

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY H.E. DR BERNARD ZOBA,
COMMISSIONER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENERGY IN THE
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION, AT THE UNITED NATIONS
SYMPOSIUM ON HYDROPOWER
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

BEIJING (CHINA), 27 - 29 OCTOBER 2004

- **Excellencies,**
- **Distinguished delegates,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is a singular honor and privilege for me to speak before this august assembly of eminent persons.

First of all, allow me, on behalf of the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, His Excellency Professor Alpha Oumar KONARE to convey to you the sincere thanks and profound gratitude of the Commission for the invitation to the Symposium on Hydropower and Sustainable Development.

The Commission of the African Union would like to salute the Government of the People's Republic of China, and the people of this country, for the warm hospitality that we have enjoyed since our arrival in Beijing and for the effort to make this Symposium a reality.

The African Union appreciates the truly excellent friendship which has always existed between China and the countries of Africa, as well as the great contribution that China has unfailingly made to the development of the continent. In this regard, it would be appropriate to recall the Second Ministerial Forum on the China-Africa Cooperation, held in December 2003 in Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia, headquarters of the African Union.

Our thanks go as well to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As you know, the provision of affordable energy constitutes one of the best means to combat poverty.

Bearing in mind its importance for households to meet their domestic needs as well as for industry and transportation systems which consume massive amounts, energy constitutes a key element that has to be taken into account in the formulation of development policy in the world.

The situation in the energy sector in Africa is particularly characterized by the evident paradox between the considerable existing potential and the minimal access to energy that people have. This situation is mainly explained by a shortage of technical capacity and financial resources to enable the exploitation of the energy resources and their optimal utilization, as well as the insufficient interconnections between networks.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The holding of this Symposium on the topic of hydropower comes at a very important time for Africa.

In fact, at a time when the petroleum sector, which has for a long time been and which still remains the primary source of energy, is experiencing significant price increases and environmental problems, renewable energy constitutes one of the best alternatives for the future.

For Africa in particular, the high price of electricity generated from traditional sources is a reason to move towards the exploitation of renewable energy with a view to enhancing access to the majority of the population and to ensure development and modernization of African countries.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This Symposium on hydropower is taking place at an important time for the African Union.

I would like to seize this opportunity to convey to this forum some views of the continental organization.

The African Union, on whose behalf I have the privilege to speak and which was formed in 2002, is responsible for economic, social and cultural development, the promotion of peace, security and good governance as well as the acceleration of the process of integration of the continent of Africa.

By creating the African Union and adopting the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as a program of the Union, the African Heads of States have proved their determination and commitment to propel Africa into the new

millennium. The establishment of the African Union and the NEPAD are essential for the realization of the common vision: **“Of an integrated Africa, prosperous and peaceful, supported by its citizens and constituting a dynamic force on the international scene.”**

In the domain of energy, the challenge for the Union and its NEPAD program consists of putting in place an integrated energy infrastructure to make the most of the energy resources of the continent with a view to supplying energy that is affordable, capable of stimulating economic development and improving the lives of the populations of the continent, while ensuring sustainable protection of the environment.

In that perspective, the African Union intends to promote renewable energy through the development and construction of large regional hydroelectric dam projects. The Great Inga dam project on the River Congo in the Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the large priority projects planned by the African Union and NEPAD. The realization of this project would ensure the satisfaction of the energy consumption of practically the entire African continent.

The African Union also intends to support the development of sub-regional power pools and the interconnection of electricity networks with the eventual aim of having a transmission network interconnecting the whole continent.

At the same time, despite the low utilization of other renewable energy sources, the African Union is also going to promote their development, as these energy sources have a role to play particularly with respect to rural electrification.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This august gathering is composed, as I have already mentioned, of illustrious persons in the area of hydropower. I have no doubt that the Symposium will formulate appropriate recommendations, which, I hope, will provide a renewed impetus to the development of hydropower in African countries.

The African Union will play its role in pleading the case for hydropower before the international financial institutions and development partners with a view to mobilizing the resources necessary for financing regional hydroelectric integration projects and put in place the mechanisms necessary for promoting the development of other sources of renewable energy.

I wish the Symposium every success and thank you for your kind attention.