First I would like to thank Professor Kristi Porter for inviting me to this beautiful campus. And I would like to thank you for finding some time to come and listen to me. You won’t like what I will say but will say it anyway.

Most speakers start their speeches with a joke but I will depart from that practice. First, my jokes aren’t funny. More importantly, however, a joke won’t be appropriate when dealing with Africa – a continent where something has gone terribly wrong. It is a continent that breaks my heart. The abject poverty, disease, AIDS, civil wars, failed states, famine, etc. Year in, year out, we see emaciated bodies of starving victims paraded on Western television in appeals for humanitarian assistance. These pictures cut deep into my African pride and dignity. Name the crisis and we have it in Africa. Saharan Africa, consisting of 48 countries, is the least developed region of the Third World. The health infrastructure has collapsed in Africa. Over 80 percent of Africans rely on traditional medicine. Malaria, a preventable disease kills about 1.2 million people every year – mostly children under the age of 5. HIV/AIDS has orphaned more than 14 million children in Africa. Yet, this is a continent immensely rich in mineral and natural resources. This is what is so maddening. Name the mineral and you will find it in Africa: Gold, diamonds, platinum, titanium, palladium . . . They are all there in Africa.

What all these point to is catastrophic failure of leadership and government dysfunction. On Dec 24, 2009, a product of these twin problems was
exported to America’s shores in the person of Farouk Abdulmutallab – the “underwear bomber or the Nigerian terrorist who tried to blow up DELTA flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit. How do you make sense out of all these? How do you fix Africa?

QUALIFIERS

Africa is a vast continent of 54 countries with astonishing diversity. I don’t want to paint it with one broad brush and so my remarks need to be qualified.

First, there have been some good leaders since independence but they are very few. Since 1960, there have been 209 African heads of state. One would be hard-pressed to name 15 good leaders. Take the challenge yourself. Even if you get 20 good leaders, 20 out of 206 means over 90 percent were failures. Of course, leadership failure is not unique to Africa alone. But Africa seems to have a bumper crop of them.

Second, there are some faint rays of hope. Africa is making progress but the report card is mixed and where progress is being made, it is at an excruciatingly slow pace. Fueled by high commodity prices, Africa in 2007 recorded a respectable 5.2 percent rate of economic growth but it was below the 7 percent rate needed to make a dent on poverty alleviation or meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Third, there are indeed economic success stories and a few countries have sprinted ahead – Benin, Botswana, Ghana, Mali, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda and Uganda. However, these are “small country” examples and cannot serve as the economic locomotive needed to pull the rest of the continent out of its economic miasma. It is the melt-down or crises in such “larger countries” as DR Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan and Zimbabwe that are dragging the continent down.
Even then, in those countries where progress has been registered, it is fragile. Angola, for example, registered the continent’s fastest rate of economic growth of 20.8 percent in 2007, occasioned by high oil prices. In 2005, the oil revenue of $10.6 billion was almost double the figure from 2004. But Angola’s oil bonanza has not trickled down to the poor and corruption remains rampant. Ghana is an emerging “economic success story” but is heavily weighed down by a bloated bureaucracy comprising of 90 cabinet ministers and deputy ministers. Uganda has chalked up some impressive growth rates, averaging 8 percent in recent years, following decades of economic reform and earning the World Bank’s “economic success story” distinction. However, Uganda’s rates of economic growth are not sustainable as they are dependent on large dollops of foreign aid. Its budget is 55 percent dependent on foreign aid. Further, economic reform in Uganda has not been matched by political reform. Back in 1986, President Yoweri Museveni declared that, “No African head of state should be in power for more than 10 years.” Yet, he himself has been in power for more than 20 years and counting.

Fourth, there are democratic countries in Africa. Out of 54, only 16 are democratic: Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde Islands, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Sao Tome & Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia. If you apply a stricter definition of democracy, the list would be shorter.

Fifth, Africa has not been ignored by the West. Since 1960, more than $600 billion in foreign aid has been poured into Africa with little to show for it.

Be that as it may, the bottom line is: The vast majority of the African people, despite the immense wealth of the continent, still wallow in poverty and repression. And the African continent reels from one crisis after another. With the global financial crisis, things will get worse in
Africa. But let me restrict myself to the three most important crises that continue to plague Africa:

1. Political Crisis because it can break a nation. Look at Kenya, Madagascar, Sudan, or Zimbabwe,
2. Conflict Resolution, which is essential for the restoration of peace and order without which development would be impossible.
3. Accountability. Obviously leaders and governments need to be held accountable.

For each of these crises, there is an African solution, distinct from a Western solution. I coined the expression, “African Solutions for African Problems” after the collapse of Somalia into anarchy and chaos in 1991. In a scathing piece published in the Wall Street Journal,

The rationale for the coinage was three-fold. The first was to help make foreign aid to Africa more effective. Billions in foreign aid have been poured into Africa with little to show for it. The whole foreign aid program is a huge scandal. I am not saying America should not help Africa. We need help but aid-giving has become a theater of the absurd with the blind leading the clueless. The blind are African leaders who do not see that the solutions to the myriad of African problems lie in Africa itself.

The blind are African leaders and the second rationale was to disabuse their copy-cat mentality. They have copied every foreign system imaginable for transplantation in Africa. Name the foreign system and you will find some dilapidated replica somewhere in Africa. In fact, the whole post-colonial African development strategy can be characterized as “development-by-imitation.” American farmers use tractors; so too must we in Africa. New York has skyscrapers; so too must we in the middle of nowhere in Africa. China is a one-party state; so too must we. Rome has a basilica; so we built one at Yamassoukrou, Ivory Coast. France once had an emperor; so Bokassa of the Central African Republic spent $25 million to crown himself “emperor” in 11975 to prove that Africa too had come of
age. The list of unimaginative aping is endless. They copied from everywhere; even Jupiter! **Enough!**

Third, each time a crisis erupts in Africa, the leadership frantically looks abroad, either for the causes or for foreign solutions. Quite often, the international community obliges. However, though noble and well-intentioned, these foreign solutions have seldom worked in Africa. For one thing, they create a “dependency” on foreigners, reinforcing the offensive notion that Africans are incapable of solving their own problems. For another, the foreign solutions do not fit into Africa’s unique political and socio-cultural topography.

The clueless are the foreign aid donors who have scant understanding of the cultures they are dealing with. As such, they often unwittingly aid and abet the implementation of wrong solutions to solve Africa’s problems. Let me give you an example.

In the West, the teleological point of reference is the *individual*. The American says I am because I am and I can well do anything I want. The emphasis is on the “I.” In poor African and tribal communities, the emphasis is on the *collective* – the extended family, the village and the tribe. Recall this African saying made famous by Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton: “It takes a village to raise a child.” By the same token, it takes a village to solve a crisis. If an individual commits a crime, he brings shame not just to himself but also to his family and village. It was this value system which propelled the father of the Dec 24 Nigerian terrorist bomber to tip off the U.S. Embassy officials in Nigeria.

U.S. foreign policy and foreign aid programs are drive by the Western belief that an *individual can make a difference*. For example, Iraq and Afghanistan are places where the U.S. has invested enormous political capital in individuals such as al Maliki and Karzai. If it takes a village to raise a child in Africa, then obviously we should focus aid on helping the village, not a single individual. Thus a **REAL AFRICAN SOLUTION** is
that which is rooted in African culture, traditions and heritage. So what are the real African solutions to the political crises facing Africa?

EXAMPLES:

- **Village government**
- **Crisis**

In crisis-resolution, the African tradition entails *consultation* and *decision-making by consensus*. When a crisis erupts in an African village, the chief and the elders would summon a village meeting and put the issue to the people. There it was debated by the people until a consensus was reached. During the debate, the chief usually made no effort to manipulate the outcome or sway public opinion. Nor were there bazooka-wielding rogues, intimidating or instructing people on what they should say. People expressed their ideas *openly* and *freely* without fear of arrest. Those who cared participated in the decision-making process. No one was locked out. Once a decision had been reached by consensus, it was binding on all, including the chief.

These village meetings are indigenous African political institutions and commonplace across the continent. They are similar to New England’s town hall meetings and are variously called *asetena kese* among the Ashanti, *ama-ala* among the Igbo, *guurti* among the Somali, *kgotla* among the Tswana, *dare* among the Shona, *pitso* among the Xhosa, and *ndaba* among the Zulu.

- **Democracy**
- **Conflict Resolution**

**REAL AFRICAN CONFLICT SOLUTION**

The Western notion of justice is different from the African. Whereas the Western notion emphasizes punishment for the guilty, the African notion mandates forgiveness, restitution, reconciliation to promote social healing and restore social harmony.
Africans believe that when two people fight, the entire village is affected. Therefore, conflict resolution requires not just a settlement between the two disputants but also an effort to repair frayed social relationships (social healing). Africa's indigenous conflict resolution mechanism requires four parties: An arbiter, the combatants (two sides) and civil society or those directly and indirectly affected by the conflict (the victims). In traditional Africa, when two disputants cannot resolve their differences by themselves, the case may be taken to a chief’s court for adjudication. The court is open and anyone affected by the dispute can attend and make their voices heard. First, the complainant makes his case; then the defendant. Next, anybody else who has something to say may do so. After all the arguments have been heard, the chief renders a decision. The guilty party may be fined say three goats. In default, his family is held liable.

The injured party receives one goat, the chief another for his service and the remaining goat is slaughtered for a village feast for all to enjoy. The latter social event is derived from the African belief that it takes a village, not only to raise a child but also to heal frayed social relations. Thus, traditional African jurisprudence lays more emphasis on healing and restoring social harmony and peace than punishing the guilty. Further, the interests of the community supersede those of the disputants. If they adopt intransigent positions, they can be sidelined by the will of the community and fined say two goats each for disturbing social peace. In extreme cases, they can be banished or expelled from the village. Thus, there is a price to be paid for intransigence and for wreaking social mayhem -- a price exacted by the victims.

A. POLITICAL CRISIS
First, it is important to understand the **CAUSES** of these political crises. And one word “power” explains why much of Africa is in political turmoil: The monopolization of power and the unwillingness of African leaders to relinquish or share it. How did this start?

It all started after independence in the 1960s when African leaders, with few exceptions, imposed **defective and alien** political and economic systems on their people and that set the stage for the ruination of post colonial Africa. They spurned democracy as a "Western institution" and established "one-party state systems" with themselves as "presidents-for-life." That political system was defective because you don’t have to be a rocket scientist to realize that any political system with enormous concentration of power degenerates into tyranny no matter where it is established. It was also alien because it contravened Africa's own indigenous heritage of consensual and participatory democracy under its chiefs.

They compounded the error with the imposition of a **defective and alien economic system**. They associated capitalism with colonialism. Colonialism was evil and exploitation and since the colonialists were capitalists, aha! Capitalism too was evil and exploitative. So, most African leaders adopted socialism – the anti-thesis of capitalism. That economic system of socialism or statism was defective because its plethora of state controls created chronic commodity shortages, black markets, and spawned a culture of bribery and corruption, virtually destroying Africa’s productive base. It was also alien and in sync with Africa’s own indigenous heritage of free markets, free trade and free enterprise. There were free markets in Africa before the colonialists stepped foot on the continent. Timbuktu was one great market town, as were Kano, Salaga, Mombasa and Sofala. Anybody who has been to a West African market will affirm that market activity has always been dominated by women.
Prices on African markets have for centuries been determined by bargaining; they are fixed by chiefs.

**Indigenous Africa: means of production privately-owned. Raising capital – susu. Profit is shared.**

The combination of the defective and alien systems -- political and economic – had the effect of concentrating enormous power in the hands of the state and who ruled it. And what was this power used for: To develop the Africa? **Noooooooooooooo!** It was used by the ruling elites to enrich themselves, their cronies and tribesmen and exclude everyone else. The richest persons in Africa are heads of state and ministers. Quite often, the chief bandit is the head of state himself. Very soon, government ceased to exist. It evolved into what Africans call a “Vampire state” – a government hijacked by a phalanx of bandit and crooks who used the instruments of the state to suck the economic vitality out of their people for their own self-aggrandizement.

Now ask yourself this: What would you do if you are a member of a group excluded from the spoils of political power? You might consider doing any one of the following 3 things:


b. **Secede, as the Biafrans attempted to from Nigeria in 1967, resulting in a civil war that claimed more than 1 million lives.** Talk of secession is occasionally heard in Yorubaland and the Delta states in Nigeria, as well as in Cabinda, an oil-rich enclave of Angola.

c. **Vote with their feet, which is why Africa is crawling with refugees are every corner.**
Note the civil wars in Africa are power struggles. They are not about redrawing colonial boundaries; rebels head straight to the capital city, where power lies. Nor does tribalism have anything to do with them. Somalia is ethnically homogenous; yet it imploded.

Note also that the cause of all these is the defective and alien political system. You can’t blame Western colonialism, American imperialism or slavery for that. African leaders imposed that political system on their people themselves. Obviously, you can solve that problem and prevent future political crises by reforming that abominable political system. Power needs to be decentralized and given back to the people where it belongs. The politics of exclusion must be replaced by the politics of inclusion, etc. But the leadership is not interested, period. I hate to tell you this: Without reform, more countries will blow and the following are candidates: Algeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Libya, and even Uganda.

RESOLVING POLITICAL CRISES

When rebel insurgency erupts, the international community barely pays attention until the scale of barbarity, carnage and human suffering reaches horrific levels. Then diplomatic pressure is applied to the combatants to reach a deal. The West, in particular, often prefers to see direct face-to-face negotiations between government and opposition or rebel leaders. And the signing of a pact or the establishment of Government of National Unity (GNU) – as was the case in Sudan (2005), Kenya (2008) and Zimbabwe (2008). But this Western approach has failed miserably.

More than 30 such peace accords, backed by the West, have been brokered in Africa since the 1970s with abysmal success record. Only Mozambique's 1991 peace accord has endured, while shaky pacts hold in Chad, Liberia, and Niger. Elsewhere, peace accords were shredded like confetti even before the ink on them was dry, amid mutual recriminations of cease-fire

The reasons for failure are not hard to find. **First**, peace accords or GNU are essentially a formula for joint plunder of the state. A "government of national unity" (GNU) is often proposed to "bring rebels and opposition leaders into government." A number of ministerial or government positions are reserved for rebel leaders. Bitter squabbles erupt over the distribution of government posts as nobody is satisfied with the eventual distribution. Squabbling over posts may lead to the resumption of hostilities and conflict again -- Angola in 1992, Congo in 1999, and Sierra Leone in 2000. More government posts may be created to satisfy rebel demands, leading to a bloated bureaucracy: Kenya now has over 79 cabinet ministers and Zimbabwe over 30. The U.S. by contrast has about 20 cabinet positions.

**Second**, African despots never honor agreements to which they append their signatures. Their promises and signatures are just for show as they lack sincerity or commitment. Even before the ink is dry, they start backtracking on the agreements they have made. They may agree to the creation of a post of prime minister but deprive it of power or a budget to enable him to function. Such were the cases in Angola, Ivory Coast and Sudan.

Even when peace accords are successfully concluded and a "government of national unity" (GNU) is established, it is short-lived. Angola’s GNU did not last for more than six months in 1992. In South Africa, former president de Klerk pulled out of the GNU after barely one year when apartheid was dismantled in 1994. Congo’s GNU in 2003 created 4 vice-presidents but did not bring peace to eastern Congo, especially the Bunia region. Burundi’s civil war flared up in August 2003 again, despite the establishment of a
GNU, brokered by former president Nelson Mandela and Ivory Coast’s GNU established in January 2003 proceeded in fits and starts.

THE REAL AFRICAN SOLUTION

In recent years, this indigenous African tradition was been revived by pro-democracy forces in the form of "national conferences" to chart a new political future in Benin, Cape Verde Islands, Congo, Malawi, Mali, Niger, South Africa, and Zambia.

Benin's nine-day "national conference" began on 19 February 1990, with 488 delegates, representing various political, religious, trade union, and other groups encompassing the broad spectrum of Beninois society. The conference, whose chairman was Father Isidore de Souza, held "sovereign power" and its decisions were binding on all, including the government. It stripped President Matthieu Kerekou of power, scheduled multiparty elections that ended 17 years of autocratic Marxist rule. [Kerekou was re-elected in 1996.]

Congo's national conference had more delegates (1,500) and lasted longer three months. But when it was over in June 1991, the 12-year old government of General Denis Sassou-Nguesso had been dismantled. The constitution was rewritten and the nation's first free elections were scheduled for June 1992. Before the conference, Congo was among Africa's most avowedly Marxist-Leninist states. A Western business executive said, "The remarkable thing is that the revolution occurred without a single shot being fired . . . (and) if it can happen here, it can happen anywhere" (*The New York Times*, 25 June 1991, A8).

In South Africa, the vehicle used to make that difficult but peaceful transition to a multiracial democratic society was the Convention for a Democratic South Africa. It began deliberations in July 1991, with 228 delegates drawn from about 25 political parties and various anti-apartheid groups. The de Klerk government made no effort to "control" the
composition of CODESA. Political parties were not excluded; not even ultra right-wing political groups, although they chose to boycott its deliberations. CODESA strove to reach a "working consensus" on an interim constitution and set a date for the March 1994 elections. It established the composition of an interim or transitional government that would rule until the elections were held. More important, CODESA was "sovereign." Its decisions were binding on the de Klerk government. De Klerk could not abrogate any decision made by CODESA -- just as the African chief could not disregard any decision arrived at the village meeting. [In 2006 Afghanistan also conveyed a tribal conclave called loya jirga to resolve a political crisis and transition to a democratic state.]

In 1996, South Africa tried to export this model to the Middle East to help resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One would think South Africa’s Ambassador would have made every effort to export the same model to its next door neighbor – Zimbabwe. If CODESA worked for South Africa, then CODEZI (a Convention for a Democratic Zimbabwe) will also work for Zimbabwe. CODEZI is the real African solution for Zimbabwe’s crisis. Obviously, this is the real African solution for these countries as well -- Algeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Libya, and Uganda – to save them from implosion.

But in case after case, the various peace accords brokered in recent years in Africa lack these vital ingredients. The victims are always excluded and, worse, the warlords go scot-free and rich. A notable exception was in South Africa, which established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) after the dismantling of apartheid in 1994. The TRC was rooted in this African tradition. If every white person, guilty of apartheid crimes, were to be punished, how many whites would be left in South Africa?

It should be noted that recently, this notion of “truth and reconciliation” has been adopted by the governments of Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda.
Rwanda abandoned the Western approach to the genocide and reverted to its traditional system of gacaca because if the country were to try all those guilty in the crime of genocide in a court of law, it would take Rwanda more than 250 years to try the over 100,000 of them.

ACCOUNTABILITY

This is a principle which is not alien to Africa. The African chief is appointed; he does not appoint himself, nor declare his village to be a one-party state. He governs with a council of elders, made up of heads of the extended family systems in the village. Without the council, the chief is powerless. He must reach unanimous decision with the councilors on all important matters. If not, a village meeting will be convened, the issue put before the people and a consensus reached.

The first of defense against despotism is the Queen Mother. She appoints the Chief from the royal family, the founders of the settlement. If a chief is bad, he brings shame to the royal family and it is her duty to remove the chief. In the Ashanti Kingdom, if she failed to perform her duties, she herself will be removed.

The second line of defense is the Council of Elders, who might refuse to work with a despotic chief and ask the royal family to supply a new chief. If the councilors fail, the third and final line are the people. They would vote with their feet to go and settle somewhere else and land is readily available in Africa. A bad chief was simply abandoned by his people.

With respect to African kings, accountability was differently enforced because the African king has no political role. Africans divided the universe into 3 cosmological spheres: The Sky, the World and he Earth. Each is represented by a god and the king’s role is propitiate the gods to maintain order (called kiet among the Nnamdi of Kenya). If the Sky god
was angry, there would thunder, lightning, and floods. If the Earth god was “angry,” there would be poor agricultural harvests, famine and women would be barren. When any of these occurred, it meant that the king had failed in his duties and off went his head, among the Sukuma of Tanzania.

With the Yoruba, in a process known as kirikiri, a mob would parade around the king’s palace, loudly abusing him and pelting the palace with stones, chanting: “Our ancestors reject you . . . The gods are against you.”

The king would be given three days to leave town. If not, a select group of men seized and disposed of him.

Of course, today regicide is not practiced but ooooooooooooh how I wish they would bring it back! The Mugabes, Bashirs, Ghaddafis, etc. never had it so good.

To conclude, the political crises that we face in many African countries is due to the fact that the leadership imposed on their people systems that were alien or un-African. And to resolve these crises, they resorted to mechanisms that were un-African! A double whammy. Maybe, some of these leaders should be subjected to Africa’s own brand of accountability – regicide.

Thank you.