remove the borders

inherited from the colonial era. For another, it should be obvious that our governments are in no position to demand from the rest of the world something they are yet to offer their own citizens: free movement. In this regard, the African passport championed by the African Union Agenda 2063 Visa Free Africa project aims not only at allowing free movement of our people but also boosting intra-Africa trade, labour mobility, knowledge and skills transfer, and promoting pan-African identity, amongst other key benefits. This project must be supported and urgently implemented across our continent.

Moreover, the project promotes the vision of a united Africa and subscribes to Marcus Garvey's idea that "Africans won't be respected anywhere unless Africa is strongly united." The same idea was brought forth on the African political scene by Kwame Nkrumah (who publicly, on many occasions, acknowledged Marcus Garvey's influence on him) in these words: "It is clear that we must find an African solution to our problems, and that this can only be found in African unity. Divided we are weak; united, Africa could become one of the greatest forces for good in the world."

In the second phase of this process, African countries must demand that the rights of their citizens be respected by other nations. As an enforcement tool, African countries should collectively develop a common visa policy towards other countries and continental blocks such as the EU on the basis of reciprocity, taking into account how the latter treat holders of an African passport. Modern technological advancements allow the centralization of the visa process and remote visa service delivery to specific people, whereas Africans should be prioritized and automatically given free visas for intra-Africa travels while non-Africans who provide their good reason for travel are given specified visa duration according to the purpose of their visit: an eye-for-an-eye policy, if it may be so called.

Clearly, it is unacceptable that while citizens from

industrialized countries enjoy the privilege of moving around the world without the stress of being denied a visa, embodying the real meaning of global citizens, their African counterparts are denied potential life and business opportunities due to the horrendous visa tracking journey. Since the private sector in modern societies plays a huge role in the development of a country and also thrives on private international partnerships between businesses and individuals, limiting Africans' access to such partnerships is a violation of their economic rights, which should be considered criminal.

Further, it should be noted that a lengthy visa application process that usually ends with applicants being denied a visa has a devastating effect on people's self-esteem, not only as individuals but as a collective, a nation, and a people. It also subconsciously suggests that anyone who successfully obtains a visa has been 'chosen' among many others who are undeserving of the privilege. Unfortunately, this is the fate of Africans despite the fact that the Global North sends their teenagers to Africa for 'internships' during their gap years while their citizens come to set up businesses without worrying about a visa process.

The situation of isolation that Africa finds itself in can be traced back to the relatively recent history of African occupation. Africa was believed to have been linked to the world only in as far as the colonial powers and their citizens were the primary beneficiaries of the relationship. In such an abusive relationship, psychological and economic isolation of Africa(ans) was the norm. While the current "independent" Africa is only 60 years old and in the process of rediscovering herself, colonial-era policies limiting Africans' freedom of movement continue to hinder the continent's growth in many spheres of its life.

Understandably, whenever a more aggressive approach is suggested to resolve issues like this, the question of African countries that have invested in tourism and consider western

citizens as their primary clients becomes a puzzle to be solved. However, even at that, these countries also want their citizens to be unburdened with the visa processes that hinder their freedom of movement. Moreover, with a population of about 1.3 billion and a yearly average growth rate of 2.5%, Africa represents a huge untapped market for tourism on its own. Intra-Africa freedom of movement policies should be a priority for our governments as they will address a range of social, economic, and political matters that are almost impossible to tackle in the current isolated states.

Movement is life; it is self-discovery and self-expansion. In a highly inter-connected world, being isolated is an inevitable death sentence. Africans are aware of the forces that have been used to keep their continent isolated. Now, they ought to realize that the weapons to counterattack are accessible, with the most lethal ones being diplomacy and strategic alliances. Africa should not be afraid of making freedom of movement for Africans a priority; it is a basic freedom and a human right.