

Deputy Secretary-General's address to 17th African Union Summit Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, 30 June 2011

Your Excellency President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea and Chairman of the African Union,

Your Majesties,

Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,

Gracious First Ladies of Africa,

Your Excellency Mr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union,

Your Excellency Mr. Lula Da Silva, Former President of Brazil and Special Envoy of Her Excellency the President of Brazil,

Your Excellency Mr. Amhed Ben Helt, Deputy Secretary-General of the League of Arab States,

Honorable Mayor of Malabo,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be with you here today in this beautiful and welcoming city of Malabo. Allow me at the outset to thank President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, the Government and the people of Equatorial Guinea for their generous hospitality.

I congratulate you Mr. President for your leadership of the African Union and for hosting this important Summit meeting.

Allow me also to commend Chairperson Jean Ping for his competent stewardship of the Commission of the African Union.

I bring warm greetings from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. He thanks you all for Africa's strong support in electing him for a second term.

He is now even more motivated and committed to support Africa in meeting its challenging quest for peace and universal human rights, prosperity and sustainable development.

In just nine days Secretary-General Ban will join many of you to celebrate the birth of South Sudan, the United Nations newest Member State.

The path has been long and hard, and there are still many hurdles ahead, not least the ongoing tensions in South Kordofan and Abyei.

We are thankful to the African Union High Level Panel under President Thabo Mbeki and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi for brokering the agreement to demilitarize the disputed area of Abyei.

Despite these setbacks, South Sudan's independence is another milestone for Africa, and for Africa's partnership with the United Nations.

The United Nations stands firm in supporting South Sudan's peaceful development and to good neighbourly relations between north and south.

We will also remain committed to the search for a political solution to the Libyan crisis.

There should be no doubt about our aims. The objective -- and the obligation -- of the international community is to protect civilians and to work for a durable peace that meets the legitimate aspirations of Libyan people.

We appreciate the African Union's support for the efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Libya, Mr. Abdul Elah al-Khatib, who is here with me today.

Serious efforts aimed at launching a political process are underway and will continue until we reach a political solution.

This process must be given space to grow and bear fruit. It is therefore important for the international community to remain united and to deliver a clear and consistent message to both parties.

We hope the African Union ad hoc High-Level Committee on Libya will continue to support both our political and humanitarian objectives as we work together for a peaceful solution that fulfills the legitimate aspirations of the Libyan people

As well as the people of Libya, we are concerned about those migrant workers who remain in Libya, many of them are from African States. They all need protection and assistance, including upon their return to their home countries. We will be working closely with the African Union in this regard.

Excellencies,

From Somalia to Cote d'Ivoire, from Niger to Madagascar, across the length and breadth of this continent, the United Nations, the African Union and regional bodies such as ECOWAS and SADC have worked together successfully.

Through joint preventive diplomacy, mediation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, we have helped save lives, reinforced the rule of law and strengthened the process of democratization that is taking hold in Africa.

The United Nations will continue to work closely with Africa's leaders to keep and build peace and to ensure that elections are a route to stability and prosperity.

And we will continue to support the efforts of Africa's people to realize their right to choose their own leaders and destiny.

Countries that prioritize democratic principles generally fare better in avoiding armed conflict, promoting stable and equitable development, and building socially inclusive societies.

In the past decade, Africa has made considerable gains in consolidating democratic principles and undergone a period of rapid economic growth.

Attractive investment opportunities are proliferating beyond the minerals and energy sectors.

While extreme poverty, hunger and inequality remain a major concern, a middle-class is also emerging in several countries.

For Africa, this is, in many ways, an era of opportunity.

Our job, Excellencies, is to ensure that it is an era of opportunity for all.

I therefore commend you for your choice of the theme of this Summit.

If we are to bring lasting peace and sustainable development to the continent, we must further empower Africa's youth.

Thirty-five per cent of Africa's people are between the ages of 15 and 35.

This is the age when people are laying the foundations for their future? building careers? planning families.

But, far too many young adults in Africa face daunting challenges to achieve these legitimate objectives.

Youth unemployment in Africa varies in average between 11 per cent and nearly 24 per cent; and here too, women are most affected.

Furthermore, many young men and women who are employed still often find themselves among the ranks of the working poor.

Africa's record on education gives equal cause for concern.

While school enrolment is up and the gender gap has narrowed, lifting the quality of education in schools remains a critical challenge as is the high rate of young illiterates.

Governments' commendable efforts are often curtailed by the mismatch between the needs of the job market and what the education system has provided.

Young people who cannot read cannot benefit from the rapid advances in information and communications technologies that are sweeping the continent.

Nor can they engage meaningfully in democratic decision making.

In spite of these difficulties, in many parts of Africa, young people are rising as agents of change. They demand more freedoms and opportunities. They want the fulfilment of their legitimate aspirations for better lives.

So, let us respond to this call by investing in young entrepreneurship programmes and business start-up schemes; by expanding employment guarantee schemes that target young people – especially women -- in rural and urban areas; and by continuing to attract foreign direct investment and providing incentives to firms to hire young people.

Such initiatives have been contributing to create millions of jobs throughout the continent, over the past three years, including in my own country, Tanzania.

In other nations, such as Nigeria and South Africa, national youth service programmes have provided an integrated approach to community service, skills development and access to employment.

And as we gather here to pledge to invest in Africa's youth, let us also recommit to involve them in a more meaningful way so they can truly contribute to implementing the critical steps that are required to enable us to meet our development goal.

Excellencies,

By choosing the theme of this meeting and by prioritizing youth development in Africa's development agenda, you have yourselves recognized this reality.

The Plan of Action of the 2009-2018 African Youth Decade that your Excellencies have adopted provides a strategic framework to achieve your goals. I laud you for this visionary undertaking and encourage you to spare no efforts to translate it into tangible and transformative facts.

Later next month, the United Nations will mark the end of the International Year of Youth with a High-level Meeting on Youth in New York.

The outcome will be a concise action-oriented document detailing how Member States, the UN system and civil society can address the needs of young people.

In addition to education, employment and meaningful participation, empowering African youth requires investing in health as well.

Last year, many of you joined in the pledge by world leaders to dedicate \$40 billion dollars to the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health.

The UN system is working with your governments to turn these financial and other commitments into concrete delivery on the ground through the Secretary-General's "Every Woman, Every Child" initiative.

We are also working to reduce the burden of HIV/AIDS, which remains a major threat for Africa's youth, particularly young women.

At the beginning of this month, the General Assembly adopted ambitious new targets to combat this disease that has had such a disproportionate effect on Africa.

We have a realistic goal of no new HIV infections among children by 2015.

Our long-term vision is zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths.

We can meet these targets – as we can meet all the Millennium Development Goals – if we work together as partners, and if we invest our resources wisely and equitably.

But economic empowerment alone will not suffice if we do not abide by the relevant legal instruments that protect African youth.

Excellencies,

As you are aware, this year marks 10 years since the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child entered into force.

The Secretary-General has launched a global campaign to promote the universal ratification of the Protocols

Only 18 African Union members are Parties.

I call on all African States to become parties and implement them fully.

In doing so, you the leaders will give hope to the demobilized child soldier and the unemployed city dweller.

You will create new opportunities to the adolescent in school and the graduate with an idea for a new business.

You will help materialize the dreams of the young men and women of Africa for fairer and more thriving societies.

For just as we must always respect the wisdom of elders, let us always engage the energy of youth so they can develop to their fullest potential.

We all know the old adage: “Idle hands are the devil's playthings.” Let us instead give young people something constructive to do!

Excellencies,

Today, I reaffirm the United Nations' commitment to work in partnership with Africans of all ages with a view to building an environment conducive to prosperity, democracy and peace.

The United Nations will continue to work with you to deliver your vision of an integrated, flourishing and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global arena.

Thank you.