

That All May Be Represented

by LaMarco Cable
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If you live in the Washington, D.C. metro area or have visited, you may have noticed the politically charged message written on the bottom of the District of Columbia license plate. It reads: "Taxation without representation." I did not investigate its meaning until I moved to the area in 2011 when I received my very own D.C. plate. I learned that this message is a pro-statehood message. The slogan has been attributed to James Otis who penned it in response to the resentment of American colonists who were being taxed by the British Parliament, a government in which they did not have any elected representatives. Like the early American colonist, Washingtonians want an elected official having a vote in the U.S. Congress. They want a vote in decisions determining their livelihood.

People like to feel represented. We like to know that our ideas and positions are being heard and honored. But not all voices are valued equally in our world. Recently the international community was astonished to learn that 60-100 people from a dozen African nations were denied visas to attend an annual African Global Economic and Development Summit in California. The result? No African representatives were able to attend the meeting.

The conference seeks to bring together attendees to discuss initiatives pertaining to climate change, clean energy and poverty. How is this possible in 2017? How could there be any conversations about trade on the African continent without significant guidance from African leadership? This form of decision-making as it relates to Africa is antiquated and should be strongly resisted and opposed. We who believe in inclusivity must honor the agency of all people and demand that they be included at the table to represent their own interests.

This African Trade Summit is reminiscent of the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 where a delegation consisting of all European and U.S. leaders gathered to divide the African continent into colonies and to make decisions that continue to economically disadvantage African nations to the present day. Though the recent Summit was not created to shape Africa in the way that the Berlin Conference did, it sets a dangerous precedent for business and trade in Africa.

We must honor the agency of all people and demand that they be at the table to represent their own interests. We must oppose discrimination against African nations and demand representation at all tables that impact the lives of African people.

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