

28 January 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Institut des Relations Internationales du Cameroun (IRIC)
“Africa: An Essential Partner in a Global World”**

Your Excellency Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon,
Very Honourable Cavayé Yéguié Djibril, President of the National Assembly of Cameroon,
Distinguished Ministers,
Professor Narcisse Mouelle Kombi, Director of the Institut des Relations Internationales du Cameroun,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I thank you, from the bottom of my heart, on my own behalf and on that of the delegation accompanying me, for the warm welcome you have accorded us.

I have already had occasion to visit many countries in Africa, both as a member of the Swiss Government and as a private citizen, a tourist. This visit to Cameroon is, however, my first visit to your continent in my capacity as President of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

I am particularly glad to be here because, among other reasons, Cameroon is a country that has contributed richly to the United Nations both practically and symbolically. Our ties date back to the earliest days of the Organization, when the Trusteeship Council began contributing to the shaping of the country in 1946. When it gained independence in 1960, Cameroon became a member of our Organization.

Our relations have developed with each passing year. Cameroon now plays its part as a fully fledged member of the community of nations. In Côte d'Ivoire, in Haiti, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon is contributing effectively to United Nations peacekeeping operations. You also generously host many refugees on your soil. Cameroon takes an active role in the deliberations of the General Assembly. During the current session, it is chairing the Third Committee, whose work is at the heart of United Nations activities. In 2001, Cameroon performed admirably as president of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations; it has also served two terms on the Security Council: in 1974-1975 and in 2002-2003, acquitting itself well in a period that is considered one of the most difficult in international relations since the end of the cold war, mainly owing to the war in Iraq.

It is my hope that, in speaking to all of you here this afternoon, I can send a message to all of Africa. Your country, of whose remarkable ethnic, linguistic, geographical, cultural and religious diversity you can be proud, is a veritable Africa in miniature, and thus an ideal place for me to do so.

Over the years, Cameroon has become a solid, respected and appreciated partner, and it is in its image that, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, fifty years after the wave of independence that swept

across it, the continent of Africa as a whole is proving itself to be an essential partner in our global world.

The economy of the continent reflects its dynamism: in 2010, with a growth rate of 4.7 per cent, the GNP of sub-Saharan Africa has almost reached its level prior to the economic and financial crisis. A number of African countries, such as Angola, Nigeria, Mozambique and Rwanda, have been among the most vigorous economies on the planet for the past decade. Capital flowing into the continent, especially direct investments, has remained largely unaffected by the crisis, and South-South flows continue to play a growing role.

The World Bank is forecasting a 5.3 per cent growth rate for 2011. Africa would thus be better off than the Western countries or those of Latin America. The most optimistic are predicting growth rates similar to or better than the Asian tiger economies. Cameroon is not doing quite as well in this regard, but it should experience vigorous growth over the medium term.

I wish to commend you here on your initiative to hold a conference on development issues in Africa. That conference, which was attended by my predecessor, led to the Yaoundé Declaration of 19 May 2010, a major document concerning Africa's economic, social and human development, a declaration signed by the many African Heads of State and eminent international figures who had responded to your call.

Your initiative was a timely contribution that has bolstered the efforts by the international community to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals, held in New York in September 2010, showed that the international community will, by and large, fulfil the commitment it made in the year 2000 to halve extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Admittedly, the situation is more complicated at the regional level, with delays in a number of areas in sub-Saharan Africa. But there too, the overall performance masks a variety of successes, such as advances in the number of children in school in Cameroon and in Malawi, the reduction in infant mortality in Eritrea, and the struggle against hunger in Ghana, to cite but a few examples.

Combating poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals are one of the priorities of the agenda of the 65th session of the General Assembly. In September, the international community clearly reaffirmed its commitment to achieve the Goals. We must now ensure that these words are transformed into action, with a view to attaining a true partnership. Lenders must fulfil their obligations in the area of public aide for development. In the developing countries, the adoption of budgets clearly prioritizing public expenditures for the Millennium Development Goals is an essential responsibility of national legislatures.

The General Assembly will contribute to the follow-up of the Millennium Development Goals, most notably with a special session in 2013, but also throughout the present session, by deepening certain aspects connected with development.

It is particularly important to ensure that improvements in the living conditions of the very poorest are sustainable. Key elements in that regard are investment in productive activities and the creation of jobs.

I am pleased to note in this connection that the growth and employment strategy paper adopted by the Government of Cameroon is organized around the development of productive sectors and infrastructure.

The economy of Cameroon and all African economies certainly have potential. It is simply a matter of creating the conditions that will enable them to realize that potential. The quality of institutions and of the policies implemented at the national and regional levels will be the determining factor. Rule of law, respect for democratic institutions and the protection of property rights are crucial to fostering a civil society in which people are able to exercise their rights. They are also crucial to garnering investment and enhancing the mobilization of domestic resources. Productive capacity-building will be one of the issues discussed in Istanbul in May during the summit on the least-developed countries, a group to which many African countries belong. I hope that the General Assembly will contribute its ideas and I plan to hold an informal thematic debate in New York in March on the conditions conducive to the development of the private sector in the least developed countries.

To consolidate the progress made in poverty reduction, economic development must be sustainable over the long term and must not, through the overuse of resources, jeopardize the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Sustainable development and the concept of the green economy are a second major thematic focus on the agenda of the General Assembly. I am convinced that the African economies have an opportunity at hand to draw lessons on development from the industrialized countries and to establish more sustainable economic structures without repeating the same mistakes. I hope that the programme for energy sector development being implemented by the Government of Cameroon, which gives the lead role to renewable energy sources, will serve as a model.

Greening the economy requires spurring innovation and developing affordable low-carbon technologies. It is necessary to mobilize financial resources, facilitate technology transfer and focus on training and capacity-building. I intend to organize an informal thematic debate in New York in May in order to raise awareness about the importance and the potential of the green economy and to respond to concerns that have been raised about it.

Poverty reduction and sustainable development are crucial themes not only for the future of Africa, but also for the whole world. Our common welfare is at stake. In the globalized world of the twenty-first century, problems no longer have a passport and we can no longer ignore what is happening elsewhere, be it pandemics, migration or international terrorism. Global strategies are required to meet these new challenges. This calls for a system of global governance that is effective, inclusive and representative - the third thematic priority of this sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly.

Progress in this area cannot help but benefit Africa, whose representation in informal groups such as the G-20 falls far short of its actual importance.

In my view, the cornerstone of this system of governance is clearly the United Nations. The General Assembly enjoys legitimacy owing to the size of its membership and its system of “one country, one vote”, which guarantees that even the smallest countries have a voice.

But there is a growing risk today that the United Nations will be sidelined as other entities come to the fore on the international stage. The Organization is criticized for lacking efficiency and agility. Urgent decision-making seems easier and faster within a narrower forum. That has led to the emergence of the G-8, the G-20 and other informal consultative groups.

There is no question that these new entities are useful. The rapid and coordinated response by the G-20 to the economic and financial crisis was a clear illustration of that. The question that arises concerns how representative and legitimate they actually are. We must ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place for communication, consultation and cooperation between the United Nations and these entities. These mechanisms should also extend to the private sector, civil society and academia, whose close contact with the people, diverse views and independent analysis make them important stakeholders in global governance.

As the first step towards that end, I organized informal debates of the General Assembly before and after the G-20 summit in Seoul. The goal was to give all Member States, whether or not they had been invited to participate in the Seoul summit, an institutional framework within which to receive information about the G-20 agenda from the Secretary-General and the host country and to discuss the outcome. I am certain that the bridge-building between the United Nations community and the G-20 will continue this year under the French presidency.

I am pleased that last December the General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution on the United Nations and global governance sponsored by some one hundred Member States, including many African States. This resolution shows how important our Organization is to its Member States and will allow us to continue working after the sixty-fifth session to reassert the central role of the United Nations in global governance.

I often compare the United Nations with my country, Switzerland, which would not exist without its cantons. Without its Member States, the United Nations would not exist. The sole source of United Nations strength is the commitment of Member States to making it a powerful instrument of global governance. The Member States must act responsibly and adopt the necessary reforms that will enable the United Nations to play that central role in global governance.

This applies in particular to the revitalization of the General Assembly. Regional organizations such as the African Union have an important role to play in forging consensus among its member States and facilitating the emergence and adoption of solutions. Reform of the Security Council to ensure that this body better reflects the new world order is another important issue for Africa. A constructive and realistic approach by all parties is crucial to the success of the negotiations. The review of the work of the Human Rights Council must also be completed in order to allow this fundamental United Nations body to focus on its primary mandate of promoting and protecting human rights.

Regional organizations - the African Union, which I have already mentioned, as well as subregional organizations such as ECOWAS and SADC – are an important pillar of global governance. Subsidiarity should apply and problems that can be solved regionally or subregionally should be tackled at those levels. I wish to stress the positive role that these entities can play in ensuring the proper functioning of democratic institutions and enhancing political governance in Africa. The crisis in Côte d'Ivoire shows how important regional engagement is in promoting stability.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To tackle global challenges and promote the fundamental values enshrined in the United Nations Charter, it is crucial to be able to count on Africa as a partner. The economic, demographic and political recalibration of the world order now under way and the burgeoning role of the African continent on the international stage are giving rise to new hope, but they also bring with them new responsibilities.