

Migrant slavery casts shadow over EU-Africa summit

ABIDJAN - A furore over migrant slave markets in Libya casts a shadow over an AU-EU summit this week that aims to promote Africa's long-term economic growth and stability, spurred by European fears of terrorism and mass migration.



Protestors attend a demonstration against slavery in Libya, at Sergels torg in Stockholm, Sweden, on November 25, 2017 | [AFP](#)

The two-day African Union and European Union summit opening Wednesday in the Ivory Coast economic capital Abidjan focused mainly on the need to create jobs for Africa's rapidly growing population.

The summit marks what Europe sees as a potential turning point for broader and deeper ties with a continent it once colonised widely -- while China, Japan, India and Gulf Arab states also compete for influence.

However, outrage over the slave trade in Libya looms over the talks in Abidjan, with the scandal having sparked protests in Dakar as well as in Brussels and other European capitals.

AU Commission chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat called for "urgent measures" to stop the abuses of black Africans in Libya, which critics say have been fueled by EU-Libyan cooperation to curb migrant crossings to Europe.

"We face an emergency," a grim-faced Faki told reporters in Brussels last week during summit preparations with EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini.

Faki called for coordination with Libya, the AU, EU and United Nations to tackle the problem.

Mogherini said the summit of 55 AU and 28 EU leaders could take "joint action" on the migrants even if she stressed its aim is to build a broader partnership.

Acknowledging how the slavery revelations were "unbearable for both sides", Mogherini said the Europeans and Africans must push the UN-backed government in Libya to prosecute the slave traders.

They will also press Libya to give UN humanitarian agencies greater access to migrant detention centres, where she said their work in the last year has improved conditions and led to the voluntary return of some 10,000 migrants to their home

countries.

But rights activists have asked why it took so long for African and European leaders to condemn abuses that had been known long before US network CNN aired footage two weeks ago of slave markets near Tripoli.

Libya became a massive transit hub for sub-Saharan Africans setting sail for Europe after the fall of dictator Moamer Kadhafi in 2011 tipped the country into chaos.

The EU has been desperate to stem the migrant influx via Libya and Turkey, the two main routes, as more than 1.5 million migrants have reached Europe since 2015.

EU officials said the influx, which sparked political divisions across the EU, and frequent Islamist attacks in Europe have been a wake-up call to tackle the root causes.

The EU has already set up multi-billion euro funds to promote Africa's economic development while deepening counter-terrorism cooperation with African countries where Islamist militant groups are spreading.

"What happens in Africa matters for Europe, and what happens in Europe matters for Africa," European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said before leaving for the summit.

"Our partnership is an investment in our shared future," he added in a statement.

Ahmed Reda Chami, Morocco's ambassador to the EU who will attend the summit, said Europe had a vested long-term interest in Africa whose population is set to double by 2050 to around 2.4 billion people.

"If there is no economic development, you will have hundreds of millions of young people who have no future, who will (try) come to Europe to find work," Chami told AFP at his Brussels mission.

Like other leading Africans, Chami called for a "Marshall Plan" for Africa, but linked to anti-corruption measures and tailor to African needs.

The multi-billion dollar Marshall Plan launched by the United States after World War II is widely credited for helping Europe achieve its current prosperity and stability.

Developments in Zimbabwe will be a key part of such discussions.

A senior EU official said "there is a real opportunity for Africa to grasp" and implement political and economic reforms in Zimbabwe following the forced resignation of dictator Robert Mugabe.

EU officials argued that the EU, China, Japan, and India can all help Africa but the Europeans were most engaged because they shared a common fate through proximity.

But an AU official wondered whether the Europeans were aiming to see an opportunity or rather to contain a threat. "We do not feel an African vision," the official said on condition of anonymity.

Source: AFP