

Speech for Aichi Expo 2005: “*The Wisdom of Africa: If There Were No Africa*”
Aichi, Japan (March 2005)

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen. It is truly a pleasure and honor to be with you all here today, for the very first time for me in Nagoya, Japan. Before I start, I would like to recognize the following people who are in the audience with us today:

Ms Wangari Mathai, Nobel Laureate and inspirational environmentalist

His Excellency, the Kenyan Ambassador to Japan.

Mr. Tanaka —Civic Project Co-ordinator

Mr. Ogawa—Chairman of the Civic Participation Pavilion

My Colleagues from Serbia, the Philippines, and North Carolina

And To all of you who have come from afar to be with us today.

It truly is an honor to be here today to celebrate the theme “*Africa’s Wisdom*” and “*What would the world like if there were no Africa on earth?*” This is truly a good time and good theme to be discussing this topic as Africa has undergone some tremendous transformation in the past decade alone. From the creation/transformation of the OAU (Organization of African Unity) to the African Union, Africa has seen many positive changes that have gone unnoticed to many in the West. Worst of all, some have maintained an outdated, primitive and inferior view of the African Continent. ***My speech here today seeks to change that! Africa is more than the sum of its problems*** that are so often negatively portrayed by the media! While it is true that Africa has many problems or challenges (such as AIDS Orphans, dictators and un-ending conflicts), that is only one side of the story. It is imperative that we balance this incomplete view with many positive stories from Africa for the very benefit of those who seek to unconsciously and consciously bring the great African continent down!

This is the opportunity to do so. This AICHI Civic participation project is a great platform for all of us here today to open our eyes, ears and minds to the vast contributions that Africa has made historically to humanity. My presentation today will show how Africa has made many diverse contributions (intellectually, spiritually and culturally) throughout history impacting culture, commerce, industry and ecology in the world. These contributions have laid the foundation and provided the support that has impacted humanity. Where African Soil ends, its ideas, inventions and people continue reaching out to the rest of the world. Thus we as Africans recognize our importance for not only does humanity’s roots begin in Africa, but believe that we naturally, culturally and spiritually can provide the richest soil where humanity can draw its nutrients to sustain its self. Therefore, my simple answer to today’s theme and question “*what would the world look like if there were no Africa on earth*” is “We would all not be here!” Africa is the cradle of humanity!

I will start by showing you the physical aspects of the continent, then move towards the historical, cultural, commercial, environmental and spiritual contributions that Africa has made or still has to offer.

Beginning of Slide Show Presentation

Africa is the world's second-largest continent in both area and population, after Asia. It covers 20.3 percent of the total land area on Earth, and with over 800 million human inhabitants in 54 countries, it accounts for about one seventh of world human population.

I. Africa's Contributions to Humanity:

A. History

- ***Cradle of Humanity*** - South Africa (my home) is the home to the oldest fossil (2.5 million year-old *Australopithecus africanus*)

- human race originated from this continent perhaps evolving there
- Ethiopia has seen human habitation for longer than almost anywhere else in the world, with modern homo sapiens

- *Ancient civilisations:*

- Egyptians – Ancient Egypt, which first developed over 5000 years ago
 - one of the most notable civilizations and one of the first monarchies anywhere in the world
 - Great monuments and feats of engineering:
 - The Great Pyramid, the tomb of Pharaoh Khufu (also known as Cheops), is the only surviving monument of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World
 - obelisks
 - produced early forms of paper (papyrus) and a written script
 - *developed the calendar*
 - made important contributions in various branches of mathematics (geometry and algebra), and it seems likely that they understood and perhaps invented the use of zero
 - Important contributions in mechanics, philosophy, irrigation and architecture
 - Some historians now believe that ancient Egypt had an important influence on ancient Greece: Pythagoras and Archimedes studied in Egypt, the work of Aristotle and Plato was largely based on earlier scholarship in Egypt, Pythagoras' theorem, was known to the ancient Egyptians hundreds of years before Pythagoras' birth

- *Power warriors:*

- Hamilcar Barca, who fortuitously battled the Roman empire during the 1st Punic War
- Hannibal, Hamilcar's son who is often ranked as one of the best military commanders in history alongside Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Friedrich II and Napoleon and was best known for his achievements in the Second Punic War in marching an army from Spain over the Pyrenees and the Alps into northern Italy and defeating the Romans
- Shaka Zulu - changed the Zulu tribe from a small clan into a nation that held sway over a large proportion of Southern Africa. His military prowess and new tactics, his practice of destroying his enemies and assimilating the remainder marks him as one of modern Africa's most influential military leaders.

B. Culture

- **Music:** Remembrance of the rhythms of sub-Saharan Africa, in particular west Africa, were transmitted through the Atlantic slave trade to modern blues, jazz, reggae and rock and roll.

C. Commerce

- **Carthage** (modern day Tunisia) - during the 6th century BC acquired dominance over the Western Mediterranean and became center of commerce with merchants and explorers established a vast network of trade, bringing wealth and power. It also challenged the Roman empire for military dominance

- Africans in east and south-eastern Africa set up great civilizations that established important trading links with the kingdoms and empires of India and China long before Europeans had learned how to navigate the Atlantic Ocean

- When Europeans first sailed to Africa in the 15th century, African pilots and navigators shared with them their knowledge of trans-oceanic travel

- **Slave labor** – From its beginning of the Atlantic slave trade it is estimated that some 12 million slaves left Africa for the Americas, of which 10.5 million arrived alive. The result of this trade is one of the largest migrations in history.

D. Resources - By far Africa's most valuable exports are its minerals and petroleum; these operations are concentrated in only a few countries.

- **Oil:** Nigeria sits on one of the largest proven oil reserves in the world

- **Diamonds:** Most commercially viable diamond deposits are in Africa, notably in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, the Republic of the Congo, and Sierra Leone. South Africa home to largest diamond ever discovered

- **Gold:** Egypt and Nubia had the resources to make them major gold-producing areas for much of history. Since the 1880s South Africa has been the source for about two-thirds of the world's gold supply

- **Agriculture:** Africa's economy is more reliant on agriculture than that of any other continent, with around 60% of Africans working in the agricultural sector. About three fifths of African farmers are subsistence farmers tilling small plots of land to feed their families, with only a minimal surplus that can be sold for other goods. However, there are a significant number of larger farms that grow cash crops such as coffee, cotton, cocoa, and rubber; these farms, normally operated by large corporations, cover thousands of hectares and employ large numbers of labourer.

E. Spiritual Wisdom

African culture is communal in nature. Unlike many of the western cultures that are individualistic in nature, Africans place value in communal relationships that help to sustain life. This communal way of life that promotes “relationship building” and promotes harmony is and has been helpful model to resolve and prevent conflicts. In South Africa for example, Archbishop Desmond Tutu has pointed towards the concept of “Ubuntu” in the success of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South

Africa which helped prevent a blood bath and heal the South African nation recovering from racial tensions in the post Apartheid era. This concept of Ubuntu promotes compassion, unity, forgiveness and respect amongst individuals instead of retribution. Ubuntu means “a person is person through other persons.”

- It Defines Human beings as being with others.
- It values compassion, unity, forgiveness and respect.
- Believes: humanity is race neutral—and we should be inspired to learn from each other as we learn from ourselves,
- Believes we are one large community that is an integral part of eco-systems.
- Ubuntu says we are not only interconnected, but have a communal responsibility to sustain life.
- It exists across Africa in different ways and words. But wherever you go, from Dakar Senegal, to Cape Town, this spirit lives on.

I believe that Ubuntu is a gift that Africa can share with the world. A war in Iraq would have been prevented if Ubuntu was practiced in the USA. Who knows?

In Africa, we define wisdom or someone who is wise, as someone who profoundly respects other human beings, nature and his/her community. The Oxford Dictionary defines Wisdom as “n 1: accumulated knowledge or erudition or enlightenment 2: the trait of utilizing knowledge and experience with common sense and insight [syn: wiseness] [ant: folly] 3: ability to apply knowledge or experience or understanding or common sense and insight [syn: sapience]

II. Problems:

Despite its rich history, Africa is suffering. Internal and external influences have raped it of its resources, robbed it of its wealth potential, kidnapped its children, and left it to fend for itself.

We now suffer from: (**show mainly youth/children statistics please**)

- **Poverty:** 46% of population living below poverty line (313 million people)
 - extreme poverty cuts life expectancy in half from 80 years to 40 or worse
 - in Sub-Saharan Africa an infant has 1/3 chance of surviving to age 65
- **Disease** (HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria): three-quarters of all young people living with HIV/AIDS live there (8.6 million people)
 - 12 million children have been orphaned by AIDS
 - HIV/AIDS is now the leading cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa
- **Illiteracy:** Adult illiteracy rates in Africa are as high as 78% for men and 93% for women, only in 4 states including South Africa are they below 20%
- **Conflict/ war** – 1999 Africa accounted for 40% of world’s conflicts
 - in 2002, of 63 low-income countries, 38 are located in sub-Saharan Africa and curiously, these are the countries associated with conflict
- **Environment:** Africa had the world's highest rate of deforestation as poor people cleared trees for farmland and firewood.
 - Acute respiratory infections, which often afflict families that rely on coal or firewood, kill or disable about 30 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's children each year

Conclusions

Even though many problems still exist in Africa, they should be seen as opportunities for us to work together to solve some of the world's difficult problems. Africa's problems should not be seen as the only view of the continent, even in an environment in which the media thrives in negative and sensational reporting. We should keep an open mind. Today I showed you how Africa has made many diverse contributions historically that have impacted world culture, commerce, industry and ecology. Spiritually, I personally believe that the concept of "Ubuntu" has an enormous role to play in resolving world conflicts, protecting human rights and provide some lessons individuals, organizations and multilateral institutions in the rich countries. We are all interconnected. We are one. Let us work together and learn from each other. Africa's Wisdom calls! Are you ready to listen with an open mind?

I thank you and Wish all of you the very best for the remainder of the exhibition!

Salani Kahle' (Good-bye in Siswati)