Time to make our voices heard

HIS is not the last we will hear from US President Donald Trump when it comes to Africa, so rather than bracing ourselves for the next run through a pothole and merely reacting, let's gear up, get organised and institutionalise in effective ways.

It was last March or April that I received a frantic phone call from a Joburg-based radio personality. He wanted to know my impressions of Trump praising then Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe and his administration announcing cutting back HIV/Aids assistance to Kenya. I had to explain to the frustrated interviewer that up to that moment the Trump administration did not have an African policy approach formulated.

Though, as I pointed out, there were some passing remarks about previous administrations Africa policy postures made by Trump's incoming transitional team floating around. Those remarks, which were nameless, were composed of questions being raised about rationales behind so much US aid being given to African countries which seemed to go nowhere in resolving problems on the continent such as terrorism, HIV/Aids, poverty, famine, illiteracy and unemployment.

I suggested to the journalist that there were two things we knew for sure about Trump. First, he lives on praise and flattery (which is not too unusual for most politicians). That is why he was so positive about Mugabe, besides his autocratic leadership style which Trump finds appealing all over the world. That is, Mugabe congratulated him on his surprise presidential win over favoured opponent former secretary of state Hillary Clinton.

The second thing we knew was that he was a businessman. Thus would take bottom line looks at foreign aid, including to African countries. The gravy train from America was over. It was important at the same time for African heads of state to take advantage of the Trump Administration's no Africa policy. As a vacuum, they could exploit it by coming up with their own strategic plans with ethical auditing and authentic outcome evaluation measures and approaching the White House and the US Department of State. And they should do this through a big fanfare invitation to Trump to come to Africa as their honoured guests. Unsurprisingly, I probably wasn't even heard by the journalist or by those tuning in, and those who contacted me again for follow-ups.

It is true that Trump has been on record for saying racist things since and even before his campaign days for the US presidency. And like a faked Trump e-mail around social media a week or two ago making morbid remarks about Africans and Arabs, there are more than enough characters around the world willing to fan the fires of Trump's renowned bigotry through pretending to be him, with thousands of the gullible falling for such digital era trickery.

It is a bigotry, real or faked, against Africans and certain African heritage people in the diaspora, like Haitians, which Trump embraces. He claims his views are a reflection of how so many Americans feel about black and brown foreigners who are from Haiti, Mexico, Latin America and Africa.

Meanwhile, so he said in his diatribe about shithole countries, countries like Norway are ideal countries to welcome immigrants to the US. Trump has a point, as bigoted as it is, as do members of his voting base who find nothing wrong with what he said – even black and Latino Trumpees, the super Americans of colour types who agree with white nationalists, believe it or not, about the need to keep uncivilised people like those from their own ancestral homelands out of America. I know the kind well.

One of my Facebook friends to the right prides himself on being the Black Trump and mimics everything the President says. He has a healthy following. It flies in the face of hypocrisy and what Trump and **Professor John H Stanfield** responds to Trump's recent racist diatribe about s***hole countries and advises African leaders should fight back



LIVES ON PRAISE: Many ordinary people and heads of state were outraged by US President Donald Trump's recent derogatory comments. He was particularly disparaging of Haiti, El Salvador and Africa.

PICTURE: EVAN VUCCI/AP

his disciples claim runs against American values as a plural democracy, a point yelled by liberals everywhere about this shithole nonsense now, since that has never been the case.

In fact, the whole emergence of Trump and his slap-happy disciples, with a wobbly mass media and a dizzy American and global liberal impotency to respond effectively, demonstrates the superficial, uneven and sloppy job elite American policy-makers have done in authentically and effectively dealing with the deep insidious racism which characterise what America in many respects remains. And it is a sloppiness which has contaminated other nations such as Australia, Canada, Brazil, Great Britain, and South Africa with national diversity and anti-racism policies which, like in America, lack effective design and implementation with no depth or authentic transformative capacity and only prance around the edges of confronting and dissolving racism in systems through applying shallow cosmetics.

What African heads of state and their citizens of all ethnicities, who are deeply offended understandably by Trump's shithole (Haiti and African) countries diatribe, seem to have a hard time getting is how bigoted – out of ignorance or/and racial prejudice – so many Americans are about the continent of Africa. Most of us still think Africa is a country populated by cannibals who live in trees and spread all kinds of terrifying plagues. In fact, historically, the American public health orientation towards Africa has been con-

cerned about the well-being of Africans, especially the black ones. Thus, the Trump shithole countries diatribe comes as a big shock and hurt to Africans of all hues who look at Hollywood America as the place to go; where there are no problems, where money grows on trees and gold flows down streets where there is no poverty and no problems in finding a good job.

Only those Africans who come to American most impacted ica and are treated like n*****s because tion's right-w of their skin colour or like second rate colonial people because they are white deportations.

But for the most part to be African, especially black African (if you are white or Indian African it may be a different rags to riches story) in real America means a life of marginality and, at best driving, a taxi or working at a hotel as a bell hop or waitron. It is such Africans, along with Haitian and other Caribbean and Latin American brothers and sisters, who are most impacted by the Trump Administration's right-wing efforts to curtail black immigration and to engage in massive deportations.

It's high time African leaders become more strategic in how they approach the US and Europe

Africans rather than from Europe, become aware of how xenophobic or downright racist or elitist, or all the above, so many Americans are, including those who are not even Trump supporters, but have that negative view about Africa. Or at least view the continent as the land(s) of the exotics and the big wild animals.

Sure, if you are upper-middle-class or affluent Africans, or those with African immigrant background like Obama's daughter, who started Harvard this year, with the big bank accounts, you can find yourself surpassing native-born African Americans when it comes to elite university admissions and employment.

If African heads of state and leaders of civil societies are so justifiably angry and insulted by Trump's diatribe, it is not enough to send out press releases and then go home and sit on one's hands waiting for the next handout from anywhere. It is high time African leaders become much more strategic in how they approach the US and Europe.

This is the post-Cold War. Through the West's 1990s and beyond abandonment of African countries, China has filled in the gaps with its more entrepreneurial and infrastructural approaches to foreign aid to African countries. There is thus no need for African leaders to continue to be

so scared of the US. There is ample proof of growing sentiment for African leaders to stand up and talk back to patronising American leaders.

This is seen in Ghana's response to western Ebola researchers who wanted to do the same old tricks of using their countrymen and women as a field laboratory with no benefits given to the country.

The AU's refusal to support the American, French, and British efforts to intervene in Libya is another example of this growing anti-Western resistance movement. This last incident with the UN African ambassadors teaming-up demanding an apology from Trump.

But, this growing movement to stand up and speak up needs to be channelled into well-organised network building efforts to develop more effective ways for Africans to advocate more effectively for their national, regional, and continent wide interests in American foreign affairs circles. If Asians, Europeans, and Middle Easterners (especially Israelis and Saudis) can organise their voices enough to get what they want from the US, why can't Africans do the same?

The lack of understanding of how to do that among African heads of state and civil society leaders blows my mind. These are, in many cases, well educated and experienced Africans, some of whom have gone to the best universities in America and still don't know how to strategically approach Americans. Neither do their diasporas in America know how to effectively lobby for what they need. In too many cases, such as what has been going on in

relation to the Trump Administration, African leaders have been too passive or too passive aggressive and pressing the wrong buttons for access and influence.

I have known African heads surround themselves with the wrong kinds of US presidential advisers; who look good on paper but have no capacity to press their concerns in the right American policy circles. And though these advisers are willing to come to their countries two or three times a year and stay in their five-star hotels, when political mess hits the fans and needs intervention in American policy circles and media, they are useless or simply disappear. They don't have a clue about how to identify and mobilise their diasporas beyond having occasional fancy dinners and rallies.

And too often since, they really have no idea how American political culture really works in that every important point begins with the local. Too often they waste their time trying to address their needs to US State Department officials rather than pinpointing political leaders in cities and villages pertinent to their advocacy concerns and working up the political food chains to state and national levels.

It is like Rwandans who, for over 20 years have been ineffective in bringing 1994 genociders in the US to justice. They spend most of their time dealing with US State Department officials in Washington, DC rather than taking their concerns to the mayors of cities which are known hotbeds of genocider settlements. Or running local media campaigns to expose, arrest, and prosecute genociders, especially those for years now living under false names and fake passports.

So as much as it is important to raise a public fuss about Trump's shithole diatribe, it is even more important for African leaders and their continent organisations such as the AU and the Africa Forum for Former Heads of State and regional governments to come together to use this opportunity to develop a strategic vision blueprint to influence the shaping of African policies in American government and civil society circles – especially business, faith, education, private foundations, media, and international NGOs.

This process should be institutionalised and sustained through an institute somewhere on the continent which not only creates and funnels policy briefs in the right directions in American policy influencing circles, but also educates African leaders how to informally as well as formerly access the most critical policy-influencing arenas in the US as well as other Western and I should add, Eastern nations and regions.

Otherwise, African leaders will continue to be looked upon in ways Trump so crudely expressed, with many Americans both for and against him thinking the same way, even if they are not openly saying what they really think about Africans and their continent. It will continue to be assumed that Africans are all about handouts, corruption, and being incompetent. Who simply cannot and really do not wish to defend themselves or empower themselves as global players.

It is time for emerging and progressive long standing generations of African leaders in government and in civil society nationally, regionally, and continent-wide to begin to speak for themselves.

More importantly, to strategically plan for themselves in a world which is in sore need for quality global leadership and to develop strategies to be heard and respected in their own voices.

It is time, otherwise we prove the point of a man with archaic views who happens to be head of one of the most powerful nations who can be countered and prevailed over if we care enough to move beyond our peeves and go at it and get to it.

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face of hypocrisy and what Trump and tainment and prevention rather than con-This material has been copied under a Dalro licence and is not for resale or retransmission.