



Press Release

Chairperson Ping receives Irish Parliamentary Delegation



Chairperson Ping (centre), Hon. Pat Breen (3rd from left), and Amb. Sile Maguire (far left)

Addis-Ababa, 17 November 2011 -- The Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC), Dr. Jean Ping, on 16 November 2011, in his office at AUC Headquarters in Addis Ababa, received a Delegation from the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Parliament of the Republic of Ireland, led by the Honourable Pat Breen, T.D.

In his introductory remarks, Hon. Breen stated that the Irish legislators are in Africa to find out how Irish taxpayers' money, channeled through Irish Aid, is distributed and used.

With 11 embassies in the Continent and trade missions in several African countries, the Republic of Ireland considers Africa an important friend and partner, thus the recent launch by the Irish Government of an African Strategy, he declared.

Hon. Breen highlighted the important role played by the AU in Africa's relations with the rest of the world, "for it is important that Africa speaks with one voice," he added.

"We are aware of the problems in some African countries, in particular Sudan and Somalia, and we share the view that Africa's problems should be resolved in Africa. This is a time of change and recent events in North Africa could happen elsewhere in the continent. We have come to listen to your views on these and other issues," he said.

With reference to the current problems within the Euro zone, Hon. Breen stated that the European Union had been very good to his country and "Ireland is back in business", after honouring all its financial commitments.

Welcoming the Irish Parliamentarians, the Chairperson said that Africa has strong relations with the Republic of Ireland and recalled, to the delight of his guests, that some years ago, Africa helped Ireland at the United Nations to gain a valuable seat on the UN Security Council.

Dr. Ping pointed out that Africa is in the global spotlight for several reasons, including recent political events in North Africa and the continent's rosy economic prospects.

While most European and other developed countries are haunted by the spectre of a double-dip recession and unsustainable budget deficits and debt burdens, he explained, Africa last year recorded an average economic growth rate of more than 5%, with some countries, such as Ethiopia, growing their economies in the double digits.

He added that whereas not long ago, Africa was dismissed as a "lost continent", the source of nothing but doom and gloom, Africa is today increasingly viewed as a continent of opportunity. Major global economic players, such as the business magnate, George Soros, have become increasingly interested in investment opportunities in Africa, which indicates that "something is moving in the continent and we are delighted to see that," the Chairperson added.

"Amidst this good news, however, we still have some persistent bad news of armed conflicts, particularly in Sudan and Somalia," Dr. Ping acknowledged, and proceeded to give the Irish legislators a detailed overview of the situation in both countries, as well as recent developments in North Africa, with special emphasis on Libya and AU efforts throughout the Libyan crisis to minimize the loss of human lives, preserve the country's unity and territorial integrity and safeguard the overall peace and stability of the region.

At the end of his presentation, several members of the Irish Delegation asked questions, to which the Chairperson provided comprehensive and substantive answers. The Irish legislators expressed their satisfaction and delight and variously described the Chairperson's exposé as "masterful" and "educative".

An invitation, which he readily accepted, was extended to the Chairperson to pay an official visit to the Republic of Ireland.

Both parties agreed that as a country that had recently experienced conflict on its soil, Ireland is in a unique position to make a valuable contribution to conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding in Africa.

The Parliamentary Delegation, which included a Member of the Irish Senate, Senator Lorraine Higgins and three other Members of the Lower House, was accompanied by Ireland's Ambassador to Ethiopia and the AU, H.E. Mrs. Sile Maguire, while the Chairperson was flanked by his Deputy Chief of Staff and Defence and Security Advisor.

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