

Cities Top the Agenda at the First Africa-Europe Foundation Forum



On the occasion of its first Forum, the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) has called for cities to have a central role in a strengthened and revitalised Africa-Europe partnership. The Forum's special dialogue on cities brought together a range of actors from civil society, business and politics, to co-strategize ways to reinforce the role of mayors and cities in Africa-Europe dialogue at this critical milestone for the neighbouring continents.

Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, Mayor of Freetown, who has received international recognition for city leadership in facing the global health pandemic, opened the dialogue with insights into how cities in Africa and Europe can “chart a path forward by developing practical approaches that deal with the realities we face as Africa and Europe, from COVID-19 to climate change and human mobility.” This is a path Freetown is already walking as a pioneer for the “Mayors Dialogue” initiative co-founded by Mayor Aki-Sawyerr with city leaders from both continents who are calling for a central role in a strengthened Africa-Europe partnership.

This call was taken up by the European Commission’s Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, **Dubravka Šuica**, who committed to ensure cities are given “greater space to act and contribute in decision-making, [including] new opportunities for access to financing to deliver results on the ground, and a citizen-centred, bottom-up approach to regional cooperation.” Vice-President Šuica, responsible for the Conference on the Future of Europe, also announced she would be working with the Africa-Europe Foundation “to shape a meaningful engagement of cities and mayors” in the lead-up to next year’s EU-Africa Summit.

Engagement with cities was put into global perspective by **Louise Mushikiwabo**, Secretary General of Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, who spoke about the importance of “a nimbler form of multilateralism,” underlining that “we have got to create agility in the way we do business and create an understanding that people need cities to work beyond the rules and processes of the multilateral world in order to contribute to solving the global challenges of the 21st century.”

The special dialogue was co-organised by the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) and leading global affairs think-tank ODI, as part of the first Forum of the AEF following its launch in December 2020. The AEF acts as a network of networks and brings together some of the world’s most experienced leaders through its “High-Level Group of Personalities”. On the occasion of this special dialogue, it was also announced that Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr will become the newest member of the High-Level Group, further reinforcing the centrality of city leadership in the work of the AEF.

Mo Ibrahim, Chairman of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation and co-founder of the Africa-Europe Foundation, confirmed that cities would be adopted as a central pillar of the Foundation's work, underlining: "Our focus will be on getting things done and in this perspective mayors are doers, on the ground in daily contact with people and key to transforming dialogue into action." He added, "Going forward it will be critical to find ways in which cities can access finance and invest in sustainable actions in the face of climate change and common challenges."

The first Africa-Europe Foundation Forum is running from 28 June to 2 July 2021 and is a key milestone for defining the strategic priorities and action of the Foundation in the months ahead.