

# The United Nations and Development: An African Priority

by

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1997-2006

Kofi A. Annan served as the seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations from January 1, 1997 to December 31, 2006, and was the co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2001. In April of 2007, he was named chairman of the prize committee for the Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership.

## **Abstract**

*A farewell address by Kofi A. Annan held at the African Development Forum on November 16, 2006 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in which he states that development is never a gift bestowed on any country from outside, and thus, it has to be achieved by the hard work and enterprise of the country's own people. And in his conclusion, he pledges to devote himself to the welfare of Africa.*

Excellencies, Dear Friends:

This has been a chequered decade for development, but an extraordinary one for the UN's role in development.

When I took office in 1997, official development assistance had been declining for more than a decade. Funding for the UN system had dropped precipitously, amidst fierce ideological debates with the Bretton Woods institutions and other partners about the right approach to development. And the world was falling rapidly behind in tackling new challenges, particularly HIV/AIDS.

Today, thanks largely to the vision and political will that emerged from four UN summits over the past six years – the Millennium Summit in 2000, Monterrey and Johannesburg in 2002, and the World Summit last year – ODA is breaking through the \$100bn barrier; and a set of agreed goals – the Millennium Development Goals – is supported by all major development actors. No less important, we have common strategies for reaching those goals, set out in the Millennium Project report that appeared at the beginning of last year.

On HIV/AIDS too, there is good news amidst the gloom. Five years ago I made the issue a personal priority and called for the creation of a “war-chest” of an additional seven-to-ten billion dollars a year. The Global Fund, which I am proud to be patron of, has channelled more than \$2.8 billion to programmes across the globe, most of it for AIDS. We have recently seen significant additional funding from bilateral donors, national treasuries, civil society and other sources.

Available annual funding for the response to AIDS in low-and middle-income countries now stands at over US\$8.3 billion. Much more is needed – by 2010 total needs for a comprehensive HIV/AIDS response will exceed 20 billion dollars a year – but, with the support of UNAIDS and other partners, we have at least made a start on getting the resources and strategies in place to combat the greatest challenge of our generation; and the result can be seen in the success that several African countries have had in containing or reversing the spread of the epidemic.

So we have much to be proud of. But we cannot for one second be complacent. We have laid a foundation for development, but no more than that. We won't really know whether these achievements count for anything until ten years from now, when we are able to look back and see whether the MDGs have been achieved, whether prosperity is rising equitably within countries, across countries and across regions, whether all girls and boys everywhere are at school, with enough to eat and prospects of a future with jobs, health, housing and other basic needs supplied.

Frankly, the prospects are mixed, at best. Overall the world may meet the poverty goal, thanks to the remarkable progress in Asia. But even there, progress towards other goals – notably Goal 7, ensuring environmental stability – is lagging. Indeed, as we have been hearing from the Nairobi conference where I was yesterday, climate change may make nonsense of all our forecasts, if we don't take serious preventive action on a global scale within the next few years.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has told us that Africa is already, and will be even more, the continent worst affected by global warming. And while many African countries have made spectacular progress in some areas, this continent as a whole is falling behind in the race to reach the MDGs by 2015.

It is not too late to turn this situation around. But it will take focus, application and commitment. As I said in Montevideo the week before last, it requires action in areas from trade to migration policy. A successful Doha development round, especially, is a sine qua non of success.

But let's not forget where development has to happen – namely, in the developing countries. Development is never a gift bestowed on any country from outside. It has to be achieved by the hard work and enterprise of the country's own people.

And that means that what is required most of all, if the MDGs are to be achieved, is that the developing countries themselves live up to the commitment that all states gave at last year's World Summit, by adopting comprehensive national strategies for reaching the MDGs, and by implementing them in a transparent way that benefits all their citizens.

The outcome document committed all developing countries to producing comprehensive strategies by the end of this year. That may sound simple, but in fact it is enormously complex. A national development strategy is not a one-page vision statement. It is a comprehensive, far-ranging blueprint for change, which must be home-grown, nationally owned and nationally delivered, not just by the state but with civil society and with the private sector playing its full part. It must contain clear benchmarks of progress on every issue. It must provide a real framework for guiding domestic policy and expenditures, while attracting support from donors and sustained support and investments from the private sector – both domestic and foreign.

And the fact is, far too few countries – in Africa or anywhere – have yet done this properly. It absolutely must be done, and done now. Development will simply not happen if we Africans, and citizens of the developing world in general, don't get our own house in order.

When I say this, I do not mean to understate how much is already happening. Africa now understands that development is first and foremost an African priority. Africa also understands that success requires moving forward in a clear, transparent way, through pioneering initiatives like the African Peer Review Mechanism. But I'm afraid that countries actually walking the walk, and not just talking the talk, are still the exception rather than the rule.

All our leaders owe it to their fellow-citizens to turn that around. Their challenge is to make sure all the countries of Africa are working hard, on policies and actions that benefit all their people. And Africa's young people – the theme of this forum and the hope of this continent – must keep them up to the mark.

But whenever and wherever developing countries have adopted such sound strategies for reaching the MDGs, it is equally vital that the developed countries – and the middle-income countries – live up to their commitment to provide resources to enable those strategies to succeed. We all know there are many developing countries that simply won't be in a position to attract commercial investment without first making a public investment in physical and human infrastructure for which they do not have adequate resources of their own. And all too many of those countries are in Africa.

That's why the world has a moral and strategic obligation to address shared concerns of poverty and disease and despair on this continent – an obligation that has been repeatedly acknowledged and spelt out in specific agreements over the last few years, from Monterrey to the G8 to the World Summit.

In essence, this vision of development is a compact: if developing countries deliver on comprehensive, fleshed-out national strategies, then donors are committed to meeting the needs that cannot be met through domestic resources alone.

But here too, while there are encouraging steps, too much is still not happening. Many donors are already falling short of their commitments to increase aid – and the longer this shortfall persists the harder it will be to correct. They must be held accountable.

Neither side in the compact can escape responsibility for delivering on its commitments. But the developing countries, especially, are entitled to expect help from the UN system. The UN must be there to support their vision and their plans, and to help them build the capacity – the skills, the institutions, the systems – to deliver the jobs, houses, schools and healthcare that their people need.

That is especially true in Africa, which – as we all know – has special needs and special problems. Not only does it include almost all the least developed countries. It is, as I just mentioned, the continent most threatened by global warming. It also suffers from poor governance, weak institutions, and more conflicts than any other continent – many of them a legacy of the cold war. And parts of Africa are afflicted with the world's highest incidence of HIV/AIDS – with a terrifying increase in infection rates among women. All these scourges tend to perpetuate poverty and impede development.

For all these reasons, the UN System has a special relationship with, and special responsibility for, Africa. I am glad to note that the new head of the World Health Organization, Margaret Chan, has recognized this, by announcing that she will make the health of Africans and women key indicators for WHO in the future.

Over the past 10 years, I, as an African Secretary-General, have done my best to nurture and build up the relationship between Africa and the UN. That decade, of course, has also seen the birth of the African Union – an immensely hopeful development – and I'm glad to say the UN and the AU have a close and growing relationship.

The UN is in Africa both as a peacekeeper and to help with development; as an adviser to African governments and civil society, and as an advocate for Africa in the world community.

Peace building – which is the blanket term we use to describe countries recovering from conflict – is where these different roles come together. Much of our peace building work is actually capacity-building. It's about helping countries get back on the path of development. And really we shouldn't wait to do it until there's been a conflict, with all the misery and destruction that that entails. We should be helping all African countries to build up their capacity, whether they have suffered conflict or not.

But African governments know all too well that, despite enormous progress in recent years, we don't yet have in place the properly structured and equipped UN system that we need. Many Africans find the UN confusing and frustrating to deal with, because it is present in so many different forms, with mandates that either overlap or leave major gaps. Often you end up having to deal with 10 or even 20 different UN agencies offering support that is neither coordinated, nor strategic, nor to scale.

We must simplify Africa's access to, and dealings with, the donor community. Instead, we often seem to be adding new layers of complexity. In short, we are less than the sum of our parts.

That's why Africa has a major stake in the new UN peace building commission and fund that have just started work, and also in the broader effort to bring greater coherence to all our development work, through the high-level panel on system-wide coherence.

The panel was set up in response to the call from last year's World Summit for research into whether our humanitarian, environmental and development work could be improved by more tightly managed entities. The fact that the prime minister of Mozambique, Luísa Dias Diogo, agreed to co-chair the panel – along with Shaukat Aziz of Pakistan and Jens Stoltenberg of Norway – shows that Africa has taken this reform very seriously, and rightly so because it is this continent that has a lot to gain. .

The panel submitted its report last week. And I am delighted to say that it sets out a persuasive vision of the future UN system as the kind of supporter of development it can and should be.

The details are complex but the vision is clear – a vision of a united UN system led by one UN resident coordinator in each country, supported by consolidated funding channels, guided by a single sustainable development board, and rigorously monitored by a single development, finance and performance review unit. It sounds complicated but I think it will work.

Clearly there is scope for much discussion and debate on exactly how, and at what pace, to move forward. We will start with pilot projects in about five countries. But if these key recommendations are implemented, I believe the UN will at last be able to play its proper role, working in partnership with the World Bank and the African Development Bank and other multilateral and bilateral donors, at the centre of national and global development efforts everywhere.

It will be up to my successor, not me, to realise this exciting vision, working with the UN's member states. Indeed I am full of hope that the UN, under its new Asian Secretary-General, will bring some of Asia's inventiveness, dynamism and teamwork to helping Africa. The best way to ensure that is for African states to be fully engaged, at the highest level, in the new annual ministerial reviews and development cooperation forum that are being launched by the UN's Economic and Social Council.

Meanwhile, my dear friends, the time has come for me, in my capacity as Secretary-General, to bid you farewell. But as I lay down my global responsibilities, I can promise to devote myself more than ever to the welfare of this beloved continent.

So I am glad to say, dear brothers and sisters, that my farewell to you is not an adieu, but very much an au revoir.

Thank you all, very much. Vivent les Nations Unies! Vive l'Afrique!