

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **UN General Assembly Votes to Correct the Map: A Turning Point for How Africa Is Seen**

*164 nations vote to retire the 450-year-old Mercator projection that has minimised Africa in the global imagination since 1569; only the United States votes against.*

**JOHANNESBURG, 4 September 2026** — The United Nations General Assembly today voted 164 to 1, with six abstentions, to adopt the "Correct the Map" resolution, formally encouraging governments, schools, international organisations and technology platforms worldwide to retire the Mercator projection in favour of the Equal Earth projection or another equal-area map.

The resolution was introduced by Togo on behalf of the African Union and the African Group and co-sponsored by the Bahamas. The United States cast the sole vote against the resolution.

The Mercator projection, devised by cartographer Gerardus Mercator in 1569 to aid maritime navigation, distorts the relative size of landmasses far from the equator, inflating Europe, Russia and North America while shrinking Africa, Latin America and South Asia.

Under Mercator, Africa, the world's second-largest continent at 30.37 million square kilometres, appears roughly the same size as Greenland even though it is about fourteen times larger.

Today's vote is the culmination of a campaign that began years before it reached the floor of the General Assembly. In August 2025, the African Union formally endorsed Correct the Map, a campaign led by the advocacy organisations Speak Up Africa and Africa No Filter. The AU adopted the Equal Earth projection as its own institutional standard in March 2026, before Togo carried the campaign to the United Nations the following month.

"Maps shape how we see ourselves and how others see us," said Professor Carlos Lopes of the University of Cape Town, who helped build the intellectual case for the campaign. "If Africa appears smaller than it is, so does its weight in the imagination of citizens and decision-makers."

Fara Ndiaye, co-founder of Speak Up Africa, said: "For centuries, this map has minimized Africa, feeding into a narrative that the continent is smaller, peripheral and less important."

Moky Makura, Executive Director of Africa No Filter, welcomed the vote but cautioned that it marks the beginning rather than the end of the work: "Now the real work begins. We want to see accurate maps in schools, textbooks, newsrooms, businesses and on the digital platforms billions of people use every day. If we got something as basic as Africa's size wrong for this long, what else about Africa have we simply accepted without questioning? Africa doesn't need to be made bigger. It needs to be seen accurately."

Notably, the correction was anticipated in art before it arrived in policy. On 4 September 2025, exactly one year to the day before the General Assembly vote, Brand Africa unveiled Africa Re-Union at FNB Art Joburg, Africa's longest-running contemporary art fair. The three-by-two-metre canvas, conceived by Thebe Ikalafeng, Founder and Chairman of Brand Africa, in 2020, anchored historically by Professor Kwesi DLS Prah and realised on canvas by South African artist Mark Modimola, rendered the world in the Equal Earth projection, stripped of borders and inverted, placing Africa where convention has always placed Europe.

"The Africa Re-Union is not a return to the 1884 Berlin Conference table," Ikalafeng said at the work's unveiling, "but the setting of our own table: equal, sovereign, and unapologetically African. It is both remembrance and declaration: Africa is whole again. This time, no one will define us but us."

The painting is now permanently housed at the Unisa Art Gallery in Pretoria, home to the University of South Africa, Africa's largest university by enrolment, where it debuted as the headline artwork of the exhibition "African ReUnion: A Celebration of Pan-African Imagination and Unity" in May 2026, four months before the General Assembly vote.

Reacting to today's outcome, Ikalafeng said: "This is a moment where Africa took the initiative to correct the wrong. This is African agency in practice. The vote is the symbol. What we do next, in the classroom, on the shelf, in the boardroom, is the substance. Now, on to the next."

The resolution is not legally binding and does not restrict the continued use of the Mercator projection for maritime and aerial navigation, for which it remains the international standard. Implementation will depend on individual governments, educational institutions and technology companies choosing to act on its recommendations. Togo's Foreign Minister, Robert Dussey, has said Togo will be the first country to update its own school geography materials, by the end of 2026. France's Foreign Minister, Jean-Noël Barrot, announced on the day of the vote that Paris would abandon the Mercator projection in its own official materials.

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**About Brand Africa:** Brand Africa is a pan-African, non-profit movement founded in 2010 by Thebe Ikalafeng to drive a brand-led African renaissance. It is best known for Brand Africa 100: Africa's Best Brands, the continent's only pan-African research and ranking of brands, and for initiatives including the Africa Brand Leadership Academy and Africa ReUnion. Brand Africa works to reclaim Africa's narrative, reshape how the continent is perceived globally, and build the institutions needed to grow African brands, industries and influence on their own terms.

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