

# Towards New Strategic Alliances with Africa

Address by

Mr. Legwaila Joseph Legwaila  
Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa,  
United Nations Secretariat

At the

Interfaith Summit in Africa  
A dialogue of Religious Leaders from Africa and the U.S  
Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill  
Washington, D.C

19 July 2006

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to this very important and timely gathering. Important in itself as it addresses key issues of interest to Africa's development, but also important as it brings together African religious leaders and civil society leaders from Africa with their counterparts in the U.S. to collectively explore and share ideas on the critical challenges facing the African continent.

Allow me at the outset, to say a few words about the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa which I head. The Office promotes peace and development in Africa and international support for the implementation of The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) through advocacy. The Office also supports the Secretary-General in advancing a coherent UN system support for Africa's development. I am therefore particularly pleased to be addressing this unique forum today and hope that by the end of this Summit, we will have developed some faith-based solutions that can contribute to addressing some of the challenges facing Africa.

The theme of my presentation today is: *Towards New Strategic Alliances with Africa*. As you might all be aware, there is already a long history of the involvement of the Church in the USA in addressing issues of concern to Africa. The establishment of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833 saw Christians, and other religious groups fighting against slavery as it was seen as being incompatible with the teachings of Christ.

The role of faith-based organizations in the liberation struggle to end apartheid in South Africa is also noteworthy here. The Church in South Africa was heavily involved in the struggle against apartheid. The World Council of Churches (WCC), also had a considerable influence on the way churches throughout the world considered their role in the fight against apartheid. In 1968, the WCC launched its Programme to Combat Racism (PCR), a project that was aimed at fighting racism and racial discrimination world-wide, with a strong emphasis on Southern Africa. The PCR created much debate and controversy, in particular because it offered financial support

to liberation movements and because it advocated for an end to investment in South Africa as a way to force the minority Government to put an end to apartheid. But there was wavering on the part of the WCC.

Drawing inspiration from the accomplishments of faith-based organizations in the USA in their support of Africa, there is much that you all can do to help the region today. In doing so, you can rely on such instruments as consensus-building, advocacy and awareness raising. These are also the tools that the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa uses to promote international support for the African peace and development agenda. But there are several actors within and outside Africa who are working to advance Africa's agenda, implying much scope for partnerships or alliances between the faith-based organizations in the USA and such actors.

Just as there are many actors – State and non-State actors working *on* and *for* Africa's progress, so there are many issues. When I speak of a new alliance, I mean a new coalition of those determined and committed to helping to move that agenda, the African agenda, which is very broad indeed. Yes, there are a few issues that the inter-faith can help with, namely: resolving conflicts in war-torn countries, campaigning for better trade terms for Africa, enhanced advocacy for increased official development assistance.

There have also been numerous important alliances developed in the health sector to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa. Moreover, faith-based organizations have been working on mainstreaming gender issues into development policies. The role of the church in addressing youth and unemployment, especially in countries emerging from conflict has also been encouraging. In a sense, the alliance between religious leaders in Africa and those in the U.S is not new. What we need to do now is to consolidate the existing mechanisms of cooperation that already exist and build on new ones in areas that lend themselves to effective faith-based initiatives.

There is need for new types of alliances with faith-based organizations in the U.S. which focus more attention on conflict resolution, post-conflict reconstruction, aiding the internally displaced and finding solutions to the refugee crisis in Africa. These are some of the most

pressing issues hampering development in Africa, and in this connection, I recognize the very good work being done by the Church World Service (CWS), especially in their African initiative which targets Africa's most at-risk populations, which include children, people living with HIV/AIDS, refugees, migrants, and internally displaced persons.

Now, let me say a little about the United Nation's work on peace, security and development in Africa. Increasingly, the Security Council has been integrating issues related to peace and security with development, human rights, gender, natural resources, small arms and cross-border issues in its resolutions. In the first 44 years of the history of the United Nations, only 18 peacekeeping missions were set up. In the last 16 years, 14 new missions have been authorized, with the number of personnel (civilians and soldiers) deployed on peacekeeping missions rising from under 20,000 to 80,000, driving up the total peacekeeping budget from \$1.25 billion to over \$5 billion. In effect, the peacekeeping expenditures (most of which are in Africa), amount to more than half of the United Nations spending.

The Secretary-General has initiated a broad-ranging discussion on prevention of armed conflict which has sensitized the United Nations Member States and is starting to yield consensus for specific preventive activities which involve the active United Nations system such as a new mechanism for structural prevention (addressing the socio-economic conditions which could lead to conflict); frequent use of good offices of the Secretary-General and his Special Representatives; special procedures in the field of human rights; the International Tribunals for former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Cambodia Tribunals) have created a cumulative effect, with the standards of legal accountability being strengthened.

Furthermore, the Secretary-General has highlighted the need to build national, sub-regional and regional, as well as international capacity for conflict prevention and resolution. In this regard, he has put forward a number of guiding principles including:

- a. Conflict prevention must have national ownership. International efforts in conflict prevention should therefore focus on assisting in building national capacity in this field.

- b. Conflict prevention and sustainable and equitable development should be seen as mutually reinforcing activities. An investment in national and international efforts for conflict prevention must be seen as a simultaneous investment in development since the latter can best take place in an environment of sustainable peace.
- c. A successful preventive strategy depends upon cooperation among many United Nations actors, including the Secretary-General, the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice and United Nations agencies, offices, funds and programmes, as well as the Bretton Woods institutions. However, the United Nations is not the only actor in prevention and may often not be the actor best placed to take the lead. Therefore, Member States, international, regional and sub-regional organizations, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and other civil society actors also have very important roles to play in this field. Over the past years, the United Nations has developed close working relationships with these actors.

I would like to say a few words about the Peace Building Commission. With respect to the Peace-Building Commission, the new UN body would identify countries at risk of violent conflict, organize prevention efforts, and “marshal and sustain the efforts of the international community in post-conflict peace-building”. This recommendation would involve the Security Council, ECOSOC, donors and national authorities in filling a crucial gap by giving the necessary attention to countries emerging from conflict. We are pleased to note that the Peace-Building Commission is now a reality, and the Peace-Building Support office is also in operation, and that Burundi will be the first country for attention.

With respect to conflict prevention in Africa, the main challenge for the UN and the Security Council is to ensure sustained engagement by Member States to commit the necessary political will and resources to strengthen local, national, regional as well as international capacity for conflict prevention and to develop comprehensive conflict prevention strategies tailored to the needs of the countries and regions concerned.

As the Secretary-General has rightly stressed, this promise will not be realized easily unless it is pursued with singular determination by Africa's leaders. The effort will undoubtedly require leadership, courage and willingness to depart from the ways of the past. Africa should put the prevention of armed conflict at the heart of its effort to unite across old divisions, to build a continent characterized by sustainable peace, the rule of law, and economic progress. It is only then that Africa can break out of the vicious circle of poverty, conflict and under-development, and move into the mainstream of the process of globalization. Fortunately, through the AU, NEPAD and especially the African Peer Review Mechanism, the leaders of the continent are showing new determination to lead the way.

The international community should act to complement these efforts. In this connection, I want to refer to a particular effort of the Secretary-General to help mobilize international support for Africa. Two years ago, he established an Advisory Panel on International Support for NEPAD. The panel issued its first report last year entitled "From Rhetoric to Action: Mobilizing International Support to Africa Potential". The Panel will shortly deliver a follow up report entitled from "Commitments to Results; Moving Forward NEPAD Implementation". These reports are contributing to dialogue and Advocacy in support of Africa's development.

The United Nations is prepared to work with all partners genuinely interested in the welfare of Africa and faith-based institutions like the Church World Service have an important role to play towards this end. Let us use this Summit to reinforce our working relationships and push forward the agenda of securing a better life for the peoples of Africa.

I thank you for your attention.