



The Chairperson of the AU Commission, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, told the 27th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union not to let the sun set on the opportunities represented by the Blue Ocean Economy for the African continent.

Forget for a moment the final headlines generated by the recent African Union Summit held in Johannesburg and set aside the debate about whether South Africa should have enforced the arrest warrant for the Sudanese president, Omar al-Bashir. Of course the discourse in this regard is relevant, but let's take a look at whether our African leaders gave any due consideration to the vast body of water that provides a conduit for trade and is rich in resources – and surrounds the continent completely.

Heads of State and Government of the 54 member states of the African Union (AU) focused on their theme for the summit – Women's Empowerment and the Development Towards Agenda 2063, but there was also some discussion around the Blue Economy as well as the African Integrated Maritime Strategy 2050 (AIM 2050) and the launch of the African Maritime Decade.

Speaking at 27th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union, the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, highlighted the Blue Economy, but chastised the African leaders present for the lack of participation from the continent at the recent World Summit of the Ocean.

"There were very few Africans present at this summit," she said as she spoke about the opportunities represented by deep sea prospecting and fishing – as well as the threats of pollution for our marine life.

The Chairperson then noted the launch of the Decade of African Oceans and Seas as an "important step towards the continent reclaiming its ownership of this critical part of our natural resources and managing it in the interest of all Africans, including future generations".

Coastal countries are being encouraged to organise events on 25 July to mark the launch the start of the Maritime Decade and it will be worth watching which African countries rise up to claim the title of being a maritime nation.

On a more somber note, the leaders of the AU needed to take heed of the another very real issue that has caught the world's attention – that of human migration and trafficking via the ocean. Dramatic photos showing over-laden vessels and stories of these vessels not making it safely to shore

have resulted in action from nations and organisations around the world.

Addressing concerns that the migration issue was not being taken seriously enough, AUC Commissioner for Social Affairs Mustapha Sidiki Kaloka said the AU has in fact been working with the European Union to try and address the migration crisis. "Thousands of migrants have risked their lives in rough winter seas trying to get to Europe and UN agencies have reported a surge in the number of migrants trying to reach Italy from Libya," he said.

Kaloka said that the AU is attempting to deal with the underlying causes that force Africans to flee their countries in search of better opportunities. In one of the final press releases issued out of the AU deliberations – the plan to establish an African Standby Force was named as one of the resolutions of the summit.

The release also states; "Leaders resolved to intensify their effort to address the issue of migrants crossing the Mediterranean, and improving infrastructure and technology advancement on the continent. With thousands of African migrants losing their lives in the Mediterranean Sea while trying to reach greener pastures in Europe, the issues of migration is evidently a worrying issue for the AU."

The stark reality is that there are a number of worrying issues facing the continent that need addressing before the "nice-to-have's" of a booming Blue Economy can be realised. It's time to take our collective heads out of the sand and get on with it.

So the question must be – what will you be doing in the next decade to move the African maritime industry closer to its potential for the benefit of the continent as a whole?

Colleen Jacka, editor

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED READS:

The Inaugural Fish SA conference convened at the beginning of May drew out members of the fishing industry to discuss and network the current themes dominating the sector. Read about the outcomes on page 6.

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