

Candidates From Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar and Mauritius Contesting for African Union Chairperson's Position

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The African Union Chairperson is an important position within the African Union. The Chairperson serves as the head of the (AU) African Union elected by the assembly of heads of states and government. As the Africa Union stands at the crossroads and at the critical juncture, an effective leadership is essential for addressing the myriad challenges facing the African continent.

After several months of conscientious search for potential contestants to take over the African Union Commission chairperson's position, which expires next February 2025, four (4) candidates have emerged representing Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar and Mauritius.

With these candidates already confirmed following the deadline set for submission of applications and all the necessary supporting documents, four senior African politicians are engaged in an intensive campaign and strategic lobbying across Africa. The deadline for candidacies closed on August 6, at the African Union, which is headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The African Union, a continental organization consisting of 55 African Member States, is scheduled to hold elections at its summit in February 2025 to choose a successor to **Moussa Faki Mahamat**, chairperson of the African Union Commission. The election is conducted by secret ballot, and the winner must secure a majority of two thirds of the vote among eligible member states.

By the stipulated guidelines, the chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC) is the chief executive officer exercising administrative, legal and financial functions. It also includes pursuing a leadership role for delivering the continental vision of an integrated transformative economy, consistently working for prosperous and peaceful Africa. The current geopolitical situation requires engaging in beneficial relations with external development partners for the continent.

Considered as Africa's economic engine since its establishment as OAU and later transformed into AU, the head of the AUC, which is an executive body, is elected on rotational basis between the regions of the continent for every four years and the elected chairperson can be re-elected for two terms as incorporated in the constitution. Africa has five distinctive regions: northern, western, central, southern and eastern. Quite apart from regional origin, the candidates are required to have serious educational qualifications and, most important, experience to handle effectively the multiple tasks as the chairperson of the AUC. (See AU report: African Union Commission Elections 2025).

Contesting Candidates

From preliminary research and monitoring, the central, western, and southern regions of Africa have already served as chairpersons, this implies it is the turn of southern and eastern candidates of Africa. Concretely, it therefore includes Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. These countries are now, by geographical definition, can produce candidates for the position of chairperson. One of the basic key criteria is the candidate must be former presidents, former prime ministers, or former foreign ministers and to take up the job which mostly includes the undertaking of “measures aimed at promoting and popularizing the objectives of the Union” and the execution of “such other functions as may be determined by the Assembly or the Executive Council.”

According to African Union report, in early August 2024, the four confirmed candidates for this top AUC position, and to ultimately take over from the current chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, are: *Mahamoud Ali Youssouf of Djibouti, Raila Odinga of Kenya, Richard Randriamandrato of Madagascar and Anil Gayan of Mauritius.*



(i) **Raila Odinga** is a veteran Kenyan opposition leader, who now at 79, has tried and failed five times to become president, most recently losing the 2022 election to William Ruto. Odinga spent his years in politics, fighting for democracy during the autocratic rule of President Daniel Arap Moi. “We are focused on bringing the seat home for Kenya and serving the African people,” Odinga said on X while announcing his formal candidacy.

A media report released in March 2024, titled “Museveni Endorses Raila Odinga’s AU Chairperson Bid” and circulated in the East African region showed the publicity campaign and erratic steps at promoting Kenyan Raila Odinga to take over as Chairman of the AU Commission. Interestingly, Raila Odinga, Kenya’s opposition leader, has readily accepted Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni’s endorsement of his candidacy for African Union Commission chairperson.

In a flagship statement posted via his social media platforms, Odinga said Museveni endorsed him during a joint meeting with President William Ruto. The Azimio alliance’s leader stated that the joint meeting with President Museveni and President Ruto was organized at the Ugandan president’s invitation. Odinga has an unmistakable political influence. Born into a modest political family and grew up in politics. His profound perspectives suggest he operates as a pivotal figure within power dynamics and his decision-making capacity is perceived as absolute pragmatic. Odinga, most observers say, possesses an assertive leadership style and always expresses steadfast interest in the complexity of a development-oriented society. These leadership skills echo his deep-seated affection for a genuine communal, regional, and continental tradition. Odinga as a suitable

candidate underscores the perfect choice to embrace and settle for the best administrator for Africa.



(ii) **Richard Mahitsison Randriamandrato** studied in Paris, France. Randriamandrato was Madagascar's foreign minister from March to October 2022, but was fired after voting at the United Nations to condemn Russia's annexations of four Ukrainian regions. Madagascar has followed a non-aligned position on the war in Ukraine. He is a prominent Malagasy politician known for his role in the government of Madagascar.

He served also as a minister of economy and finance from 2019 until 2021 where he focused on economic policies aimed at stabilizing and developing Madagascar's economy. Beyond his ministerial roles, he has been involved in strategic foresight and economic intelligence advising on regional infrastructure and development projects.



(iii) **Anil Gayan**, 76, served as foreign minister of the Indian Ocean island nation of Mauritius between 1983 and 1986, and again from 2000 to 2003. After this, he has since held other posts including at the tourism and health ministries. His biography says Anil Gayan's ancestors migrated from India when the island was a British colony. He studied law at the London School of Economics and University of London until 1974. As a politician, he formed a political group called FNM (Front National Mauricien) in 2009. Along the line, in 2008, he was part of United Nations mediation in Guinea-Bissau. Gayan also led a 20-member African Union group of observers during the 2010 Rwanda elections.



(iv) **Mahamoud Ali Youssouf**, in April 2024, was nominated by Djibouti for the position of the chairperson. His biography says, between 1985 and 1990, he studied foreign languages at the Lumière University Lyon, and then studied business management at the University of Liverpool in the United Kingdom. He was, however, unsuccessful with his thesis at the Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium.

Nevertheless, as a staunch politician, Youssouf believes that although Djibouti is a small country with a sizable port, his government hopes to develop its economy along the same lines as Dubai. Its strategic location serves as a conduit to the whole world. “I am the only candidate capable of *bridging the gap between the different regions of Africa*, being French-speaking, but also English-speaking and Arabic-speaking,” said Djibouti’s Youssouf, the 58-year-old has been the foreign minister of the tiny but strategic Horn of Africa nation since 2005. “My primary objective if I am elected is *to silence the guns*” on the continent, he told AFP in an interview in July.

Employment Implications

Bridging the gap between different regions implies that this AUC leadership will address the development dynamics in the continent. That further emphasizes creating a conducive environment and atmosphere for potential external investors and stakeholders, within the geopolitical parameters, to the kind of a mixed economy, and speeding up the most industrialization processes and working towards technological advancement in Africa. (See *African Leaders Extraordinary Summit report, Feb. 2024*)

Noticeably the republics of Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger and Mali have established governments, accused their previous political leaders’ manipulation by external powers, economic under-developments and the deepening instability (that is un-quantify-able failure to stem the Islamist insurgency) in the Sahel-Saharan region, an elongated landlocked territory located between North Africa (Maghreb) and West Africa, to the Atlantic coast of West Africa.

During series of summits, conferences and meetings that proliferated these years, the AUC reiterated the continuing growth of multiple democratic challenges with a wider negative impact across the continent, and particularly itemized military takeovers that have become a distinctive feature (or accepted norm) of regime change in West Africa. Some experts pointed to the rising neo-colonial tendencies perpetrated by the former colonies and their indiscriminate scramble for resources on the continent. In addition, there are also overarching narratives of growing crisis and explicit signs of weaknesses on the side of regional economic blocs in the continent, to say the least and appropriately under the direct

confines of the African Union.

Researchers have reminded the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to invoke the African Convention for the Elimination of Mercenary, which went into effect in 1985, prohibiting states from allowing mercenaries into their territories. The researcher further called for addressing promptly 'malign influences' and 'political manipulations', and bring back the well-designed legislative measure broadly worded by the Assembly of the African Union which adopted as a strategic document known as the "*AU Master Roadmap (AUMR) of Practical Steps to Silencing the Guns in Africa*" in 2017. (See *African Union report, April 2017*)

A peaceful continent is possible. This aspiration inspired the 'Silencing the Guns in Africa' agenda, a flagship initiative of the AU Agenda 2063 that aspires to end all wars, conflict and gender-based violence, and to prevent genocide. As a long-standing partner, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for instance, has seriously recommitted its partnerships and opportunities to furthering the Silencing the Guns agenda as a necessary condition for Africa's transformative development. This focuses on the people, prosperity and peace as basis for its contributions to AU's aspirations across Africa, according the UNDP's report re-issued in February 2022.

Professor Sergiu Mişcoiu at the Faculty of European Studies, Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca (Romania), where he serves as a Director of the Centre for International Cooperation and as Director of the Centre for African Studies, noted *in article to Global Research*, that African countries are bound to wake up to a common understanding of the true meaning of their colonial past for the present, and determine their own future existence. And in fact, the leaders and the elites have to engage in development decision-making processes, and at the same time have to play their roles as autonomous actors instead of being pawns in global politics.

Mahamat's Strengths and Weaknesses

In my view, analyzing most of the media reports and arguments, indicated this year the role is reserved for a representative from East Africa to replace Moussa Mahamat, a veteran politician from the Republic Chad in West Africa, who has served two terms since 2017. Prior to taking up this position, he was the foreign minister of Chad. As the history of the procedures indicates, the elected chairperson becomes the head of the African Union Commission. Mahamat, born on 21 June 1960, was for the first time elected as the chairperson on 30 January 2017 but assumed office in March 2017. The chairperson is elected by the Assembly for a four-year term, renewable once. During his eight years' leadership, holding executive powers, needed internal structural reforms that have popularly been called for were not simply carried out, and a record of publicly announced accomplishments grossly lacked probity and transparent accountability.

Despite that as mentioned above, the African Union under Moussa Mahamat has made several achievements including raising the continental external relations profile and its ascension into the Group of Twenty (G20). In September 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, chairing the G20 summit, the G20 nations agreed to grant the African Union permanent membership status in an appreciable move aimed at offering the continent a stronger voice on important questions and to uplift its unto the higher stage. In its final declaration in New Delhi, the G20 granted the African Union a full-fledged membership. The G20 consists of 19 countries and the European Union, making up about 85 percent of the

global GDP and two-thirds of the world's population.

Under administration of Moussa Mahamat, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the single continental market has the potential to unite an estimated 1.4 billion people in a \$2.5 trillion economic bloc. The AfCFTA opens up more tremendous opportunities for both local African and foreign investors from around the world. It aims at making Africa the largest common market in the world and accelerating continental integration. It is expected to reinforce the measures taken in terms of the free movement of persons, goods, and services across borders. But much depends on the collective determination and solidarity demonstrated, to face the challenges in a united and resolute manner, by the African leaders. It depends on the strong mobilization of African leaders and the effective coordination provided by the African Union.

Essential Leadership Attitudes

In mid-July 2024, *Business & Financial Times* wrote that the candidates were discreetly campaigning for the top position. The B&FT media indicated further that, despite the general qualification being former foreign ministers, and in the case of Odinga being an experienced politician and readily preferred by the majority of African leaders, some other distinguishing leadership attitude and approach are necessary and required of the candidate. Education is the cornerstone for awareness, but one of the crucial qualities that a leader must possess is the inherent positive notion of servitude, in addition to commitment to the organization's future aspirations.

As the incoming chairperson prepares to take on the baton, it is important to look forward with optimism, eager to continue making an impact in new ways, within the geopolitical context, and be ready to strategize broadly with key stakeholders and external powers. Pragmatism should be the catch-word, while ensuring pragmatic acknowledgement of the potential to drive progress and actionable initiatives. Step away from excessive symbolism and superficial (shallow) influence instead of an invaluable and impactful engagement or relations.

AU as a multilateral body, and in this critical moment for the continent plagued by high youth unemployment, weak institutions and political instability, the new leader must have the spirit of innovation, dynamism and a forward-thinking vision. Professor (Ambassador) Edward Boateng, business executive and politician, in an opinion article listed some the criteria for the ideal AU head as follows: (i) Inter-generational bridge: Capability to bridge generational divides within the AU, fostering inter-generational dialogue and including the perspectives of all age groups in policy-making processes.

(ii) Conflict resolution: Strong leadership in addressing conflicts and crises effectively, with a coherent strategy for conflict resolution across the continent.

(iii) Institutional reforms: Commitment to spearheading institutional reforms, enhancing financial sustainability and streamlining decision-making processes to address the AU's bureaucratic challenges.

(iv) Economic development: Drive economic reforms, attract investment and foster a business-friendly environment to tap into Africa's vast resources and young population.

(v) Empowerment of women and youth: Promotion of policies that enhance gender equality

and provide opportunities for young people to participate in governance and economic activities.

Opening New Chapter

A new chapter characterizing plethoric changes is, however, expected under the next chairperson beginning March 2025. Arguments for several changes are necessary to make the continental organization work more effectively and produce tangible results especially now within the context of global reconfiguration. Africa is too diverse to fit together. But there are many more interests in uniting the continent. But the political, economic, and cultural diversities have to be transformed into continental strength to ensure development and growth, instead of a noticeable display of weaknesses and passive actions. It is often repeatedly claimed that the African Union needs urgent realistic reforms and some kind of rebranding its structure as an effective instrument for rapid development, new economic architecture, and for substantial growth.

In late January 2024, Rwandan President Paul Kagamé was appointed to lead the AU institutional reforms process. It was an important step towards implementing its institutional reforms, setting the Pan-African organization's objectives under the leadership of the Heads of State who meet once a year at the Assembly. As Africa faces a multitude and multitude of crises, so also unstoppable debates have dominated inside Africa and on international platforms over the performance of the 55-member organization, its existing challenges, and the way forward in the fast-changing world.

Appropriately four candidates were short-listed for the position based on the fact the East and Southern Africa now have their turn. But at a glance, Odinga seemingly envisions to carve out a new distinctive image for the African Union. His high-value knowledge and experiences, corporate business entrepreneurialism combined with pragmatic new economic development thinking would probably save Africa. Narratives too indicated that Odinga would adopt a far-reaching overhauled approach and take unshakable measures toward most significant issues across Africa. These are essential conditions for re-imaging the AU's future.

An in-depth analysis shows us that there should be four structural directions, in particular, to address by the next AUC chairperson: (1) investment in the economic sphere; (2) increased cooperation in the security field, and; (3) a shared vision of international and regional issues, and (4) on the social and humanitarian sphere. These representing the significant aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Africa. Therefore, the AU has to take up the task of developing collective approaches to the problems of maintaining peace and security, strengthening democratic processes, developing human potential, and ensuring socio-economic growth.

In a final summary, the AU's vision is to accelerate progress, and spearhead development and integration in close collaboration with all members. These are incorporated into a single continental development program often referred to as the AU Agenda 2063.

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