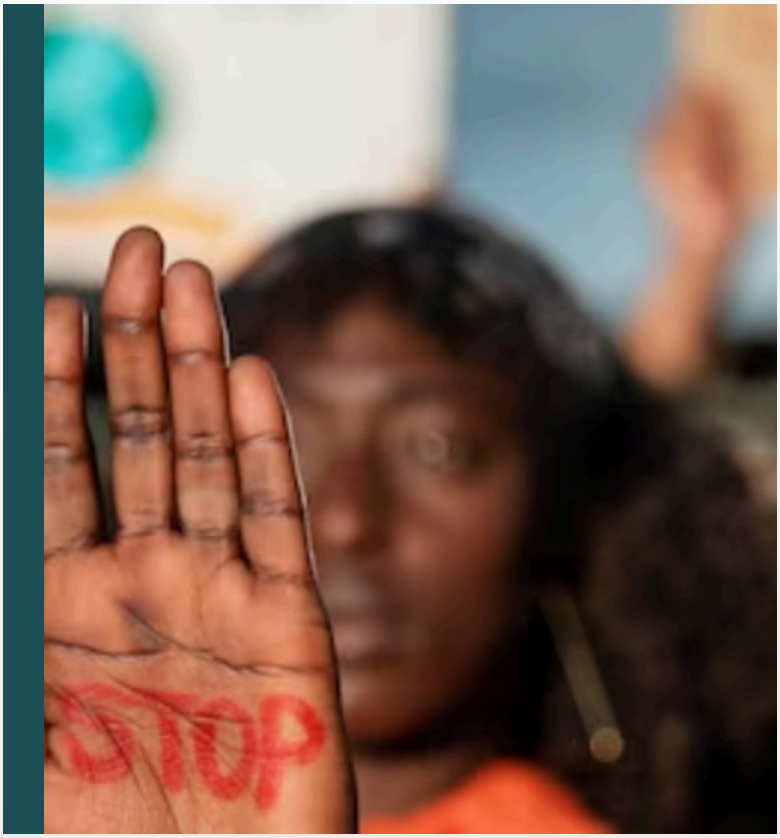
DEMOCRACY AS A PREREQUISITE FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE; CORRUPTION AS A POVERTY TRAP.

EDITO



The visceral need for freedom in every human being, the very foundation of their dignity and humanity, finds its collective expression in democracy as a political system.

Another condition for dignity is not to be enslaved by poverty: to be able to feed, care for, house, and educate one's family with decency.

Yet the shameless corruption of leaders in far too many African countries prevents this. Corruption is widespread because these leaders are not held accountable by their people through credible elections and independent checks and balances that should sanction poor governance. They are not accountable in the sense that they face no obligation to practice sound economic governance.

Fati N'zi-Hassane, director of Oxfam in Africa, rightly emphasizes: *"Africa is not lacking in wealth, it is squandered by a rigged system that allows a small elite to amass immense fortunes while depriving hundreds of millions of people of the most basic services,"* denouncing a *"political failure"* and warning that *"extreme inequality threatens to undermine democracy."*

Gilles Olakounlé Yabi, founder of the West African civic think tank WATHI, also stresses the importance of *"guarantees of shared economic and social progress"* as a condition for democracy to be more than merely formal: true democracy must offer both a certain degree of freedom and collective prosperity, and this second aspect should not be overlooked.

A democracy marked by deep inequality and detached from social justice cannot be a real democracy. Who could believe that, in truly free and fair elections, citizens would continue to vote for leaders who fail to deliver broad-based economic prosperity? And how can we ignore that in plutocracies, the economic elite often strives to block policies serving the general interest? What, then, becomes of the social contract?

In short, among the human rights worth fighting for is also the right to live with dignity from one's work: to fight for democracy is to fight both for freedom, that is, political rights, and against poverty, meaning against corruption and for a minimum of social justice *("the rights inherent and inalienable, among which are the preservation of life and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness").*

Let us give the final word to Gilles Olakounlé Yabi:

"The challenge today is to move from formal democracy to political systems that guarantee both fundamental freedoms and the implementation of quality public policies for the benefit of the majority and future generations. West African countries have a vital need for institutional reforms that increase the likelihood of leaders being genuinely concerned with the public good, and of having strong institutions. (…) Institutions like the Court of Auditors, the Office of the Auditor General (under various names depending on the country) should be pillars of the institutional architecture in nations where resources are scarce and needs immense. Everyone knows it: the ferocity of the struggle for power in Africa is closely linked to the privileged and too often unchecked access of those in power to public resources."