



Statement

by

H.E Mr. Joseph Deiss

President of the sixty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly

"Africa: an indispensable partner in a global world"

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Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

Excellency, President of the African Union Commission,

Honourable Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege to be with you today.

Today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the way the world views Africa is changing. Fifty years after independence, Africa is increasingly asserting itself as an indispensable partner in our global world.

Africa is an indispensable force for anyone hoping to achieve a strong majority in the General Assembly. The African Union and the continent's subregional organizations are driving forces of integration and progress which attract close attention whenever important decisions need to be taken.

The continent's economy is also testament to its dynamism. Throughout the previous decade several African countries have featured among the world's most vibrant economies. Capital flows to the continent, namely direct investment, have weathered the crisis, and South-South flows continue to play an increasingly important role.

All these positive elements, however, should not blind us to the fact that Africa's progress, in both political and economic terms, remains fragile. Attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, for example, is lagging behind in some areas and in some countries. In September 2010, at the High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals, the international community clearly reaffirmed its commitment to the Goals. We must now ensure that those words are translated into action. The General Assembly will contribute to monitoring achievement of the Goals by holding a special event in 2013, and also throughout the current session, in particular by holding a future plenary session on development.

It is vital to ensure that the improvement of living conditions of the poorest populations is sustainable. The greater diversification of African economies and their stronger regional integration form part of the solution. I welcome the initiatives undertaken to this end by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

The potential of the African economy is beyond doubt. But the realization of that potential risks being hampered by political instability, corruption, or bottlenecks in infrastructure. The quality of institutions and policies that are put in place at the national and regional level is a crucial factor. The rule of law, respect for human rights and democratic institutions are essential to empowerment and stability, and indispensable prerequisites for the continent's attainment of political and social maturity. For economic progress, it is essential that fundamental rights, including property rights, be guaranteed and also that sound market structures be put in place, thus ensuring that civil society can grow and exercise its rights. These are also necessary preconditions for stimulating investment, creating jobs and mobilizing domestic resources. The strengthening of productive capacities will be one of the issues taken up at the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in Istanbul in May 2011. It is my wish that the General Assembly contributes to this discussion and I intend to convene an informal thematic debate in March in New York on investment in and financing of productive capacities in the least developed countries.

If the progress achieved in reducing poverty is to be secured, it is essential that economic growth should be sustainable and should not jeopardize, through the immoderate use of resources, the capacity to meet the needs of future generations. For that to happen, we must take decisive steps towards a green economy. To allay certain fears in that regard, I plan to convene, with the help of eminent representatives from Africa, an informal thematic debate on this issue in New York in June. For me, green economy is not synonymous with conditionality, but rather an opportunity to stimulate economic growth and create jobs.

In the globalized world of the early twenty-first century, problems cross borders without passports. Global strategies are needed to respond to these new challenges. This will require a system of global governance that is effective, inclusive and representative. This is a priority theme of the current sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly and is also a matter of priority for Africa, whose representation in informal groups like the G20 remains far below the continent's real importance.

In my opinion, the centrepiece of this system of governance is undoubtedly the United Nations. The General Assembly has the pre-eminent legitimacy in that regard, because of the number of its Member States and its system of "one country, one vote", which ensures that even the smallest countries are heard.

But there is a growing danger today of the United Nations being sidelined by the emergence of other players on the international stage.

These new players are undeniably useful, as demonstrated by the rapid and coordinated response of the G20 following the economic and financial crisis. What is in question, however, is their representative nature and their legitimacy. It is essential to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms for communication, consultation and cooperation between the United Nations and these players.

To this end, I have organized, as a first tangible step, informal debates of the General Assembly before and after the G20 Summit in Seoul, to give all Member States the opportunity to express their views, regardless whether or not they were invited to participate in the Seoul summit.

I am glad that the building of bridges between the United Nations and the G20 is continuing this year with the French Presidency of the Group.

But the United Nations must also be reformed to ensure that it performs this pivotal role even better. I refer specifically to the revitalization of the General Assembly. I am also thinking of the review of the Human Rights Council and the implementation of the recommendations arising from the review of the Peacebuilding Commission. In particular, however, we have to underscore the need for reform of the Security Council, to ensure that this body more appropriately reflects the new world order. This is another crucial undertaking for Africa. We must now embark on real negotiations. It is essential that all parties display a constructive, realistic and flexible attitude, if these negotiations are to succeed. I am determined to move forward on this issue during my Presidency. I call upon all African States to engage themselves actively towards this noble goal.

Regional organizations – the African Union -, and also the subregional organizations, constitute an important pillar of global governance. The principle of subsidiarity should be respected and, wherever possible, problems solved at the regional or subregional levels. I wish to underline the positive role that these stakeholders play in peacekeeping and also in ensuring the smooth functioning of democratic institutions and strengthening political governance in Africa.

Regional and subregional organizations also have an essential role to play in operationalizing the “responsibility to protect”. They have a unique role to play in helping to ensure that their Member States build up the necessary capacity to fulfill their responsibility to protect their citizens. If the international community is forced to intervene as a last resort, the support of these regional and subregional bodies and close cooperation with them are essential. I plan to organize a thematic debate at the General Assembly later this year on this topic.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to face the global challenges and promote the fundamental values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, it is crucial that we can count on Africa. For their part, the United Nations and the international community must respond to appeals from Africa. The current process of rebalancing the economic, demographic and political world order and the increasing prominence of the African continent on the international stage give rise to new hopes, but they also bring with them new responsibilities for us all.