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Identity of African Australian youth: Speech at Africa Day Indaba Australasia and the Pacific 2024

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Adjoa Assan and Sakama: Good afternoon, distinguished guests. My colleague, Samuel Sakama, and I will be presenting some insights into the case of African Australian youth in the 21st century.

Samuel Sakama: Thank you, Adjoa. We too would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet on today and pay our respects to their elders' past, present and emerging. We log in on these countries and hopefully you log in on the different countries as well. Thank you.

Adjoa Assan: Samuel and I are both current executives of the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP). AFSAAP has been around for many years and its mission is to promote African studies, connecting those with an interest in this multidisciplinary field.

Samuel Sakama: Some of what we've tried to do here today is to give you guys a little bit of a big picture when it comes to the identity of African Australian youth. So, we have seen that the African Australian youth identity is an emerging identity. It stems from the African Americans. The pathways to the African Australian youth identity are through migration, which means young people that come to Australia as refugees and young people that come as skilled migrants or through the family pathway, and we wanted to note that the refugee or humanitarian pathway is the majority pathway, how we get young people in this country. Australia offers a lot of opportunities. I mean many of them have already been highlighted by the other presenters.

Australia offers a lot of opportunities around education and employment and, currently, we have seen in settlement that young people that are engaging with education and employment are doing very well in their settlement. Potentially, we have seen from some of the research that we have done that there is a possibility for a brain drain for Africa, for the young people, kind of like the young cohorts that we have here that been engaging. The what the African continent needs to do, though, is to tap on this valuable resource a little bit because we see that there is a potential for African countries to look more to Europe and America, probably that have been traditional than Australia, but there are also in Australia, I mean you guys will be familiar with the everyday realities of settlement that our young people go through, and research also shows that young people seemed to settle faster than the older cohorts or generations, and some of that can come from learning a language so they will understand the language faster as compared to their parents.

Settlement challenges when young people, though, include the issue of identity, whether or not the African-ness and Australian-ness, they're sort of dancing around it. We also see issues of belonging and also issues of dealing with expectations just from their parents and their communities. However, young people have continued to show resilience. So, there is a lot of resilience in the state of school music, art, sports, they are involved in various things like you can see on the TV, the number of young people that are even involved in the Australian footy sports. Despite the challenges that Australia pose, so in terms of resilience as well, we see another part of resilience is resistance, and that resistance can be young people who might not be coping very well. So, they might tend to the idea of justice involvement, probably they might tend to the use of substance, we want to highlight that as well. But those young people, it is good to say, or it is important to note that those young people are in the minority, they are very small number. So, I will now turn up to my colleague to speak more about the perspective of a young person. Thank you.

Adjoa Assan: Within the context of what Samuel has presented, I would like to share some of my own story and reflections as an African youth born in Australia. Adjoa Abesse Assan. I was named after the young man pictured in the top left of the slide, [Nana Kojo Abesse Assan, my grandfather, who has passed, Councillor to the Chief of our village in Breman, Kuntanase in the central region of Ghana. Across the world and particularly in Africa, names carry weight, and this is true for me because my grandfather's legacy lives on through his granddaughter who like my fellow African youth in Africa and in the diaspora, are concerned for the welfare of our families, communities and nations wherever we are.

Looking at the African Union's theme for 2024 of education, one of the questions I am asking is, what does it take for African youth to succeed in the 21st century? And I asked this question a few days ago on my social media to a few African youths on the continent, including my cousin, Dr Nana Yaw Assan, who is a junior doctor working in a hospital in Kumasi, Ghana, and also some African youth in the diaspora. And some of the responses I received were, this is a hard question. Another response was it takes a lot of resilience for an African youth to succeed in the 21st century, hard work, perseverance and patience. Another response was that we need to back each other as a community. No one should have to go it alone, and finally, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation as well as tapping into the right networks.

My 20 years or so of formal education reached a high point when I was admitted as a lawyer to the Supreme Court of New South Wales. But what made that ceremony especially special for me was when, to my surprise, I saw a barrister at law by the name of Uche Okereke-Fisher, who is of African background, stand to deliver a keynote presentation in the Supreme Court on behalf of the New South Wales Bar Association. And I share this story because sometimes the seeds of success are planted in African youth, yes, when we can access quality education, but also when we can imagine what is possible, like I did when I saw barrister at law Uche Okereke-Fisher, whether that be achieving the heights of success in established professions or taking up our place in emerging fields.

Samuel Sakama: We wanted to welcome you all to our conference, at the AFSAAP 2024 conference. So, the

conference will be held in Perth, Western Australia, around the 21st to the 23rd of November. And some of the themes that we will be looking at is this idea of using the past, present, and future to position Africa in the global scheme of things and some of those, we feature our presentations around understanding African status. In Australia, we do not have much yet developed in this space, so we are looking at developing that, but there will also be some themes on governments and there is some of that, I guess, harnessing the African diaspora.

Adjoa Assan: So, please connect with us and AFSAAP if you're interested on our social media platforms, and you can visit our website for more information. We thank you for your kind attention.

Samuel Sakama: Thank you.

Aisha Setipa: Thank you so much, Adjoa and Samuel. Thank you to everyone who spoke today and thank you to everyone for joining us for this series of presentations who I am sure you all found incredibly insightful and important, and just overall getting a chance to listen to some pretty incredible individuals, I do say so myself. So, with that said, I would like to encourage everyone to reach out to our presenters today, as well as the program organisers, if you would like to find out more about what was discussed today and how you can get more involved. That is, it from me today. So, I would like to invite Rugare back for closing remarks and then to also guide us into the next portion of today's program, which is the end of our panel discussion.

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