

Africans in Geneva: students, diplomats, executives

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The relationship also runs through people. Since independence, Geneva has welcomed African students to its faculties of law, economics and medicine and to the Graduate Institute of International Studies, some of whom have gone on to become ministers, central bank governors, business leaders or international civil servants. In French-speaking Africa, the alumni networks of the University of Geneva and of the Institute rank among the most influential of the Swiss networks.¹ The permanent missions of the African states to the United Nations in Geneva, almost all of which are represented, form a diplomatic community whose members frequent the financial centre and sometimes return to it as clients or as partners. The African officials of the international organisations, numerous in the institutions devoted to health, refugees and trade, constitute a clientele and a pool of talent.

This presence gives Geneva a knowledge of Africa that few European financial centres possess, together with a capacity for access to decision-makers that the commodity traders and banks make use of. It also creates risks, examined in Chapter IV: the personal relationships formed in Geneva with African politically exposed persons are the ground on which corruption and money laundering cases arise. The proximity that makes the relationship effective also makes it vulnerable. The role of language in that proximity, which Part J has described, applies to people as much as to business.

1 Notes

1. Wikipedia (en), art. “List of alumni of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies”: Kofi Annan (Ghana, 1962), Secretary-General of the United Nations and Nobel Peace Prize laureate 2001; Mohamed ElBaradei (Egypt, 1964), Director General of the IAEA 1997-2009 and Nobel Peace Prize laureate 2005; Alpha Oumar Konaré, President of Mali 1992-2002 and Chairperson of the African Union Commission 2003-2008; Jakaya Kikwete, fourth President of Tanzania; Michel Kafando (1972), transitional President of Burkina Faso 2014-2015; Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, “Kofi Annan” (graduateinstitute.ch): student in Geneva in 1961-1962, “Firstly, Geneva is an international city and could serve as a laboratory where I could observe international politics in play”. ↩

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