AFRICA'S MAJOR CHALLENGES AND UNITED NATIONS REFORM AGENDA: IMPLICATIONS FOR UNITED STATES POLICY

ADDRESS
by

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Provost,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to, first of all, express my sincere thanks to the Provost for inviting me to make this presentation on a very important subject, "Africa's Major Challenges and United Nations Reform Agenda: Implications for United States Policy". My presentation will address three main questions. Firstly, what are the major challenges facing Africa? Second, how will the UN Reform Agenda assist Africa in meeting these challenges and finally, what are the implications of the combined efforts by the Africans and the United Nations on US policy?

II Major Challenges and New Threats Facing Africa: Peace and Security; Sustainable Development and Democratisation

Although each of these challenges would be discussed separately, they are clearly interrelated and a holistic perspective would enhance our understanding of the African condition and therefore the multi-dimensional efforts to address them.

(a) Peace and Security

The proliferation of wars and conflicts continues to undermine peace, security and stability in Africa despite the generally positive trend we have witnessed in the last four years. While Africa's longest running wars have
been resolved or being resolved (Angola and North/South conflict in Sudan),
the conflicts in Western Darfur, Côte d'Ivoire and more recently Togo, are
significant set backs to conflict resolution and peace in the continent.
Moreover, the prevalence of endemic poverty; transnational organized
crime; HIV/AIDS pandemic; proliferation of small arms and international
terrorism have also complicated Africa's efforts to meet their peace and
security challenges.

The challenges of peace and security in Africa is also related to the
crisis of governance: the practice of the politics of exclusion, poor economic
management and in some cases, illegal exploitation of natural and mineral
resources, lack of respect for human rights and difficulties with
democratisation. Fortunately, the establishment of the African Union and
progress in the operationalisation of its Peace and Security Council and in
establishing an African Stand-by Force are positive developments. An
African Parliament is now in being and the creation of a New Partnership for
African Development (NEPAD), and its African Peer Review Mechanism
(APRM) for good governance in the political, economic and corporate
sectors, are also positive elements of change for the better in the continent.

International terrorism and the tragic events of September 11, remind
all of us of three main facts: that we live in a dangerously insecure world;
that security is indivisible and finally that the growing indivisibility of
security underscores the need for global cooperation in tackling global
challenges. Moreover, the idea that security is also a function of military
supremacy has been proven wrong and perhaps redundant in this world of
increasing globalisation.
One of the key lessons of September 11 for the West is that the security of the North can no longer be separate from the security of the South. On their part, the Africans realize that when terrorists attacked the US Embassies in Nairobi and Kenya, more Africans were killed than the Americans who were the targets and this has implications for the future. This therefore re-enforces the collective desire to find global solutions to global problems.

Closer cooperation with African nations and multi-dimensional support from the Western partners for capacity building, technology transfer and additional resources are crucial if the continent is to increase its ongoing role and efforts against world terrorism. This would also be in the self-interest of the West. As General Charles Wald, Deputy Commander for the European Command (EUCOM), USAF, said last year at Washington Foreign Press Centre Roundtable on “New initiatives with African Countries,” “terrorist training in the Sahel (in Africa) can be in the United States or Europe in a matter of hours”.

HIV/AIDS has also become a threat to peace, security, as well as development. Indeed, when AIDS emerged over two decades ago, few people could predict the devastating impact that the disease would have. The prevalence rates among people between 25-49 years old exceeds 10% in 16 countries of the subcontinent. Africa is a home of the 70% of the infected adults and 80% of the infected children. AIDS has devastated many communities in Africa, rolled back decades of development and pushed stigmatised groups to the margins of the society. Thus AIDS has destroyed
the social fabric, impeding normal education and transmission of experience from generation to generation to take place. Africa is yet to cope effectively with the issue of treatment of millions of people infected in addition to providing social security to orphan children, as millions of adults continue to fall ill and die, and as household, communities and whole sectors of economy stagger under the burden.

Then there is the problem caused by the proliferation of small arms. It is generally agreed that the problem of illicit trafficking in small arms in Africa is principally a derivative of armed conflicts or post-conflict violence rather than that of organized crime as is the case in Asia and Latin America. There are two additional elements: first, the majority of small arms (79%) are believed to be in civilian hands followed by 16% in the hands of the military and secondly, weapons are trafficked between African countries as conflicts spread throughout regions in the continent (Survey by UN Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs, IRIN, September 3, 2003).

Ineffective disarmament of SALW contributes to insecurity and impedes development, hence, DDR is a critical instrument for the control of SALW. However, progress was made through the adoption at the July 2001 UN Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects. Furthermore, an Open-Ended Working Group at the UN is engaged in the negotiating of an international instrument on this problem and to enhance international cooperation in preventing, combating and eradicating illicit brokering in SALW. The Commission on Africa has also supported the idea of a treaty that would regulate international trade in SALW.
Finally, there is the related issue of Transnational Organized Crime. The global developments that facilitate the circulation of people, goods and services and money also facilitate the transportation of drugs, arms, dirty money and illegal immigrants. Globalization has had the unintended consequence of facilitating the expansion of networks of organized crime and of black markets, which pose challenges for the maintenance of law and order and international security. In relatively weak states with less consolidated institutions, the challenge is even greater. Weak states do not possess effective know-how to conduct proper investigations and devise mechanisms to counteract Transnational Organized Crime.

Many African states have very low levels of law enforcement, yet their economies enable them to offer incentives for the development of good civil service that can resist corruption and favour the rule of law. As a result, their domestic environment facilitates the operation of criminal groups, since most of the criminal activity goes unchecked. In this regard, the conclusion of the UN Convention on Corruption is a welcome development and its ratification and implementation would help Africa address this particular challenge. The decision by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime to organize a Round Table jointly with the African Union in Addis Ababa, May 30-31, 2005, on “The Rule of Law and Protection of the Most Vulnerable: Why Fighting Crime can Assist Development in Africa” is also a positive development.
(b) Poverty reduction and Sustainable Development

Fighting poverty remains a daunting challenge in the continent. Over 42% of Africa's population lives on less than $1.00 a day. Income poverty also rose 40% between 1987 and 1993. Africa is a home of nearly 700 million people but 120 million of her women are illiterate and 150,000 die every year as a result of complication related to pregnancy and 22 million children die before they reach their first birthday.

One major obstacle to Africa's development is, however, the debt overhang. The continent owes more than $200 billion or 80% of its current GNP. Between 1990-1993, payment of the interest on the debt amounted to more than $13 billion a year, considerably more than it spent on education and health. Debt is strangling efforts to get resources into the hands of poor people that would help them to expand their choices to overcome poverty. The heavy debt burden of many countries is robbing them of their sovereignty and impeding their pursuit of economic and social policies. The sad part is that the debt over-hang is hitting on generations that had little or nothing with its contraction. As the UNDP Poverty report observes, the "truth of the matter is that demands of debt servicing are no longer a matter of money, but a source of the excruciating impoverishment of people's lives". A new strategy for combating poverty in Africa must begin with the need to accelerate debt relief. The continent's external debt is the major impediment of mobilising resources that needed to substantially reduce poverty. Although some efforts are currently in place to address the debt, the net impact of debt reduction measures such as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries has been insignificant.
Another factor impinging on the struggle to eradicate poverty in the continent, thus meriting an urgent attention of African countries is the unequal benefit from the globalization process. As globalisation is basically trade driven and Africa's share of world trade has declined from about 4% (1980's) to less than 2% at present, the continent is really at the margins of the process of globalisation. Hence, as a matter of urgency, greater access to European and North American markets for African products is required and Africans must reorganize their production system to take advantage of such market access.

Moreover, Africa's share of private foreign investment continues to decline. From the peak of $10 billion (1982) to about $5 billion (1996). Hence, renewed efforts should be made by the Africans to create conclusive environment for attracting a significantly higher share of global foreign direct investment (FDI). Perhaps, worst of all, a recent World Bank publication showed that "37% of Africa's private wealth is held outside Africa, whereas for Asia, the share is 3% and for Latin America, it is 17% (James D. Wolfensohn" "Africa's Moment", Washington, D.C., 1998). Hence, a sizeable proportion of the Continent's private wealth is not even in Africa to be used for productive purposes for the benefit of Africans. Hence, a critical issue is the need for international cooperation for the repatriation of illegally exported wealth, which is kept in largely Western banks.

Furthermore, any new strategy for partnership with Africa to reduce or eliminate poverty also requires an increase in the levels of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). Unfortunately, few developed countries have met the target of 0.7% of their respective GNPA to be allocated to
ODA. This issue was positively addressed by the Blair commission Report, the Jeffrey Sach's Report on the MDGs and the latest Secretary-General's Report for the 60th UN General Assembly.

(c) **Democratisation, Good Governance and Respect for Human Rights**

Building democracy, promoting good governance and paying attention to human rights and to the fragile state institutions and political structures, especially in war-torn societies and of new democracies in Africa, are of critical importance. In this regard, it is also important to note that while the rationale of the behind the idea of democracy is the need to ensure collective decision-making in problems affecting the polity, nowadays, there is a tendency of over-emphasizing the process rather than the outcome of that process. This tendency subordinates the substantive issues and outcomes to the process and thereby help create the illusion that the mere creation of democratic structure is a panacea to existing problems.

The absence of democracy is related not only to the incidence of conflicts, but to the retardation of socio-economic development in Africa. These crises are a direct consequence of lack of democracy, freedom, politics of exclusion and tyranny by many African governments. However, in some countries the idea of democracy has created political paralysis. In this regard, opposition parties have not always played a constructive role in governance; they have become prisoners of politics of opposition hindering positive actions by governments.
Fragile political structures and institutions need to be strengthened. Moreover, building transparent and accountable systems, encouraging participation and inclusiveness, participating in peace education and building local capacity to manage conflicts are important contributions to peace and development in the continent.

III UN Reform Agenda and its impact in advancing the challenges facing Africa

In an unprecedented meeting at the level of Heads of State and Government in January 1992, the Security Council requested Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to produce a Report, which would position the United Nations to address the challenges in a post-Cold War era. Dr. Boutros-Ghali responded by producing three reports: first, an "Agenda for Peace", which set the steps which the United Nations might take in promoting peace and security in a changing international system. This was followed by a complementary Agenda for Development and subsequently, by the less well known Agenda for Democratisation. Through these Reports, the then Secretary-General argued that without peace, there can be no development; that without development, there can be no durable peace and that without democratisation, there would be neither peace nor development.

Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, has sought to develop further the themes of the three seminal Reports by his predecessor. Among his own important Reports are: "The Causes of Conflict and Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa" (A/52/871-S/1998/318); the implementation of the Brahimi Report on better UN Peace-keeping
Operations; Report to the UN General Assembly on 16 July 1997 titled "Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform", which was subsequently approved by Member States; the Report to the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations (1999) and the current Report, "In Larger Freedom", which was prepared for the 60th Session of the General Assembly in September 2005 and is subject of intense consultations among Member States of the United Nations. Meanwhile, the Secretary-General has also made significant administrative reforms in the Secretariat and promoted greater openness of the United Nations by encouraging the involvement of civil society and the private sector in the work of inter-government bodies. Indeed, as Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan has demonstrated his commitment to a vigorous and comprehensive programme of reform of the UN in order to modernize and prepare it for the challenges of the 21st century.

Furthermore, the Secretary-General created a 16-member Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change in November 2004 with the task of "examining the major threats and challenges the world faces in the broad field of peace and security, including economic and social issues in so far as they relate to peace and security and making recommendations for the elements of a collective response". The Panel has since submitted its Report titled "A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility". Based on the recommendation of this Report and that of Jefferey Sach on the Millennium Project, which resulted in a strategy to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, as well as consultations with Member States and his own reflections, the Secretary-General released on March 21, 2005, a Report
entitled “In Larger Freedom: Toward Development, Security and Human Rights for All”.

The Report puts forward a comprehensive action plan to strengthen the UN’s capacity for tackling poverty, security threats and human rights abuses. The Report presents specific recommendations for national governments on these three subjects and concludes by proposing steps to make the UN “a more effective instrument” for pursuing these priorities. African stands to benefit significantly from the implementation of the recommendations of this Report through helping them to address their major challenges of development; peace, security and stability, the promotion of human rights and the provision of humanitarian assistance to those in need.

In my view, there are a number of positive recommendations from the Panel's Report and endorsed by the Secretary-General's own Report:

- **Conceptual:**

  *The Nexus between peace and development:* The Imperative of the interconnectedness of contemporary threats to security is particularly important. Issues such as terrorism, civil war, and extreme poverty should not be treated in isolation from one another. According to the High-level Panel, "hard" and "soft" security issues should be addressed with equal seriousness. The response to the question of what constitutes a security threat has to do with the political fact of diverse threat perceptions among leaders around the world. The government (or people) of the Central African Republic, for
instance, is not as likely as that of the United States to consider weapons of mass destruction a palpable threat. But poverty and the associated limitations on health and life possibilities are certainly uppermost concerns for all governments and citizens alike. Poverty can, for example, lower life expectancy as dramatically as war.

Development is an “indispensable foundation” of collective security, and the eradication of poverty and disease is an essential part of the effort to achieve a safer world. Industrialized powers worried about terrorism, for instance, should also be concerned about narrowing the gap between rich and poor. Although poverty is not a direct cause of terrorism in any simple, straightforward way, factors such as minimal economic opportunity and a lack of strong governing institutions create conditions which can be more readily exploited by those seeking to recruit new members to terrorist causes.

**Conflict Prevention:**

The Secretary-General's Report contains many proposals to prevent conflict and other global threats, with development as the first line of response. Development, it says, “serves multiple functions. It helps combat the poverty, disease and environmental degradation that kill millions and threaten human security. It is vital in helping states prevent or reverse the erosion of State capacity, a key to meeting almost every class of threat.”
➤ **Peace-building:**

The Report also addresses issues that arise during and after violent conflict, including the capacities needed for peace enforcement, peacekeeping, peace-building and the protection of civilians. It finds the global supply of available peacekeepers dangerously low, and calls on countries to be readier to provide and support military deployments. Developed States especially, it says, should do more to have suitable contingents ready for peace operations, and provide the financial and logistical resources to mobilize them when and where they are needed.

➤ **Proposals for Institutional Change:**

**Peace-building Commission:** The Report recommends the creation of a new UN body, the Peace-Building Commission, which 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.

➤ **Strengthening of the UN:**

The Secretary-General endorsed his High-Level Panel's view that the UN “has been much more effective in addressing the major threats to peace and security than it is given credit for, but that nonetheless major changes are needed” in order to be “effective, efficient and equitable in providing
collective security for all” in the 21st Century. He also supported the Panel's recommendations for significant changes in the Security Council involving the expansion of its membership from 15 to 24 members. In this regard, two options were proposed: one involving the addition of new permanent members with no veto; the other based on new four-year, renewable seats that would be regionally distributed, also without the veto power.

In addition, the Report proposes changes in the General Assembly, ECOSOC and the Commission on Human Rights, and in the UN’s relations with regional organizations. Kofi Annan’s report of March 2005 “In Larger Freedom” went further by calling the Commission’s abolition and the establishment of a smaller Human Rights Council which would meet year-round and have its membership restricted to countries that will “abide by the highest human rights standards”.

➢ Process of Cooperation between the UN and Regional Organizations:

The report identifies the collaboration with regional organizations such as the AU as being crucial and sets out a series of principles that would govern a more structured partnership between them and the UN. The recommendation on the use of assessed contributions by the Security Council to support those peace-keeping operations undertaken under its authority and on its behalf would, for example, be particularly useful to the African Union to enhance its peacekeeping operations in Africa. In addition, a Ten-Year United Nations Action Plan for Capacity Building in
IV Implications for US Policy

The United Nations Reform Agenda implicitly recognizes the need to address the special needs of Africa and this has implications for US policy. For example, on the development side, the Secretary-General's Report assumes the urgent need for policy coherence in international assistance to Africa, which must address the lack of complementarities in debt, aid and trade policies of the developed countries towards the continent. As an illustration and, for a period stretching back over 10 years, ODA to Africa has been almost offset by debt service payments by the Africans. Another example of incoherence is evident in trade and ODA relief whereby for nearly a quarter of a century starting from 1970, the dramatic decline in Africa’s market share amounted to an estimated income loss of $70 billion per annum, almost five times the average annual ODA to Africa. The United States of America could help in finding remedies for this policy incoherency.

The recommendations in the Millennium Declaration Report calling on African states to adopt development strategies bold enough to meet the Millennium Development Goal targets by 2015 can only be met if donors and Africans alike identify the external financing gaps, and fill these through Official Development Assistance and significant debt relief measures. It is hoped that a dozen "MDG fast-track" countries would be designated for a
rapid scale-up of ODA, with more countries being granted such status as soon as they are ready. In the area of trade, it is important that there is a major breakthrough in the next Doha round. In this regard, the broad commitment to trade liberalization by the US Government to advance hope, opportunity, and prosperity by reducing barriers to trade and investment is positive, especially within the context of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), is appropriate.

In general, and as Secretary-General Kofi Annan reminds us, none of the global challenges that faced us on September 10 has become less urgent since the day after. According to him, “The factors that cause the desert to advance, biodiversity to be lost, and the earth’s atmosphere to warm, have not decreased. And in the many parts of the world afflicted by the scourge of war, innocent people have not ceased being murdered or mutilated, dragged or driven from their homes. The number of people living on less than one dollar a day has not decreased. The numbers dying of AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and other preventable diseases have not decreased. In this regard, the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria created to address the health and social crises caused by these diseases is timely. Moreover, it is positive to note that in only three years, the Global Fund has committed US$ 3.3 billion to more than 300 programs in 127 countries, with ninety-seven percent of the funds going to countries with low or very low income and sixty percent of Global Fund grants being approved for programs in sub-Saharan Africa. The United States has demonstrated commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS through its own $15 billion programme put in place by the present Administration.
Therefore, it is our shared responsibility to help make our world a safer, more prosperous and fairer world - one in which Africa is included as a full partner and not left hanging at its margins. That is, after all, the essence of multilateralism and the force that propels the common hopes and aspirations of “we the peoples” of the United Nations. And in partnership with Africa, the United Nations, the USA and other G-8 countries, the European Union and the international community have important roles to play. Such partnerships would cover many areas, including addressing the root causes of conflict in Africa, thereby confirming the nexus between peace and development and enhancing the capacity of African states to engage effectively in conflict management and resolution while building durable peace and security systems. In this regard, the decision by the Millennium Challenge Corporation established by the US Government inviting 16 eligible countries, of which 8 are African, to submit proposals for aid from the Millennium Challenge Account, is a step in the right direction. The bottom line for US policy, in my view, is to partner with African States and their Institutions, such as, the African Union and NEPAD, and make efforts bilaterally and through the United Nations and other multi-lateral organizations to assist the Africans in addressing their continent's main challenges.

V Conclusion

The real question that may be asked is why the rich, developed countries should be concerned about Africa and its problems and prospects? The first answer and the correct one is that it is in fact in their self-interest to
do so. As former President Clinton puts it, Africa matters to the United States not just because 30 million Americans trace their ancestry to Africa but (in part) “because we (Americans) have a strong interest in a stable and prosperous Africa; 13% of our oil comes from Africa and there are 700 million producers and consumers in Sub-Saharan Africa”. And for the Western world in general, he observed further, that “the 21st Century world has been transformed and our views and actions (about Africa) must be transformed accordingly”. Moreover, it is important to re-emphasize that September 11 has shown that global challenges, both old and new, require global responses to address them. For all of us, it is important to recognise that we live in a true, global village. In short, the agenda of peace, development and human rights set for us in the Millennium Declaration and re-affirmed in the latest Secretary-General's Report is no less pressing.” These are also the main challenges which Africa is grappling with and for which the support of the United States and the international community is essential in the context of a new partnership.

I thank you for listening.