

We don't have leaders in Africa - Graca Machel

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Nelson Mandela's current wife and former Mozambican first lady told the Discovery Invest Leadership Summit last week that the African continent does not have leaders, and that the African people must blame themselves for electing those who are now ruling them.

"We don't have leaders," Machel said. "Whose fault is that? Ours, because we are the ones who elect them," she said in an interview held at the leadership summit held in Sandton, Johannesburg, 21 September 2011.

Machel, who sits on the UN Foundation board, was replying to questions put to her by the event's master of ceremonies Bongani Bingwa.

Close to 2000 delegates attended the summit that took place at the Sandton Convention Centre.

"A good leader is a visionary and is trustworthy," a visibly frustrated Machel said, adding that a real leader needs to empower people and not disenfranchise them.

Machel's fearless criticism of the African leadership echoed political analyst Moeletsi Mbeki's sentiments who said recently that African people are disillusioned with their leadership.

"These people are not leaders, but the elite," Mbeki, of the SA Institute for International Affairs, told a CNN-MultiChoice media forum in June this year.

Corruption, financial mismanagement, dictatorship, nepotism, political intolerance, vote rigging and lack of legitimacy are just some of the scourges currently affecting the African political leadership.

Machel said leaders' legitimacy comes from caring for their people - a rare feature in Africa, where critics suggest that the majority of current African leaders lack legitimacy and credibility, as well as the organisation that houses them - the African Union.

Machel, founder of the Graca Machel Trust and advocate for children and women's rights, wed Mandela in 1998.

Mandela, who served only one five-year mandate as SA president, currently lives in Qunu, his birthplace in the Eastern Cape province.

Asked whether she could still fire a machine gun, Machel, a former freedom fighter, said laughing: "No, not anymore."

Her late husband, Samora Machel, was the Mozambican head of state and leader of Frelimo (Frente para Libertacao de Mocambique).

Frelimo, which still rules Mozambique since the 1975's independence from Portugal, is one of many Africa's so-called liberation movements that have stood the test of time after fighting bloody wars against European colonial masters.

However, these liberation movements which later converted into political parties - some of which still rule the continent - have often been accused of plundering their respective countries, enriching themselves, and oppressing and starving their people.

"We didn't manage to adjust the system we inherited to our realities," Machel said, adding that Africans are still suffering from the 'Syndrome Big Boy', whereby people are still voting on personalities rather than on programmes and policies.

"There is a huge degree of injustice and discrimination going on the continent," she said.

Machel, a former Mozambican cabinet minister, urged South Africa to do more for Africa, stating: "The destiny of South Africa is interlinked to that of the continent, and this country will go far if it's fully integrated into the continent.

"It's not only for the politicians. South African business leaders must also take the regional integration issue very seriously," she said, calling on business leaders to take time and learn more about African people.

"We are not the market, but we are people," she said.

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