



Background

on the honouring of the human rights and peace activist

Aminata Dramane Traoré (Mali)

with the International ethecon Blue Planet Award 2021

Aminata Dramane Traoré was born on 26 July 1947 as one of twelve children in humble circumstances in Bamako. At that time, Bamako belonged to the West African colonial territories of France. In 1946, the inhabitants of this colonial empire had received French citizenship, but the plundering of their labour and the resources of West Africa continued. Even after the "Sudanese Republic", which encompassed present-day Mali, acquired formal autonomy in 1958, it remained dependent on France. Like many Malians, the fact that colonialism appeared in varying forms also shaped Aminata as she grew up.

After leaving school, she studied in France at the University of Caen, graduating with a degree in psychopathology and a doctorate in social psychology. She returned to Africa and taught ethnosociology at the University of Abidjan in the Ivory Coast. In addition to her academic work, she worked for a number of international political organisations. The young scientist and practising Muslim became increasingly involved in the spirit of Pan-Africanism for a common solution to Africa's social problems by overcoming colonial borders. She worked in various state and suprastate institutions of the United Nations, Ivory Coast and the Republic of Mali. In 1979, she became the Director of Study Programmes at the Ministry of Women's Affairs of the Ivory Coast, followed by her appointment to the Board of the Population Council in 1987 and as African Coordinator of the United Nations Development Programme in 1988. In 1992, she became a member of the International Panel on the Restructuring of the United Nations Development Programme in New York, and in 1993, she became a member of the Independent Commission on Population and Quality of Life of UNESCO.

Aminata Traoré was appointed Minister of Culture and Tourism in the Malian government by President Alpha Oumar Konaré in 1997. Even in this position, she did not give up her open protest against the political dictates of the industrialised countries over Africa and her demands for a reform of the United Nations. In the course of her march through the institutions of the Republic of Mali and the United Nations, she encountered the manifold resistances against the aspirations for social and political independence of the former colonies from the leading industrial nations, which are still to this day deeply inscribed in the structures of the international economic order. In 1999, she published the widely acclaimed essay "L'Étau", in which she pointed out the limited possibilities of African state politics and aggressively denounced the injustice of the Bretton



Woods institutions. For this publication, Aminata was criticised as a member of the Malian government. In order to avoid restrictions on her freedom of expression, she resigned as minister in 2000 and reaffirmed her expressed position. Instead of backing down or settling in these institutions, she resigned from her post as minister. Instead of being silenced by this sharp criticism, she named the political actors of neo-colonialism in her books. Instead of becoming lost in the treatment of individual problems, Aminata Dramane Traoré kept an eye on the entire power structure of neo-colonialism. Consequently, she increasingly turned to social movements.

From 2002 to 2004, Aminata served on the Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalisation at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and advised the United Nations Secretary-General as a member of his Panel of Civil Society Experts in 2003-2004. In July 2005, she was appointed to the Board of the International Press Service. She directs the "Cent-re Amadou Hampâté Ba", a meeting and research centre for local initiatives in Mali, and is a scientific advisor to the Spanish socialist IDEAS Foundation.

Aminata Dramane Traoré became one of the best-known critics of neoliberal globalisation during the World Social Forums. Together with 18 other prominent academics, she adopted the Porto Alegre Manifesto at the World Social Forum in 2005. The manifesto contains a twelve-point programme that was taken up by social movements worldwide as a list of demands.

The 19 authors stated, "If implemented, these proposals would enable the citizens of the world to take their future back into their own hands." These twelve demands are:

1. a debt cut for the countries of the Global South
2. international financial transaction taxes
3. abolition of tax havens
4. universal right to work, social security and pensions
5. abolition of free trade and all laws of the World Trade Organisation
6. food security through the promotion of local small-scale food production
7. prohibition of patents on all living things and the foundations of life, e.g. water
8. social rejection of sexism, racism and anti-Semitism; recognition of all cultural, political and economic rights of indigenous peoples
9. stop the destruction of the environment and global warming through greenhouse gases
10. dismantle all foreign military bases that have not been man-dated by the United Nations



11. public right to freedom of information; stop the concentration of ownership of the media

12. reform and subordination of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to the United Nations on the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Aminata organised the following World Social Forum in Bamako in 2006 as a member of the organising committee. Building on the previous manifesto, the 2005 WSF resulted in the "Bama-ko Appeal", which was also discussed in the subcommittees and thus expressed the organised political will of the 2005 World Social Forum. This appeal aimed at building an internationalism of the peoples of the South and the North against the dictatorship of the financial markets and the uncontrolled development of transnational corporations; it condemned the invasion of Iraq, called for international understanding and solidarity, solidarity with the resistance of the Palestinian people and vigilance against the threatening US interventions in Venezuela and Bolivia. The appeal called for an alternative to militarised and neoliberal globalisation and the hegemony of the United States of America and its allies.

In 2006, Aminata and her non-governmental organisation "Forum for another Mali" led the largest African migration congress to date, which presented the African-European migration crisis from the perspective of those affected. "The presentations by failed migrants who have been deported from Spain and France caused a stir." They denounced the murderous isolationist policy of the European Union, which continues to arm collaborating states like Morocco and urges violence against migrants. At that time, more than one tenth of the Africans who made the perilous journey across the sea to the Canary Islands came from destabilised Mali. 3.5 million Malian citizens were already living in other African countries. Aminata explained in detail how the economic subjugation of Africa by European corporations causes youth unemployment and lack of prospects. Her conclusion after the "Forum of Migrants" went around the world: "European and African policies are forcing young people to take the most dangerous route." She has organised annual follow-up meetings since this time. In December 2021, the sixteenth forum will focus on the climate collapse that has already begun as the meanwhile biggest cause of flight from the Sahel Zone and denounce the responsibility of European corporations for this climate change.

In July 2007, French President Nicolas Sarkozy heralded a new offensive of French colonialism in West Africa with a racist and neo-colonial speech in Dakar, Senegal. Aminata recognised the significance of this speech and in 2008 published her best-known book "L'Afrique humiliée" (roughly: "Humiliated Africa"), in which she took up and sharply criticised this speech. Together with the director Jean-Louis Martinelli, she developed the play "Une nuit à la présidence" ("A night



in the presidency"), a satire on neo-colonialism and the cynicism of the French president. The premiere was at the Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers in 2014.

The invasion of Libya by the USA, Great Britain and France in 2011 marked the beginning of a comprehensive destabilisation of all countries bordering the Sahara. It not only led to a civil war in Libya that continues to this day, but also promoted state disintegration, the proliferation of weapons and the emergence of militias in Mali. It broke the division between the agricultural southwest and the nomadic northeast of Mali, where a Tuareg independence movement began to fight for its own state ("Azawad"). In March 2012, the military staged its first coup in Bamako. Since then, changing military juntas have ruled in the capital, inviting French troops to fight against religious and ethnic-separatist militias in Mali. European troops have occupied parts of Mali and its neighbouring states since 2013. The then French President Hollande had announced before parliament that the deployment would be "relentless". Ostensibly, French and Malian troops initially fought against various militias such as AQMI ("Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb"), Ansar Dine ("Supporters of the Faith") and MUJAO ("Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa").

Aminata Dramane Traoré was among the first to publicly accuse the French government of systematically destabilising Mali and the entire Sahel region. In doing so, she courageously and persistently denounced the interests of French corporations as the driving forces behind this imperialist aggression.

The interests of French corporations in Mali's mineral resources are an open secret. "For example, around northern Mali lie many of the uranium mines exploited by France, which the country urgently needs for its nuclear power plants. The French state-owned nuclear company AREVA mines uranium in Mali's neighbouring country Niger, which is now the largest uranium producer on the continent. Uranium has also been found in Mali itself. In France, nuclear independence is more or less a matter of reason of state and at the top of every government's agenda," was the judgement of SPIEGEL journalists Gebauer and Hengst immediately after the French invasion. In addition, Mali has untapped reserves of oil, natural gas, gold, diamonds and copper.

Traoré not only criticised the allegiance of the French and Malian political elites to this economically motivated war, she also accused the media of complicity in falsely suggesting that Malian poverty was the cause of the war. The opposite was the case. Africa's wealth in resources makes it the target and victim of industrialised countries: "Africa is the victim of its wealth!"



She also refused to accept the French narrative that the destabilisation of the Republic of Mali was the failure of an incompetent military. "Why should I attribute the entire responsibility for the collapse of the state to those left behind in an army that, just like the other institutions of the republic, is tainted by corruption, nepotism and a climate of impunity?" She blamed the destabilisation on cannibalistic, neoliberal economic policies that enriched a tiny elite at the expense of the people. She blamed the "crowbar opening of the Malian economy".

The Malian and French authorities reacted to Aminata's vehement and high-profile attacks with repression: "In order to blur the meaning of my discourse and my struggle, I was first portrayed as a supporter of the coup and an opponent of the CE-DEAO. On top of this, I have now been placed under house arrest." The Euro-pean Union also aided and abetted, denying her a Schengen visa to enter France for the purpose of public appearances in April 2013. The Canadian authorities also refused to allow her to attend the twelfth World Social Forum in Montréal in August 2016.

The war in Mali has come to a head since the entry of French troops: in 2014, after going it alone militarily, France managed to involve other NATO countries in the occupation of the Sahel zone and expand the area of operations. Since then, German, British and Canadian troops have also occupied territories in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger as part of "Operation Barkhane". All of these countries are former colonies of France. Meanwhile, security has not been created by the deployment: Quite apart from the acts of violence committed by the occupying forces, the number of attacks in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger also increased fivefold between 2016 and 2020. In 2019 alone, 4,000 people were killed.

Today, Aminata runs a restaurant and guesthouse in her hometown, but continues to write tirelessly against the unjust world order in newspaper articles and books. In June 2020, Aminata published an article on social media in which she interpreted the recent wars in Africa as a European attempt to secure the world's largest reserves of raw materials for European corporations and to take them away from the growing Chinese economy. In the same article, she announced her intention to run for UN Secretary General. At the World Social Forum 2021, she warned that the Covid 19 pandemic was deepening existing inequalities. Furthermore, the pandemic should not distract from the fact that Africa also suffered from neoliberalism before the health crisis. Referring to the worldwide protests of Black people against racism and police violence since 2020, Traoré summed up: "It is Mother Africa herself who is humiliated when Black people are murdered." Aminata Dramane Traoré strengthens African self-confidence all the way into the diaspora and simultaneously international solidarity and exchange between social movements worldwide. She contributes to international understanding and international



resistance against neoliberal globalisation and presents alternatives against subjugation to international financial institutions. She has dedicated her life to this task.

The Board of Directors and Board of Trustees summarise their decision as follows:

"Human rights and peace activist Aminata Dramane Traoré defends human rights regardless of her own safety and opposes oppression, injustice, state violence and war. She not only stands up for human rights, but also for an expansion of these universal fundamental rights. She acts for the benefit of the human community. She upholds morality and ethics and opposes the demise of the Earth as a dead planet. In a world increasingly focused on profit as the sole criterion for all decision-making and development, ethecon sees Aminata Dramane Traoré's actions as an outstanding contribution to saving and preserving our Blue Planet. For this admirable cultivation and development of human values, ethecon Foundation Ethics & Economics honours Aminata Dramane Traoré with the International ethecon Blue Planet Award 2021."



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Background

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