



Africa 54

Speech by Alain Taieb delivered on 29 September 2016 in London

- A) Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners of many African Nations, Presidents, CEO's and Chairmen of Companies
And other distinguished guests, dear friends,
- B) Tonight marks the last evening of our celebrations as we also celebrated Africa54 in Paris and in Johannesburg a few days ago. In total, the three events have brought together over 1500 distinguished guests, representing all 54 African countries and the private sector, government agencies and NGOs from the entire continent.

I am addressing you tonight as a member of the second generation of the family of entrepreneurs who created the AGS group (that later became "Mobilitas").

This is a company that will be half a century old in a few years.

A family business that aims to create a lasting heritage in the largest sense of the term.

We are embracing the future with confidence by now handing over the reins to the third generation.

The word Africa has historical, familial, cultural and social resonances for our company. Just like my parents, grand-parents and ancestors, I was born on African soil. I spent almost 22 years on the continent, between South Africa of course, Cameroon (as a young development aid volunteer) and Tunisia.

Our group is a perfect example of what Africa is, in its magnificent diversity.

I'll come back to it later, but what exactly is Africa 54?

Africa 54 is simply a medium-sized company's (neither a small business nor a big group) ambition to operate directly and sustainably in each of the 54 countries of the continent.

Africa 54 is the story of a continent that needs its businesses to flourish like all the other continents did before.

Finally, Africa 54 is also the success of Mobilitas, a family group that was originally created under the AGS brand, which became the first and only privately owned company in the world to have branches and/or joint venture operations in each of the 54 countries of the continent.

- C) We've never spoken more about Africa than we are now, but for us, this is not just a passing fad.

Africa is a gigantic continent, with a young population of 1.1 billion people, a fast growing economy with an annual GDP growth rate of 5.5%, and businesses that are the drivers of the social progress that is desired and expected.

Africa is a continent where all religions exist and all international languages are spoken in Africa (in addition to the 2000 vernacular languages).

In Africa, there are 21 French-speaking countries, 23 English-speaking countries, 5 Portuguese-speaking countries, 1 Spanish-speaking country, 4 countries that speak both French and English, and about 10 Arabic-speaking countries.

Africa will have nearly 2.5 billion inhabitants in 2050, including half a billion in French-speaking countries.

Africa, has only 6 time zones, of which 4 are shared with Europe,

It covers over 30 million square kilometers.

The continent is so big that we could put the US, China, India and most of Europe in it.

There are many varied markets on the continent, resulting from a growing middle class (which will soon include many hundreds of millions).

There isn't a product, a service or an idea that is made or used in the world today that can't find its place on the African continent. There isn't a product, a service or an idea that is made or used today (or will be used tomorrow) in one of the 54 African countries that couldn't be adapted to all 54 countries.

Africa is therefore a gigantic source for growth, a breeding ground for innovation and creativity that isn't content to take, consume, copy or catch up.

Instead, it goes over and beyond in innovation and large-scale experimentation. (Financial services using mobile phones or medical apps are just two examples amongst many.)

The 21st century is clearly the African century. Who could still doubt it?

- D) The Mobilias Group is a group with its legacy rooted in both Europe and Africa. Of its 4325 employees, 2 810 are in Africa (the remaining 1 515 are split between Europe and Asia).

The Group's activities since its creation are:

International removals, with over 170 000 families moved from one country to another each year.

Relocation and tenancy management, offering our international customers and their companies complete relocation management. These services include visas and work permits, the search for a house, the management of expatriates' rental and of all their expatriation costs (expense management). The families of more than 7 000 corporate executives benefit each year from this integrated service, similar to a 5 star hotel's concierge service.

Lastly our group comprises a division specializing in physical and digital records management. This service was kind of left behind, or even neglected on the continent. It consists of keeping, protecting, scanning and digitizing all sorts of documents for companies or public institutions.

Examples include millions of mobile phone contracts for telecom operators, land registry maps, medical files belonging to hospital patients, banks and insurance companies' archives, as well as rarer and more precious archives such as the Timbuktu medieval manuscripts dating back to the West-African imperial era, most of which were written and kept in Timbuktu in Mali since the 13th century, or old books from many of the continent's libraries.

- E) In some of the sectors we work in, it is fashionable to be “asset-light”: that means to win contracts, to manage them remotely and subcontract everything, allowing the company to avoid investing heavily in equipment and men and to let others do that. They call this the modern and “agile” company.

The problem is that Africa needs investment, infrastructure and, most importantly, it needs for millions of jobs to be created and maintained.

At Mobilias/AGS, we have invested, recruited, trained and developed, country after country, business sector after business sector for a quarter of a century. Throughout the African continent, hundreds of thousands of families have trusted our know-how in international removals and in relocation.

Thousands of companies and institutions have acknowledged our technical expertise in the storage or the digitizing of their data and records.

This is what quickly encouraged us to conceptualize the Africa 54 project.

This is because we have a long term vision, we want to be the opposite of the “Asset light” concept.

We want to put down deep roots for our activities in Africa and, instead, be “asset heavy” and have our own employees on our payroll.

This policy took a lot of time, energy and perseverance.

We had to create companies under local law (or sometimes joint ventures), install, buy or build logistical infrastructure (warehouses or offices), and recruit and train the management and hundreds of employees.

A quarter of a century later, Mobilias’ Africa 54, is not the end point, or a pipe dream or a mirage. To the contrary, it’s a concrete achievement (we’ve seen it).

But it’s also an ambition, a start, a testimony.

- F) An ambition, a start

If the Foreign Affairs Ministries in Uganda, Benin, South Africa, Namibia or Gabon entrusted us to manage the relocation of thousands of their diplomats in the world, why not replicate this success in the 54 countries?

If African or Western banks have us store, manage, scan and digitize and deliver their archives in 3, 4 or 5 countries, why not extend this to all 54 countries?

If libraries, cultural centers or museums have us digitize and protect their old manuscripts by the hundreds, or drawings or sketches not yet known by the public, why not do it in the 54 countries?

This is Africa 54!

- G) Mobilias’ Africa 54, a quarter of a century later, is a realization and an ambition, for sure. But it’s also a testimony.

We use a developed and exceptional network, as well as our human scale and our perfect knowledge of the strengths and expectations of each African country to ensure sustainable growth that will generate some well-being, some jobs and resources for tens of thousands of African citizens.

We Act “locally”, but always think “globally”

We Act “commercially”, but always think “socially, family, education, environment, prosperity”

We Act “today” and always think “tomorrow”

There are still thousands of jobs to be created by our Group and tens of thousands of African citizens who will experience prosperity locally.

This is a strong signal to all entrepreneurs that their success is sometimes limited to their linguistic, cultural or geographic comfort zone, but that could and should be multiplied on the continent’s scale.

Let’s take the example of South Africa. When Mobilitas purchased the Laser Group (the local market leader), we quickly decided to use this country as the base and regional management for the development of the whole of Africa. In 15 years, independently from the activities specific to the South African markets, we created an administrative support hub for the 53 other countries (IT, quality control, accounting, audit management, marketing...). This division includes 362 jobs that were created from scratch and that have nothing to do with the activity in South Africa but that are irrigated by the rest of the continent. This is what the specialists call “net/net” job creation.

H) There will be thousands of middle sized companies that will grow on the continent in the years to come. If only 1 000 of them installed their pan-African regional centers in South Africa, this would be $362 \times 1\,000 = 362\,000$ net jobs created!

What does Africa need the most today, if not the creation of thousands of jobs, training and opportunities created by the local, regional and, we hope, continental economic actors?

I) The Mobilitas teams, globally and for those based in Africa (over 2 800 employees) are proud and aware of their contribution to the continent.

This first page of the story is due to them.

The following pages, even more beautiful to write, will be shared, we hope, by twice or three times more employees who will manage to join us thanks to the growth of our activity in Africa.

The 21st century is therefore the African century.

This is where it all happens.

In any case, this is where it will happen for Mobilitas.

I thank you for your attention.

Alain Taieb
Chairman of the Supervisory Board

