

A Solemn Call to All Kamites

*So that never again shall the death of an elder be the destruction
of a library*

Call of the Bwa Sacré to the peoples of Africa, of the continent and of the diaspora

LANGUAGES · MEMORY · ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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A Solemn Call to All Kamites

So that never again shall the death of an elder be the destruction of a library

Peoples of Africa,

Kamites of the continent and of the diaspora,

Keepers of our traditions,

Customary chiefs, linguists, researchers, computer scientists, teachers,
students and African youth,

I address you today in my capacity as President of the Bwa Sacré, but
also as a son of an Africa that watches, generation after generation, part
of its memory disappear.

I speak to you of a silent emergency.

Our languages are dying.

They do not die in the din of weapons.

They die when a child no longer understands the language of his grand-
father.

They die when an elder takes with him a word that no one has recorded.

They die when a proverb is no longer understood.

They die when a song is no longer sung.

They die when a knowledge handed down orally for centuries meets a
generation that no longer knows how to listen.

And when the last man able to name a plant, a ceremony, a star or a
principle in the language of his ancestors disappears, it is not only a
word that disappears.

It is an African way of thinking the world that goes out.

Amadou Hampâté Bâ left us this formula, now famous:

“In Africa, when an old man dies, it is a library that burns.”

For a long time, that sentence described a fatality.

Today, for the first time in our history, we possess the technical means to prove that fatality wrong.

Artificial intelligence changes the game

Many of us have been wary of artificial intelligence.

That wariness was not always without foundation.

A technology we do not master can indeed become an instrument of dependence.

But there is a more dangerous mistake still:
refusing a tool while others learn to use it.

Artificial intelligence can listen.

It can transcribe.

It can compare thousands of hours of speech.

It can learn grammatical structures.

It can preserve dialectal variants.

It can link a word to its pronunciation, its context, its translation and its history.

It can take part in speech recognition, speech synthesis and machine translation.

And above all, unlike a human being, digital knowledge can be copied, backed up and passed on without depending on the span of a single human life.

I must, however, make one essential point:

it is not artificial intelligence itself that is eternal.

Companies disappear. Software changes. Artificial intelligence models are replaced.

What must survive is our data: our voices, our texts, our dictionaries, our corpora, our archives and our knowledge.

Artificial intelligence must learn from our heritage.

It must never become its owner.

Look at what those who started before us are doing

Look at English-speaking Africa, and particularly South Africa.

South Africa did not simply declare that its languages were important.

It built a national infrastructure devoted to digital language resources: the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources – SADiLaR.

Texts are digitised.

Voices are recorded.

Corpora are assembled.

Dictionaries, language tools and multimodal resources are developed.

These resources serve research in speech recognition, speech synthesis, machine translation and the computational processing of languages.

In other words:

while some are still debating whether their languages should be protected, others are already building the infrastructures that will allow machines to speak them.

That is the real stake.

This is not about artificially opposing English-speaking and French-speaking Africa.

It is about observing a difference in organisation and drawing a lesson from it.

What other Africans have begun to build, we can build as well.

Mali: we cannot wait

I address Mali in particular.

Land of ancient civilisations.

Land of Bambara, Soninke, Fula, Songhay, Dogon, Senufo, Minianka, Tamasheq, Bozo, Khassonke, Bomu and Bwamu, and of so many other languages.

We have academics.

We have linguists.

We have computer scientists.

We have radio stations holding thousands of hours of archives.

Above all, we still have elders who hold a knowledge that no one has fully written down.

What are we waiting for?

Every year that passes takes speakers away.

Every burial can take away a vocabulary.

Every death can erase a pronunciation, a story, a proverb or a knowledge that we will never recover exactly.

Mali must create a true national infrastructure of African language data for artificial intelligence.

Not tomorrow.

Now.

Burkina Faso: a door has just opened

And here I want to acknowledge an important development.

In Burkina Faso, something is beginning.

In March 2026, in Koudougou, the ministry in charge of the Digital Transition brought together linguists, researchers, journalists and artificial intelligence specialists to work on building corpora for AI models.

Mooré, Dioula, Fulfulde and Gulmancema are concerned.

That is progress.

I salute it.

But I also say:

we must go much further.

Because Burkina Faso is not reducible to four languages.

What will become of the languages of the Bwa?

What will become of those of the San, the Lobi, the Bissa, the Gurunsi and the many other communities?

A language spoken by a few tens of thousands of people deserves to survive as much as a language spoken by several million.

Technology allows us precisely to stop choosing between the two.

Côte d'Ivoire: we must act

I also address Côte d'Ivoire.

Country of the Akan, the Gur peoples, the Mande and the Kru.

Country of Baoulé, Agni, Attié, Ébrié, Senufo, Koulango, Lobi, Bété, Dida, Guéré, Yacouba, Malinké and so many other languages and communities.

These languages are an immense wealth.

But a language celebrated in speeches and absent from the digital world gradually becomes invisible to machines.

And in the world that is coming, that invisibility will have consequences.

If tomorrow digital assistants understand French and English perfectly but remain unable to understand a grandmother speaking her mother tongue in her village, we will have created a new form of exclusion.

Tomorrow's digital divide will also be a linguistic one.

Côte d'Ivoire must therefore also build its great national banks of voices, texts and linguistic knowledge.

I now address the whole of French-speaking Africa

For too long we have regarded language as a matter reserved for linguists.

That is over.

In the twenty-first century, language is also a question of digital sovereignty.

Whoever owns the data owns part of the capacity to train the machines.

Whoever documents a language determines in part what future generations will be able to know of it.

And whoever abandons that responsibility to others cannot be surprised when others tell his story in his place.

So we must stop waiting.

Let us not wait for Google to record our grandmothers.

Let us not wait for a European university to come and collect our last speakers.

Let us not wait for an American company to decide which African languages are profitable enough to deserve an artificial intelligence.

These actors can be our partners.

They must not be the sole keepers of our memory.

I call for a great mobilisation

I call on the African states.

I call on the universities.

I call on the academies of national languages.

I call on the traditional chiefs.

I call on the keepers of our sacred groves.

I call on the griots.

I call on the traditional hunters.

I call on the priests of our traditions.

I call on the women who still know the old songs.

I call on the farmers who know the traditional names of plants.

I call on the blacksmiths.

I call on the healers and holders of knowledge, with respect for what must remain secret.

I call on the linguists.

I call on the computer scientists.

Above all, I call on African youth.

Take your phones.

Take your microphones.

Go and see your parents.

Go and see your grandparents.

Go to our villages.

Record.

Ask:

What is this called?

How was that said in the old days?

What is the difference between these two words?

How do we count?

How are the seasons named?

What are the constellations called?

What are the kinship terms?

Which proverbs did our ancestors use?

How is birth told?

How is death spoken of?

How are the visible world and the invisible world named?

Record the answers.

But let us not content ourselves with piling up files.

Let us document them scientifically.

Let us identify the language.

The dialect.

The village.

The speaker's generation.

The date.

The exact transcription.

The translation.

The context.

And where several versions exist, let us keep the different versions rather than arbitrarily inventing a single one.

For to save an error for eternity would not be to save our heritage.

It would be to make our error eternal.

And I issue a warning

If we do not do this work ourselves, others will.

And in fifty years, our great-grandchildren may ask an artificial intelligence:

“How did my ancestors speak?”

The machine will answer with the data it has found.

If that data was produced exclusively by others, it will then be too late for us to protest:

“That is not our true language!”

“That is not our tradition!”

“Our ancestors did not say that!”

The machine will not have invented our silence.

It will simply have inherited it.

That is why our generation bears a historic responsibility.

The Bwa Sacré takes its share

As President of the Bwa Sacré, I consider that the safeguarding of our heritage can no longer be oral alone.

We must preserve our language.

We must preserve our variants.

We must record our elders.

We must document our transmissible knowledge.

We must build a corpus that our descendants will be able to consult and that future artificial intelligences will be able to learn.

But we must also distinguish what belongs to the public heritage from what belongs to the sacred and must not be handed over indiscriminately to machines or to the whole world.

To safeguard does not mean to disclose everything.

Cultural sovereignty also requires knowing what we transmit, to whom we transmit it and under what conditions.

Kamites, the hour has come

Our ancestors passed their languages on to us without computers.

Without hard drives.

Without the Internet.

Without artificial intelligence.

They managed to carry them across centuries.

And we, who have satellites, smartphones, servers, cryptography and artificial intelligence, would have the excuse of letting them die?

No.

Our generation would be unforgivable.

We are probably one of the last generations able to record certain elders.

But we are also the first African generation with the technological means to preserve their voices on a massive scale.

That is our responsibility.

That is our chance.

Once, when an old man died, a library burned.

From now on, let us record the library before the fire takes it.

Let every people build its corpus.

Let every language have its archives.

Let every community keep its voices.

Let every child be able to find the words of his ancestors again.

And tomorrow, when artificial intelligence speaks the languages of the world, let the languages of Africa stand among them.

Not as ethnographic curiosities.

Not as the digital remains of vanished peoples.

But as living languages.

Languages taught.

Languages spoken.

Languages thought in.

Languages that create.

We ask no one to save our languages in our place.

We call on Africa to take possession of its own digital future.

Let us rise.

Let us record our languages.

Let us preserve our voices.

Let us pass on our memory.

For a people that keeps its speech keeps an essential part of itself.

And what our ancestors managed to pass on to us across the centuries,
we have no right to let die in our hands.

For our ancestors.

For our children.

For the generations not yet born.

May our languages live.

May our memory endure.

And may Africa speak to the future in its own voice.

The President of the Bwa Sacré

BAZURU

Abidjan, 12 September 2026

