

Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa, Cheikh Sidi Diarra, to the African Group of Ambassadors on the work of the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa; current and future activities

11 March 2008 at 4:00 PM

Mr. Chairman of the African Group,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am particularly pleased to have this opportunity to meet with you today in my capacity as the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Africa. With Africa as a high priority on the global agenda, and with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's determination to mobilize the UN in support of Africa, I am very conscious of the heavy responsibility that falls upon me in my new tasks. In this endeavor, I wish to assure you that under my leadership, OSAA will play an effective role for Africa.
- Africa is at the very top of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's agenda as he himself has stated on many occasions.
- Excellencies, in assessing the actions of the Secretary-General with regard to Africa, I think it is crucial to bear in mind the strong commitment he has shown to Africa in all his activities. It is therefore necessary and appropriate to view his management decisions in that context. Thus, his proposal to realign OSAA and OHRLLS is an effort to strengthen the work of the UN system on Africa. This new arrangement will reinforce the office's advocacy role and allow for increased donor contacts to mobilize support for programmes dedicated to Africa's development.
- The realignment aims to enhance focus on development and bolster the coordination capacity on mandates related to Africa with a view to improving the Secretariat's ability to better meet the specific needs of Africa. I therefore seek your full support in the implementation of the mandates given to my office. Specific recommendations have been finalized and are currently being sent to inter-governmental bodies for the strengthening of the office. The Secretary-General made a presentation on these proposals, before the UNGA this morning. I reassure you that I will constantly consult with you and brief you on the latest developments in the work of my office.
- The entire UN development system devote a significant part of their time and work to Africa because Africa is not on track to achieve the MDGs, unless there is a major acceleration of efforts. Towards this end, the Secretary-General established the MDG/Africa Steering Group, which incidentally met yesterday, to galvanize international assistance for Africa in achieving the MDGs. I am happy to report that OSAA participates in the MDGs/Africa Working Group which is part of the MDGs/Africa Steering Group.

- This is a time of many significant developments on the African agenda. We have witnessed several years of sustained economic growth, averaging over 5 % per annum in many African countries; the African Union's peace and security architecture is rapidly evolving, and the regional integration agenda is also advancing. More than 20 African countries have subscribed to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), while progress has been made in NEPAD's infrastructure and agriculture agenda, in particular.
- I would now like to speak about the priorities of the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa in 2008.
- From 28 to 30 May 2008, Japan is hosting the Tokyo International Conference on Africa's Development (TICAD IV) and this will be followed by Japan convening the G8 Summit in June – at which it intends that Africa be a priority item of discussion. OSAA has been a co-organizer of the TICAD process and will be fully engaged in this event.
- While continuing with timely execution of legislative mandates given by the member states, we intend to pay particular attention to all of Africa's partnerships with other members of the international community, i.e. Africa/EU; Africa/China; Africa/India; Africa/Brazil etc. South-South Cooperation, which is also steadily expanding, will also receive attention, as will the developmental impact of climate change upon Africa.
- The Secretary-General has emphasized the importance of strengthening UN-AU Co-operation and implementing the 10 Year Capacity Building Programme in support of the African Union; in this regard, OSAA will continue to cooperate with the Department of Political Affairs, which is the lead department on this subject.
- Our biggest priority will be the High Level meeting on “Africa's development needs: State of Implementation of Various Commitments, Challenges and the Way Forward”, scheduled to take place on the 22nd September 2008 in New York, to be chaired by the President of the General-Assembly, at the end of which a political declaration will be adopted. In this context, the Secretary-General is expected to submit to the meeting a comprehensive report on Africa's development needs and OSAA is actively involved in its preparation.
- Excellencies, I know that as Representatives of Africa at the UN, you have always taken a very keen interest in the work of OSAA and you have been consistent in your support. Let me assure you that I will do everything possible to maintain and preserve your confidence in me personally and in the work of OSAA. Under my leadership, you can count on OSAA effectively fulfilling its mandate, and making a significant contribution to the UN's support for Africa. I will provide you with briefings and updates on NEPAD, the APRM, and other significant developments on related topics, and will always be at your disposal for discussion and dialogue on matters relating to Africa.

- Thank you,