

*By Elie Mutangana*

As global trade tensions escalate among the world's economic giants, African leaders converged in Marrakech, Morocco over the weekend to chart a bold path forward, resolving to turn crisis into opportunities. The occasion: the 3rd AfriHeritage Awards and Concert, was a blended gathering of celebration with a strong call to action for the continent's future.

Leading the discourse was Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) who emphasized the need for Africa to respond strategically to the shifting global trade dynamics. She highlighted the increasingly challenging trade landscape facing African nations, worsened by recent US tariffs on exports from the continent.

"The United States has raised tariffs on African exports, even if the highest duties have now been paused, meanwhile, aids for other intents and purposes is practically over. If African countries can enormously explore the abundant green energy potentials, to power industrial activities, the continent will be in pole position to leverage comparative advantage.

"The time to act is now. In every crisis there is an opportunity. And I think the continent should seize the advantage of the current global crisis to turn things around, looking inwards and mobilizing our resources," the WTO boss said shortly after bagging the African Lifetime Achievement Award.

While acknowledging global progress in fighting poverty, she warned that Africa remains behind. "In recent decades, the world has made unprecedented progress in poverty reduction," she said, adding that "over 1.5 billion population of the world have moved out of poverty."

In a passionate remark, Ghanaian President, John Dramani Mahama reaffirmed his commitment to pan-African ideals, self-determination, unity, progress, sustainable development and strategic youth empowerment program.

"Tonight is more than just a celebration. it is a phenomenal powerful night of recognition, when we honour indomitable spirit of African resilience. A moment where we acknowledge those whose lives have continued to shape the culture and political fabrics of our beloved continent," Hon. Gomashie Abila Dzifa, Minister for

Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts stated on behalf of Mahama.

“This recognition is not only personal, but deeply symbolic, as it reflects our collective acknowledgement of HE. John Dramani Mahama’s unwavering belief in democratic governance, regional integration and cultural renaissance across Africa. Let us continue to tell our stories and celebrate our heroes,” Dzifa who represented Mahama added, while also disclosing Ghana’s commitment to hosting the 2026 edition of the AfriHeritage Awards.

Adding to the momentum, Kano State Governor Abba Yusuf, recipient of the African Award for Good Governance, pledged to deepen efforts toward inclusive development. “This prestigious recognition would motivate me to return back to Nigeria more organized to work harder towards building an Africa that works for all,” he said.

Yusuf also emphasized his administration’s focus on the underserved communities. “We will assist the downtrodden people who are suffering especially in the areas of healthcare, education. We will also support women, children and aged people,” he promised.

Similarly, Rt. Hon. Rebecca Alitwala, Uganda’s First Deputy Prime Minister, stressed the importance of integrity in public service. The recipient of the African Award for Good Governance reflected, “Throughout my career, I have been guided by the principles leaving lasting impacts in society, instead of bragging with “big titles”.

In his welcome address, Chairman of Heritage Times HT and Convener of the AfriHeritage Awards, Mr. Moses Siloko Siasia, spoke passionately about the vast human and resource potential of the African continent. He challenged the status quo, asserting that “foreigners should not be allowed to reward excellence in Africa”.

He reiterated his commitment to changing the narrative. “We must tell our story. President Nelson Mandela of blessed memory reminded us that history depends on he who writes it. We are writing our story today, we will not allow foreigners reward excellence in Africa. We must have our own brand that rewards excellence to those who have worked tirelessly and projected the image of the African Continent, and that is what the AfriHeritage Awards represents”.

Siasia explained that the award is based purely on merit, celebrating Africans who have made significant impact in their fields. “The AfriHeritage Award is given purely on merit to those who have distinguished themselves in their various fields of endeavor,” he said, adding that the organizers remain committed to upholding the highest ethics of journalism and professionalism.

Reflecting on the platform’s growth, he noted, “From a humble beginning five years ago, the AfriHeritage Magazine now prints over 250 thousand copies of magazine yearly which is distributed across the African continent and beyond, while the Heritage Times site hosts over two and a half million visitors daily, thus making it a visible and viable platform to promote African excellence”.

He concluded with a powerful call for self-belief. “We have the natural resources, we have the human resources, and there is nothing you will find anywhere in the world that is natural that you cannot find in Africa”.

Other awardess included Dr. Samuel Ogbuku, Managing Director of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC); Dr. Francess Ann Humplick, CEO of South Bridge Investment Partners; Prof. Adesoji O. Adelaja, John A. Hannah Distinguished Professor in Land Policy at Michigan State University & Board Chairman of Chapel Hill Denham; and Engr. Akinwunmi Akinfemiwa, CEO of Geregu Power Plc.

Also recognized were Standard Bank Group of South Africa, Nigeria’s Bank of Industry (BOI), and Hassan II University of Casablanca (UH2C), alongside other distinguished African personalities and brands from across the continent and diaspora who graced the prestigious event in Marrakesh, Morocco.