

United Nations High-Level Meeting on Africa's Development Needs – Speech by M. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the Republic

New York, 22 September 2008

I would like first to thank the Secretary-General for the very complete report he has prepared on Africa's development needs.

Africa has started to move again. The continent has found the way back to growth. Since 1994 its average annual growth rate has been close to 5%. It is still accelerating today and is expected to be over 6% in 2008. The volume of external investments has just exceeded – which is a good thing – that of official development assistance. The perception of Africa is changing.

Nevertheless, this economic growth remains very theoretical for a majority of Africans: it is a statistical fact, not yet a fact of daily life for people in Africa.

The continent is indeed confronted with many challenges: the food crisis and effects of climate change. Then above all, there is the observation in the Secretary-General's report, one which must concern us all: no African country, none, is on schedule to meet all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). None.

Europe wants to be involved alongside Africa. The 27 European Union Member States recently reiterated, collectively, very clear commitments with respect to aid. We have confirmed the EU's target of devoting 0.7% of our wealth to official assistance in 2015. A real agenda for action between now and 2015 has been drawn up and we will debate it on 25 September at the special high-level meeting on the Millennium Goals convened by the UN Secretary-General. We also want to do more when it comes to the global partnership for agriculture and food.

But let things be clear, the aid Europe has decided to provide Africa is not simply an emotional response, it is in the first place rational. Since we know, we Europeans, that helping Africa's development is first of all an investment in our common future.

The world, the globalized world needs a developed Africa. The European Union, a direct neighbour of the African continent, needs the development of Africa.

What would be the point of working for the security and stability of the European Union if we didn't seek to eliminate the existing gap between Europe and Africa!

What an illusion also to envisage Europe's prosperity without working for the emergence of a major economic partner 14 kilometres from its coasts; a partner whose population in 2030 will be greater than that of India or China!

What an illusion to claim to ensure world food security without making the most of Africa's agricultural resources: so it can feed itself first, but also help feed the world!

This is why we will continue resolutely to work to achieve the MDGs. There are still 70 million children to send to school; 900 million people suffer from undernutrition and malnutrition.

They live in Africa; 23 million people live with AIDS and every five minutes ten African children die from malaria. This is why education and health will remain at the centre of our aid strategies for Africa.

But let things be clear here too. Meeting the Millennium Goals is necessary, necessary. But meeting the MDGs is not enough to make a lasting reduction in poverty, ensure sustainable growth in Africa and create jobs.

We must help Africa transform its agriculture, especially family agriculture. Africa needs a "double green" revolution, that of yields and that of conserving its environment.

Private initiative in Africa must be unleashed. Businesses, particularly African SMEs, have the greatest capacity to generate jobs. Yet Africa does not have enough businesses.

The President of Liberia, Ms Johnson-Sirleaf, recently proposed putting the private sector at the centre of development and supplementing the Millennium Goals with competitive goals for development. I can only subscribe to this welcome proposal.

NEPAD, a decision Africa took, was the first to affirm the close link between governance, growth and the fight against poverty. Good management of public affairs is essential to bring about the "African renaissance".

Development implies essential political preconditions. There won't be development without peace, there won't be development without security and, even, there won't be development without the accountability of governments to their citizens.

I would like to denounce any temptation to present transparency and respect for human rights as outside, unnecessary conditionalities imposed by donors.

Democracy and respect for human rights are deep-seated aspirations of the African peoples themselves.

Were they not, these motives, at the heart of the wars for independence and the struggle against apartheid carried out by the Africans themselves?

I would like to issue an appeal, one that goes for us all: together, let us avoid repeating the errors of the past.

I am thinking in the first place of debt. Our collective efforts since the end of the 1990s reduced Africa's external debt by 25%. Because Africa's debt had been reduced by 25%, Africa has recovered some room to manoeuvre for public investments and the social sectors.

Let's guard against a too rapid and too costly public re-indebtedness. Let's not set the stage today for a new African debt crisis in 2030.

I am also thinking of the utilization and sustainable management of Africa's natural resources. Just because the terms of trade have improved is not a reason for Africa to have to be locked into only exporting raw materials.

Lastly, donors and recipients of aid must increase their efforts to coordinate and harmonize their actions. We have a duty to achieve greater efficiency.

At a time when the Secretary-General recommends that we speed up recourse to budget support, I ask the question: why do we see new donors – who are welcome – increasing project-based aid? Europeans and Africans have agreed on untying aid. Why then go back on this principle with donors from other continents? The same causes will produce the same results. Let's not start again making the errors of the past.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We all perceive that Africa is at a turning point today. Africa must be able to take full advantage of the new opportunities being presented to it.

It is in our common interest that it should succeed. You have my assurance that the whole of Europe will be at Africa's side to encourage the development of Africa which the world needs to enjoy peace, prosperity and stability.

Thank you.