

Why African media leaders must head to Ethiopia

By [Amadou Mahtar Ba](#)

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From 6-8 November 2013, the [African Media Initiative](#) (AMI) will hold its flagship annual convention, the African Media Leaders Forum (AMLF), in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, focused on the theme "Media and the African Renaissance." It will be AMLF's sixth edition.



Over the years, the Forum has become the largest gathering of media owners, operators and managers from across the continent and beyond. In November 2012, some 550 delegates attended the 5th AMLF in Dakar, Senegal.

While many have saluted the courageous decision of the AMI board to hold the Forum in Ethiopia, others have remained either sceptical or critical. The critics cite Ethiopia's huge challenges in fostering an environment in which both press freedom and freedom of expression can thrive.

While I fully understand and respect the concerns being raised, I am convinced that Ethiopia remains the most appropriate venue for AMLF 2013 for a number of reasons.

Redefining history in Ethiopia for 2013 and beyond

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the African Union, previously known as the Organisation of African Unity. Since its inception in 1963, the organisation, a symbol of Africa's desire and determination to forge ahead in the true spirit of Pan Africanism, has been headquartered in Addis Ababa. Admittedly, it has not always endeared itself in equal measure to its collective body of stakeholders. Yet we must recognize its value as Africa's largest intergovernmental organisation, where the most critical matters touching every single African are debated throughout the year.

I must admit that like many other Pan Africanists, I have been quite critical of some of the organisation's decisions. But I do acknowledge the key role it has played in the unification of Africa by promoting cooperation, friendship and mutual support among its member states, and the courageous positions it took at the vanguard for the struggle to liberate nations that were under colonial domination.

The AU is marking a positive resurgence, under the excellent leadership of its chairperson, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. It

is our responsibility, as thought leaders and as Africans, to both encourage Dr. Dlamini-Zuma and her team and to roll up our sleeves to participate in the AU's endeavours by contributing the best way we can. At the end of the day, building a brighter future for ourselves, our children and grandchildren is not the responsibility of politicians and development partners alone.

For these reasons, I am convinced that the story of the AU is the story of all Africans. Consequently, we must all participate in writing it.

The organisation deserves to be honoured in its golden year in the same place where its story started - Addis Ababa.

The city is also where another key African institution is headquartered - the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) - which continues to work relentlessly for the improvement of the continent's human and economic development.

As a strong advocate of constructive engagement, I see our coming together in Ethiopia as a great opportunity to engage with media stakeholders within the country, including the Government. In our preparations for the Forum, we have been both encouraged and actively supported by the Ethiopian media community - through its publishers association and the leaders of the nascent media council - which is known for its independence and commitment to building free and balanced media. Under AMLF's National Organising Committee, Ethiopian media leaders are playing a critical role in a collaborative effort with AMI, AU, UNECA and the African Development Bank (AfDB).

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amadou Mahtar Ba is the chief executive of the African Media Initiative (AMI), an unprecedented pan-African effort aimed at providing the continent's media owners and practitioners with the tools they need to play an effective role in their societies. AMI aims to strengthen the media sector in Africa to ensure the accountability of governments and other institutions and to promote democratic governance, human development as well as economic growth and transformation. The African Media Leaders Forum (AMLF) is the flagship programme of AMI. Ba is co-founder and chair of AllAfrica.

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