Reflections on African International Economic Law Network's (AfIELN) 6th Biennial Conference (Day 2)

By:

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Day 2

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The speech from the African International Economic Law Network's (AfIELN) President, Dr Titilayo Adebola, during the 6th Biennial Conference's opening ceremony highlighted that among the many crises Africa is currently embroiled in, sovereign debt and environmental disruptions are rife. In this spirit, Day 2 of the conference opened with Plenary 1 on Sovereign Debt by the African Sovereign Debt Justice Network (AfSDJN) moderated by Prof Olabisi D. Akinkugbe.

Plenary 1 sought to make linkages between climate finance and debt. The climate finance architecture is currently set up against African states: having contributed the least to environmental degradation and climate disruptions, African states face the harshest conditions under these trying times for our

climate. To reform the climate finance architecture, there needs to be a universal definition of what climate finance really is about. Another measure is debt restructuring and cancellation, so that African states can redirect those funds to their climate finance budgets. Lastly, green energy purchasing promises to be an effective means for improving the African Climate Finance architecture. After the Plenary, there was a total of 12 breakout Panels.

• Panel 1: International Economic Law and Geopolitics, chaired by Babatunde Fagbayibo.

• Panel 2: Intellectual Property, Health and Competition Law I, chaired by Titilayo Adebola.

• Panel 3: Investment, chaired by Ohio Omiumu.

• Panel 4: Digital Trade I, chaired by Isidore Kwando Tufor.

• Panel 5: Trade and Gender, chaired by Suzzie Onyeka.

• Panel 6: Development Finance, chaired by Clement Kijo Akapame.

• Panel 7: Third World Appproaches to International Law (TWAIL), Decolonisation and Neocolinialism, chaired by James Thuo Gathii.

• Panel 8: Food and Security, chaired by John Darko.

• Panel 9: AfCFTA I – Services & People, chaired by Ify Ogo.

• Panel 10: Civil Society and Non-State Actors, Chaired by Olabisi Akinkugbe

• Panel 11: Human Rights and International Economic Law, chaired by Humu Annie Seini.

• Panel 12: AI, Blockchains & Cryptocurrencies I, chaired by Justice Srem-Sai.

The conference rapporteur attended 3 panels: Panels 1, 7 and 10.

Panel 1: International Economic Law and Geopolitics was chaired by Babatunde Fagbayibo. The panellists were: Adaeze Aniodoh, Marie-Louise F. Aren, Xiuli Han and Sand Mba Kalu. The papers presented shared a common theme on how most international law instruments get adopted but hardly ever get effectively

implemented at the domestic level. Even where states are intentional about implementation, the instruments seem to not be relevant or specific to other geographical locations, most work out in the interest of the west.

Chaired by James Thuo Gathii, Panel 7, Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) Decolonisation and Neo-colonialism, was intended to study how third world countries have endeavoured to carve their own international law identity and landscape. Speakers: Michael Chitavi, George Gona, Arnold Nciko and Antonia Eliason. As third world countries try to find their footing in the international trade arena, they sometimes get constrained by lack of access to emergent technologies needed to allow them compete with developed countries. This has to be rooted out by decolonising trade channels and streamlining access to technology.

The day broke off for lunch in the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) Foyer. Complimented by the beauty of the blue and white pastels of the premises, participants cheerfully queued for food and sat down to eat. Good laughs and good food were abundant all round as was the pleasant company of participants. The foyer was a sight behold as everyone was excited to introduce themselves and share what they had learned in the different panels they attended.

James Gathii made a return as the moderator for Plenary 3: *African Sovereign Debt Justice Network (AfSDJN), Sovereign Debt II*. Speakers: Geoffrey Adonu, Chinoeso Samanthha Kanoyangwa, Akinyi Eurallyah and Afshin Nazir. The Plenary highlighted that Africa currently bears the most burden for climate change, experiencing the worst effects yet it contributed the least to the problem. The general view was that the debt burden is making it hard for African countries to control climate change as there is no climate financing. The proposed sources for climate finance such as sustainable bonds are not a viable solution for Africa. There is need mainstream greater levels of accountability by developed countries who should make reparations for their role in causing climate change.

Infrastructure finance must also be reorganised in a way that ensures developing countries are not left in serious debt after projects are completed. The current infrastructure finance paradigm is predatory on developing

countries. Imposing environmental taxation may be a feasible solution to the debt and climate crises in Africa. To encourage social acceptance of this tax, there should be social campaigns aimed at educating and sensitizing the people so that they can ultimately comply. The tax should be carefully designed and framed to ensure it yields the desired revenue. In closing, the plenary stressed that Africans desperately need viable and feasible solutions that are African and specific to African Problems.

Panel 10: Civil Society and Non-State Actions was chaired by Olabisi Akinkugbe. Speakers: Opeyemi Bello, Leezola Zongwe, Arnold Nciko, Babatunde Fagbayibo, Suzzie O Oyakhire and Ohio Ominun. This panel ushered in a call for change from everybody who cares to make the world a better place for the coming generations. It called on us to be intentional in the different causes we are driving. Specific focus and interest were cast on education, posing the question of how African scholars can establish themselves in academia while still maintaining their identity; how they become critical in environments that are often hostile to their experiences and interests; and how to navigate through that history and make new contributions to academia.

Finally, all the participants gathered in the main hall, the Moot Court Complex, for the African Sovereign Debt Justice Network (AfSDJN) Book Launch. The book is titled *How To Reform The Global Debt And Financial Architecture*. Authored by multiple contributors, it is intended to resolve the myriad issues arising out of the debt crisis, casting a special focus on African countries and their debt. Participants heard from the editor, James Thuo Gathii, as well as from chapter authors who were present. All were extremely pleased and proud to share their work with participants. The exciting launch ended with a book signing and group pictures.

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