



## Africa on its own terms : Cartographic justice and the struggle for equality in global governance

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### Abstract

This article examines the political and sociological significance of the African-led “Correct the Map” initiative adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2026. Through an interpretive analysis of institutional documents, diplomatic statements and selected scholarship, it asks how a representational claim becomes an international agenda-setting achievement and where that achievement encounters structural limits. Combining critical cartography, decolonial thought and African agency, the analysis distinguishes representational authority, institutional power and material capability. It argues that the resolution constitutes an African victory : African actors organised a demand for cartographic justice and secured broad endorsement despite American opposition. However, successful coalition-building in the General Assembly neither removes permanent-member privileges in Security Council reform nor demonstrates completed economic emancipation. Writing from an explicitly African scholarly standpoint, I connect the politics of recognition to permanent African representation, productive autonomy, scientific authorship and cultural sovereignty. The article contributes an account of how symbolic recognition can support, but cannot substitute for, institutional equality. Its central contention is that Africa’s standing is a right to be exercised, not a favour to be granted, and that diplomatic gains should strengthen accountable, people-centred sovereignty.

**Keywords:** African agency, representational justice, critical cartography, global governance; institutional inequality, sovereignty

### Introduction

Africa’s place in the world is not a favour to be granted by powerful nations. Neither our dignity nor our historical existence depends on the willingness of others to acknowledge it. I begin from this principle because the political significance of “Correct the Map” cannot be understood if Africa is cast merely as the grateful recipient of international recognition. The essential question is who possesses the authority to define the world, and whether African peoples can insist that the conventions through which it is represented answer to their judgement as well.

On 4 September 2026, the General Assembly adopted the draft entitled “Correct the map : rebalancing global cartographic representation and promoting equitable representation of the world’s regions, particularly Africa”, introduced by Togo on behalf of the Group of African States ; the recorded vote was 164 in favour, one against and six abstentions <sup>[21]</sup>. The United States cast the sole negative vote, while Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine abstained <sup>[21]</sup>. The measure encourages equal-area projections, including Equal Earth, where comparative area matters, but neither bans Mercator nor mandates one replacement for every purpose <sup>[24]</sup>.

As an African scholar, I welcome this decision without apology. Its significance is not that the United Nations has conferred dignity upon Africa, but that African actors have compelled a familiar convention to become answerable to a public demand for accuracy and equal consideration. The continent is not asking to be enlarged. It is rejecting the assumption that its misrepresentation must remain acceptable because an established practice is convenient to those already accustomed to it.

My central argument is direct : this resolution is an African victory in the struggle over international authority. African actors defined the issue, built the coalition and secured endorsement despite American opposition. Its scope is limited, but its political meaning is not trivial. It demonstrates that an African initiative can become an international priority without Washington’s approval. I interpret this as evidence of a pluralising order in which Africa exercises agency, not as proof that every material hierarchy has already disappeared.

To dismiss this achievement as “merely symbolic” is to misunderstand what is being contested. A claim about representation is also a claim about whose judgement deserves institutional attention. Yet celebration must sharpen political ambition rather than satisfy it prematurely. The task is not to choose between correcting images and transforming institutions ; it is to organise the relationship between them. Correcting the map is a beginning, and Africa should use that beginning to press demands that reach far beyond cartography.

The article addresses three questions. How did an African claim about cartographic representation acquire multilateral authority ? What does the outcome establish about African collective agency, and what does it leave unresolved about institutional inequality ? How might representational recognition support substantive sovereignty without being mistaken for it ? The contribution lies in bringing the sociology of knowledge into dialogue with the political analysis of international institutions. Rather than treating images as peripheral to power, or symbolic victories as equivalent to structural transformation, I examine the relationship between them.



## How world maps compare

Maps project a three-dimensional sphere onto a two-dimensional flat space. Cartographers employ a variety of approaches, and there are trade-offs to each. Mapmakers can choose a projection that best suits the purpose of their map and their intended audience.

### ORTHOGRAPHIC



This projection emulates a globe, but it has its drawbacks: Only part of the world is visible, and features become more distorted the farther they are from the focal point.

### MERCATOR



Historically, this style of map has been popular for navigation. However, landmasses are greatly distorted toward the poles, particularly in the Northern Hemisphere. Here, Greenland appears as large as Africa.

### EQUAL EARTH



Landmasses are truer to their relative areas, and the rounded shape suggests a globe. The Correct the Map campaign, endorsed by the African Union, advocates for this map projection to help counteract misperceptions fed by projections like the Mercator map.

*Credit: Alyson Hurt/NPR*

## Literature and conceptual framework

Three analytical distinctions organise the discussion. Representational power concerns the authority to define how a place appears and becomes intelligible. Institutional power concerns the ability to shape procedures, obtain representation and influence authoritative decisions. Material capability concerns the productive, scientific and organisational resources needed to sustain autonomy. These dimensions may reinforce one another, but movement in one does not establish equivalent movement in the others. Critical cartography provides the first foundation. Harley's account of maps as cultural texts directs attention to

selection, omission, hierarchy and the authority concealed by claims of neutrality <sup>[10]</sup>. Decolonial scholarship adds a distinction between the termination of formal colonial rule and the persistence of hierarchies within knowledge and social power <sup>[14]</sup>. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's conception of epistemic freedom places African people's capacity to theorise and interpret from their own locations at the centre of that unfinished struggle <sup>[12]</sup>.

The second foundation is African agency. Brown and Harman redirect inquiry from what external actors do to Africa towards the room for manoeuvre African actors possess and the uses they make of it <sup>[7]</sup>. This approach

makes the campaign intelligible as political work rather than a concession bestowed by powerful outsiders. It also discourages treating Africa as a single actor whose governments, citizens and institutions invariably share identical interests.

The distinction between norm emergence and norm internalisation establishes a further analytical test : endorsement can advance a standard before it becomes routine practice <sup>[9]</sup>. Accordingly, this article separates the victory already secured from the educational, economic and diplomatic consequences still to be established. Such precision is not a retreat from African conviction. It is a condition of intellectual sovereignty : our claims should command attention through their analytical force, not depend on exaggeration to appear consequential.

This framework also rejects the paternalistic suggestion that Africa has only now discovered its voice. The relevant question is not when Africans became capable of speaking, but how their demands acquire consequences in institutions that distribute authority unequally. Historical significance can consist in consolidating a struggle, changing the status of a demand or demonstrating a method of collective action. I therefore read the vote as an advance in an unfinished struggle, not a certificate of African maturity. Africa's standing as a participant in world civilisation was never waiting to be validated by a diplomatic majority.

### Research methodology

I use an interpretive documentary case study grounded in an African-centred normative position : African peoples are subjects of international history and legitimate authors of the standards by which international institutions should be judged. The documentary base comprises UN meeting coverage, African Union communications, diplomatic explanations, published speeches and selected scholarship available by 16 September 2026. UN reporting, the AU response and independent reporting corroborate the central event, while government statements establish declared positions rather than unmediated access to political motives <sup>[21, 6, 11]</sup>.

Document selection is purposive rather than systematic. Institutional sources establish the reported chronology, public justifications and formal reform positions ; scholarly works supply interpretive concepts rather than additional observations of the vote. The analysis proceeds through a reconstruction of the initiative's public trajectory, comparison of supportive and dissenting positions, and examination of the different decision rules governing General Assembly action and Charter amendment. Claims about representational authority, institutional standing and material capability are considered separately before their possible relationships are assessed.

This design does not include interviews, participant observation, original survey data or a statistical test of geopolitical change. UN meeting coverage is used as institutional reporting, not as a verbatim transcript or a substitute for the final adopted resolution. The case's recency limits conclusions about implementation, public attitudes and subsequent cooperation. Accordingly, the article offers a theoretically informed interpretation and normative argument, not causal proof that one vote produced multipolarity, economic development or Global South unity. Its African-centred standpoint is explicit so that

readers can distinguish evaluative commitments from documentary findings.

### Analysis and discussion

#### a. Cartographic distortion and cognitive justice

The technical issue must be stated accurately. Mercator's projection, developed in 1569 for navigation, increasingly enlarges areas at higher latitudes relative to those near the equator ; this can make Greenland appear comparable to Africa although Africa is approximately fourteen times larger <sup>[24]</sup>. Equal Earth, introduced in 2018, preserves relative areas, with its formal description published in the International Journal of Geographical Information Science in 2019 <sup>[16, 24]</sup>. No flat projection preserves area, shape, distance and direction perfectly in all circumstances <sup>[24]</sup>.

The demand is technically precise : use a representation suited to the knowledge being communicated. A navigational projection does not acquire universal educational authority simply because it performs a specialised task well. The resolution leaves specialised uses of Mercator intact and encourages education about the limitations of projections <sup>[24]</sup>. Africa's case requires no rejection of mathematics. It requires institutions to stop treating the historical familiarity of a representation as an adequate defence of its continued use where relative area is the subject.

The argument does not depend on assigning Mercator a personal intention to humiliate Africa. Structural criticism concerns the authority and uses of a convention, not speculation about an inventor's psychology. Harley locates power within cartographic practices and their social settings, providing a means to examine effects that exceed individual intentions <sup>[10]</sup>. An institution cannot answer criticism of its representational choices merely by declaring that no insult was intended. Once a limitation is identified, the relevant question is what it is prepared to change.

As an educator, I regard the classroom as a site where the authority of representations must be questioned rather than merely reproduced. Students deserve to understand what an image enables them to compare, what it obscures and why it has been selected. This is a demand for intellectual agency, not an assertion that every child viewing Mercator necessarily develops prejudice against Africa. Changing a map does not independently change foreign policy. It does, however, make possible a deliberate educational refusal to confuse a familiar convention with the world itself.

The campaign's achievement is to turn that refusal into an institutional demand. The AU situated the initiative within historical justice and narrative sovereignty and recognised contributions from Africa No Filter and Speak Up Africa <sup>[5]</sup>. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's account of epistemic freedom clarifies the stakes : freedom concerns the terms on which people formulate questions and interpret their place in the world, not simply permission to speak within categories established elsewhere <sup>[12]</sup>.

Nevertheless, cognitive justice must not become geographical determinism. Africa deserves respect because its peoples possess equal human standing, not because the continent occupies a large surface area. A smaller territory would have no lesser claim to dignity, and an equal-area map cannot represent the full complexity of cultural achievement. The ethical gain lies in correcting a misleading comparison, not replacing an old hierarchy of civilisations with a new hierarchy measured in square kilometres.

The more ambitious intellectual possibility is a universalism in which Africa participates as an author. The choice need not be between accepting inherited conventions unchanged and rejecting every concept associated with Europe. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's formulation combines centring Africa as a legitimate site of interpretation with opening African knowledge to wider intellectual exchange <sup>[12]</sup>. From that perspective, demanding an appropriate use of mathematical accuracy is not a withdrawal from shared knowledge. It is a claim to help determine how shared knowledge serves all regions fairly, including those whose objections have been treated as peripheral.

#### **b. African initiative, African coordination, international endorsement**

The diplomatic sequence is important because it makes African initiative visible. According to the AU's account, its thirty-ninth ordinary summit endorsed the Togo-championed initiative in February 2026, following earlier mobilisation and AU support for the campaign in 2025 <sup>[5]</sup>. Togo subsequently carried the issue into the General Assembly, where it introduced the text for the African Group <sup>[21]</sup>. This was not simply Africa receiving recognition ; it was African actors organising the demand for recognition.

The sequence matters because it identifies the work behind the victory. Advocacy articulated the grievance, regional coordination gave it a common platform, and diplomatic negotiation converted it into a proposition capable of attracting support beyond Africa. The achievement belongs to that organisation, not to an abstract generosity of "the international community". The issue's technical clarity and limited coercive consequences may have facilitated agreement. But favourable conditions do not organise themselves : African actors recognised an opening and acted collectively to use it.

The breadth of support strengthens rather than dilutes the claim of African leadership. The European Union endorsed the initiative's educational and scientific purpose while insisting that it did not alter sovereignty, territorial status or internationally recognised borders <sup>[8]</sup>. Ukraine supported efforts to correct historical distortions affecting Africa while objecting to territorial depictions on some Equal Earth maps <sup>[24]</sup>. These positions distinguish a mathematical projection from the political boundaries displayed upon it. They also show why the outcome cannot be reduced to an undifferentiated confrontation with "the West".

Africa does not have to choose between leading and cooperating. Togo's representative explicitly presented the project as directed against no nation, civilisation or cartographic tradition <sup>[21]</sup>. The political strength of this formulation lies in its refusal to confuse African self-assertion with a demand for superiority. Africa advanced a principle others could endorse without ceasing to identify that principle as an African initiative. Universal relevance does not require the erasure of African authorship.

The distinction between endorsement and internalisation remains decisive. Finnemore and Sikkink describe how norms move through emergence, wider acceptance and eventual taken-for-granted practice, with different mechanisms operating at each stage <sup>[9]</sup>. Applied cautiously, their framework suggests that the vote offers a platform for diffusion, not proof that schools, publishers and digital services have already changed. The resolution's success

should ultimately be evaluated through adoption and educational practice, rather than diplomatic applause alone. The AU had already established an interdepartmental working group and outlined coordination across education, communication and infrastructure functions, while a continental implementation workshop remained planned in its June account <sup>[5]</sup>. After the vote, Robert Dussey indicated that Togo hoped to revise its geography materials by the end of 2026 and promote wider adoption through subsequent consultations <sup>[11]</sup>. These are commitments to follow, not completed results to assume.

There are at least three plausible routes from this recognition to wider influence. Endorsement can provide educators and advocates with an authoritative reference when requesting institutional change. Cooperation around a successful initiative may also preserve relationships and negotiating experience useful in later campaigns. Finally, adoption creates a public standard against which the conduct of supporters can be assessed. None of these mechanisms guarantees compliance, and each requires separate investigation. They nevertheless explain why a non-binding outcome can have political value without requiring the implausible claim that a new projection directly produces economic development.

#### **c. American opposition and the refusal of political tutelage**

The political lesson is clear : American disapproval did not determine the outcome. Article 18 gives every General Assembly member one vote, with majority-based decision rules rather than permanent-member veto privileges <sup>[18]</sup>. This was therefore a defeat of American opposition, not the overturning of a legal veto. Its significance lies in the successful use of an institutional setting where organised support could prevail over a powerful state's objection. Africa should draw confidence from that result without misdescribing the rules that made it possible.

Multipolarity and multilateralism should likewise remain distinct. In this article, multipolarity refers to the distribution of consequential capabilities among several centres, while multilateralism refers to coordination through institutions and collectively negotiated procedures. A multilateral decision can occur within a materially unequal system. Conversely, a world containing several powerful states can remain coercive towards weaker actors. Africa's emancipation requires more than an increase in the number of external powers competing for influence.

Acharya's concept of a multiplex world is particularly useful because it emphasises a diversified architecture of governance involving multiple actors, ideas and processes rather than merely a new roster of dominant states <sup>[1]</sup>. The map campaign illustrates this possibility at a limited scale : African diplomatic coordination, civil-society advocacy, technical expertise and support across regions combined around a specific objective. Its significance lies partly in showing that leadership need not originate exclusively from actors possessing the greatest military capabilities.

The US representative described the initiative as part of a "radical ideological project" and objected to its association with reparations and cognitive justice <sup>[24]</sup>. President Donald Trump's January 2025 directive had explicitly instructed American foreign policy to put America and its interests first <sup>[25]</sup>. I read the vote alongside that doctrine as a revealing expression of political priorities, not as proof of a direct

causal instruction. The substantive question is why an African demand for fair representation should be treated as a threat to legitimate international business.

I reject the premise that Africa must postpone every claim to representational justice until more powerful states decide that it is sufficiently important. Institutions should certainly justify their priorities, and symbolic action must not replace material reform. But neither proposition makes educational accuracy illegitimate. Washington's decision was diplomatically shortsighted : it opposed a defensible African initiative without identifying a compelling conflict between accurate representation and international peace. In my judgement, it displayed a failure of reciprocity towards partners whose priorities it should have been prepared to take seriously.

Washington stood alone in voting against the text : its isolation on this issue is a recorded outcome, not an African rhetorical invention <sup>[21]</sup>. That is not equivalent to the disappearance of American economic or strategic power. Nor is US policy historically uniform : in September 2024, Washington endorsed two permanent African Security Council seats while opposing any extension of veto rights <sup>[13]</sup>. The contrast is instructive. Different policies can offer recognition while still leaving unresolved the African demand for equality in the exercise of authority.

For African and Global South diplomacy, the response should be greater organisation, not discouragement. The coalition existed before the American negative vote ; it would be inaccurate to attribute that coalition's formation to opposition that came afterwards.

Nevertheless, the confrontation offers advocates a concrete reason to insist that coordination must not depend on the approval of any single power. Whether it produces new economic or security cooperation remains to be demonstrated. My argument is political and prospective : African institutions should turn this episode into an incentive for deeper solidarity and sustained collective action.

"America First" cannot constitute the governing principle of a genuinely multilateral institution. The United States is entitled to advance its interests ; it is not entitled to make their primacy the test of everyone else's legitimacy. African governments must be equally entitled to identify and defend priorities rooted in their peoples' experience. My criticism is therefore not that Washington has national interests, but that its response treated an African claim to dignity as dispensable. A world organised around reciprocal sovereignty cannot demand that Africa recognise American priorities while accepting the dismissal of its own.

The emerging order should also be evaluated from below, not only from the viewpoint of powerful capitals. If multipolarity means that smaller African states must navigate several competing centres without acquiring stronger collective institutions, its emancipatory promise will remain limited. A genuinely plural order would increase their ability to set priorities, negotiate alternatives and refuse unacceptable conditions. This is why the African Group's leadership matters analytically. It directs attention towards organised influence by states that need not become great powers individually in order to contribute to international decision-making collectively.

#### **d. The Security Council : equality cannot remain indefinitely postponed**

A corrected world map cannot compensate for an unreformed structure of international authority. African states participate in the Security Council through elected seats, but none holds permanent membership, which remains confined to China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States <sup>[22]</sup>. The issue is not whether Africa is occasionally present. It is whether African representation enjoys permanence and equal standing where consequential authority is exercised. Participation under unequal conditions does not settle the demand for justice.

The Common African Position is more specific than a general request to be heard. The 2005 Ezulwini Consensus calls for at least two permanent seats with all associated privileges, including the veto, and five non-permanent seats in total <sup>[2]</sup>. It oppose the veto in principle but insists that, while it exists, equal treatment requires its availability to all permanent members ; it also assigns the selection of African representatives to the AU <sup>[2]</sup>. The demand is thus for institutional standing, not merely symbolic inclusion.

African leaders have articulated this demand across generations and different political traditions. Nelson Mandela's 1998 General Assembly address called for the United Nations, including its Security Council, to undergo reform in the interests of the world's peoples <sup>[20]</sup>. Robert Mugabe reiterated Africa's common reform position in 2015 and condemned the failure to satisfy its demands <sup>[23]</sup>. William Ruto's 2024 statement challenged the Council's exclusionary structure and demanded a more representative, inclusive and accountable institution <sup>[15]</sup>.

Ibrahim Traoré gives forceful expression to the related demand that independence become substantive. His July 2023 Russia–Africa Summit speech challenged dependency, criticised African leaders' subordination to external interests and insisted on food self-sufficiency ; it addressed sovereignty rather than presenting a specific programme for permanent Security Council seats <sup>[17]</sup>. The significance of these different interventions is their refusal to accept subordination as Africa's natural condition. Their programmes and political records remain distinct, but the insistence that African peoples must exercise greater control over their future deserves serious engagement.

The institutional obstacle is formidable. Article 108 requires Charter amendments to be adopted by two-thirds of General Assembly members and ratified by two-thirds of UN members, including every permanent Security Council member <sup>[19]</sup>. An overwhelming General Assembly coalition therefore does not remove the permanent members' legal leverage over Charter reform. The map vote shows that African initiatives can prevail where great powers lack an individual blocking right ; the Security Council question exposes a domain where entrenched privilege remains structurally protected.

African diplomacy should therefore refuse to let symbolic inclusion become a substitute for institutional equality. Governments that endorse fair representation on a map should be pressed to explain their position on permanent African representation in decision-making. The two questions are legally different ; the demand for consistency connects them politically. Africa must also establish a

credible selection arrangement and mechanisms of accountability. Permanent seats should strengthen the continent's capacity to act, not provide a small number of governments with privileges detached from the peoples in whose name they speak.

There is nevertheless a serious objection within the reform debate : extending permanent privileges might reproduce, rather than overcome, hierarchical government. The Ezulwini position acknowledges this tension by combining opposition to the veto in principle with a demand for equality while it survives <sup>[2]</sup>. My position is that correcting exclusion and democratising authority should be pursued together. Africa should not be asked to accept indefinite disadvantage in the name of an ideal reform that existing permanent members are not themselves prepared to implement. Equally, inclusion should not end the argument for more accountable decision-making.

#### **e. Beyond the map : sovereignty in the economy, science and culture**

Africa's emancipation cannot end with a more accurate image of the continent. The struggle must reach the organisation of production, the ownership of knowledge and the institutions through which collective decisions are made. I insist on this connection because recognition becomes politically inadequate when it leaves the terms of dependence untouched. We must possess not only the right to describe ourselves, but the capacity to determine how our labour, resources, scholarship and creativity contribute to our peoples' future.

The AU's Agenda 2063 connects continental influence with economic transformation, science and technology, cultural identity, integration and people-driven development <sup>[4]</sup>. These commitments establish an African programme against which implementation must be judged. The question is not whether the continent has become "mature" enough to deserve authority. It is whether our institutions are building the capabilities through which that authority becomes effective. Africa's rise should mean an expansion of substantive freedoms, not the successful performance of respectability before an external audience.

Economic sovereignty, in this framework, means greater capacity to determine how production serves public needs. Article 3 of the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement identifies à continental market, structural transformation, industrial diversification, regional value chains and food security among its objectives <sup>[3]</sup>. The relevance to the map campaign is organisational : coordinated continental action can challenge fragmentation, but agreement on objective must be followed by implementation. Integration should be judged by the opportunities it creates for workers, producers and communities, not simply by the number of official commitments.

Political independence must be defended against arrangements that leave effective choice elsewhere. Quijano's distinction between colonialism and coloniality explains why the end of formal colonial administration need not dismantle inherited hierarchies of power <sup>[14]</sup>. To confront neo-colonial dependence seriously, African institutions must identify its mechanisms : restrictive contractual terms, technological dependence or bargaining relationships that frustrate publicly chosen development priorities. Naming domination is necessary, but dismantling it requires specific

remedies. The language of liberation must become a programme of institutional competence.

Africa must negotiate with every partner from the premise that African development is the objective, not a by-product. Cooperation with China, Russia, India, Europe, the United States and others should answer to the same tests : productive learning, transparent obligations, environmental protection and retained decision-making capacity. South-South solidarity is strongest when it expands reciprocal capabilities and can withstand scrutiny. Our continent should not exchange one condition of dependence for another and call the substitution sovereignty. Partnership is valuable precisely when it enables African peoples to exercise greater choice.

Scientific sovereignty is equally important. Ndlovu-Gatsheni links epistemic freedom to the ability to formulate questions and produce knowledge from African locations rather than remain confined to frameworks established elsewhere <sup>[12]</sup>. In practical terms, this suggests investment in research institutions, geospatial expertise, multilingual educational resources and the conditions enabling scholars to work independently. The point is not intellectual isolation. It is the capacity to enter international exchange as a producer of concepts and methods, not only a supplier of data.

The same struggle extends into cinema, television, publishing and digital culture. From my standpoint as a scholar of African film and television, narrative sovereignty is inseparable from the institutions that commission, produce, distribute and interpret images. Africa must be able to represent itself in its complexity, not merely supply subjects for narratives whose terms are decided elsewhere. This is not a demand for compulsory praise. The freedom to portray disagreement, failure, invention and ambition is precisely what distinguishes self-representation from both external stereotyping and official propaganda.

Sovereignty belongs to African peoples ; governments exercise it in their name, not in place of them. Agenda 2063 connects continental transformation to democracy, human rights, the rule of law and the participation of women and young people <sup>[4]</sup>. This is an African commitment, not a condition that must be imported to make emancipation legitimate. A government cannot credibly defend dignity abroad while silencing citizens at home. The object of African renewal is the freedom and flourishing of our peoples, not the diplomatic prestige or personal immunity of rulers.

This is also why the language of Africa's rise should remain attentive to distribution. A state may gain diplomatic visibility without comparable gains for rural communities, precarious workers or young graduates. The standard I propose asks who acquires additional freedom when a government announces greater sovereignty. Can citizens shape development priorities ? Can local researchers influence the questions that receive support ? Can cultural producers reach audiences without surrendering control over their work ? These are not secondary concerns to be postponed until geopolitical recognition is secured. They are the substance that makes recognition worth pursuing.

#### **Policy implications and research agenda**

The appropriate response to victory is implementation. African educational institutions should lead the development of clear standards for choosing projections

according to purpose, supported by teaching that makes their trade-offs intelligible. Replacing one unexplained image with another is not enough. African educators must participate in designing, translating and evaluating the materials through which the continent is taught. The resolution should strengthen the capacity to exercise informed judgement, not establish another convention to be accepted without understanding.

Implementation also needs observable indicators. Governments and institutions could report the share of newly issued teaching materials using equal-area projections for continental comparisons, the availability of accessible digital resources and the completion of teacher-training programmes. Researchers could test changes in learners' geographical understanding without assuming changes in political attitudes. Such evidence would make it possible to distinguish successful adoption from a ceremonial commitment.

Diplomatically, Africa should build from the coalition it has helped assemble. European support and the AU's commitment to broad cooperation establish the initiative's capacity to reach across political divisions<sup>[8, 6]</sup>. We need not organise African identity around hostility to any country. The stronger position is to demand equal treatment from every partner and work with all who support it. Openness should serve African agency, never become a requirement to soften its legitimate demands.

The wider research agenda should be equally disciplined. Subsequent studies could track institutional adoption, examine the diplomatic negotiation process and compare this campaign with more materially consequential African initiatives. Claims that American opposition accelerated Global South unity would require evidence of changed behaviour after the vote, not simply repetition of the original disagreement. The resolution is already meaningful as a documented agenda-setting achievement ; its legitimacy does not depend on attributing consequences that have not yet been demonstrated.

Practical adoption must also avoid a new technical dogmatism. Since the resolution recognises that different projections serve different purposes, implementing it should not mean demanding that every navigational or local mapping tool adopt a single world-map design<sup>[24]</sup>. Institutions should explain where equal-area representation is appropriate, record the origin of their boundary data and provide accessible guidance to users. African cartographers and educators should help establish these standards. Otherwise, a campaign for representational autonomy could leave the institutions responsible for implementation no more capable than before.

Finally, Pan-African solidarity must be organised, not merely proclaimed. It should connect governments, scholars, teachers, artists and civil-society organisations without demanding uniformity or treating criticism as betrayal. Africa's diversity is not an argument against collective action ; it is a reason to build institutions capable of making that action legitimate. The most consequential legacy of this vote would be a stronger capacity to formulate shared demands and pursue them persistently. The continent cannot afford a diplomacy that celebrates unity for one

resolution and abandons its practical requirements immediately afterwards.

## Conclusion

The "Correct the Map" resolution is an African victory, and it should be named as such. African actors took a demand about representation, organised support around it and brought it into the sphere of international decision-making. The outcome does not complete emancipation, but it gives practical expression to the refusal of tutelage. Africa can formulate an international priority, defend its legitimacy and secure endorsement without first obtaining the approval of the most powerful state.

The Trump administration's opposition failed to stop the initiative. It revealed the limits of American persuasion on this question while leaving the wider distribution of material power and the barriers to Security Council reform unresolved. That is the terrain on which African diplomacy must now act : with confidence in what collective organisation can achieve and clarity about the structures still to be changed. Recognition should intensify the demand for equality, not persuade Africa to settle for less.

I therefore celebrate this step as a beginning that must be carried forward. From geography to the economy, from scientific authorship to cultural sovereignty, and from diplomatic recognition to permanent institutional standing, the principle is the same : African peoples must exercise effective authority over their place in the world. Our continent does not need permission to belong among the civilisations shaping the twenty-first century. It needs the organised capabilities to exercise the equality that is already its right. Correcting the map must become part of the larger task of correcting the terms on which Africa participates in world affairs.

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