Ethiopia to allow all Africans to visit without visas "very soon" - PM Abiy Ahmed says

Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed has revealed that the country will "very soon" follow Rwanda's example allowing all Africans to travel to the country without visas. The policy will open up the east African country to African visitors and it will undoubtedly ease the free movement of African nationals and boost tourism.

© Natchapon Nilsonti via 123RF

The plan was revealed during a state banquet hosted by Prime Minister Abiy for Rwandan President, Paul Kagame who is in Ethiopia on a three-day official visit. The two leaders held bilateral talks at the National Palace in Addis Ababa and made a commitment to strengthen relationships in key sectors, which include defence and air services. While Prime Minister Abiy did not give specific details of the plan to allow all Africans to travel to Ethiopia without visas, the proposal is a laudable step to open Africa's borders.

As part of the visit, President Kagame also toured Hawassa Industrial Park which has attracted 18 leading global apparel and textile companies.

Welcoming the world: Rwanda to start issuing visas on arrival for all countries
Arthur Chatora 20 Nov 2017

Rwanda visa-on-arrival example

On 1 January this year, Rwanda started implementing a new visa regime where nationals of all countries get a visa upon arrival without prior application. The issuance of visa-on-arrival for all countries was widely celebrated by many across the continent and on social media.

The announcement by Prime Minister Abiy is indeed laudable and demonstrates that African countries are beginning to act on the implementation of the African Union (AU). A number of African countries have in the past year started implementing the 30-day visa-on-arrival policy recommended by the AU, and these include Kenya, Ghana and Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe offers visas on arrival for SADC members and several international countries). However, other countries have been slow in implementing the 30-day visa-on-arrival policy recommended by the AU. The visa policies of most African states remain restrictive, and the countries are inaccessible to African visitors.

The AU has appealed to countries to review their visa policies to "implement mechanisms allowing for the issuing of visas on arrival for citizens of member states, with the possibility of a 30-day stay".

The Africa Visa Openness Index, a guide by the African Development Bank (AfDB) reveals how Africa countries remain largely closed off to African citizens. According to AfDB, "on average Africans need visas to travel to 55% of other African countries, can get visas on arrival in only 25% of other countries and don't need a visa to travel to just 20% of other countries on the continent."

AfDB recommends that African countries should promote more visa-free regional blocks, push for greater reciprocity, and introduce more visa on arrival policies for Africans.

The AU has urged member states to champion the visa on arrival initiative, identified as "critical to facilitating and encourage intra-African trade and investments, as well as tourism. With a growing middle class, we must encourage intra-Africa tourism".

Read the original article on This is Africa.