

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO AFRICA DIALOGUE SERIES

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[as delivered]

Excellencies, Friends,

I am pleased to join you for this dialogue on Africa's future.

I welcome your focus on cultural identity.

This builds on the African Union's theme for this year, highlighting the importance of arts, culture and heritage in building the Africa we want.

Culture is the flower of the human being – the fruit of our minds, the product of our traditions, the expression of our yearnings.

Its diversity is wondrous, part of the rich tapestry of civilization.

Culture is also a powerhouse – an employer of millions, an engine of economic progress, a force for social cohesion.

Aspiration 5 of Africa's Agenda 2063 envisions a continent with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics.

It is a call for using the continent's rich and diverse cultural and natural heritage as a catalyst for Africa's growth and transformation.

It is the right appeal at the right time.

With spreading hatred and intolerance around the world, we must not only defend diversity but invest in it.

Societies today are multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural.

This is a richness, not a threat.

But we need to ensure that every community feels that their identity – their culture – is being respected.

To confront today's complex challenges, we need to find better ways to redress the ills of the past that have bred mistrust and division.

An emphasis on culture, heritage and shared values can help build unity and common purpose.

These are needed more than ever as the continent works to overcome the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic and pursue peaceful, sustainable development.

We need to move towards sustainable economic growth that protects the environment, promotes human rights and strengthens the social contract.

And we need a stronger sense of solidarity and multilateral cooperation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and leave no one behind.

Now for that to be possible, we also need to express a very clear solidarity with the African continent in this dramatic moment in which we are still under the terrible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have been saying time and time again it is totally unacceptable that vaccines are not now fully available to the African continent, that Africa is dramatically lagging behind in vaccination because of a lack of vaccines available to the African continent.

I do believe that vaccines must be affordable and available everywhere and that is the reason why I have been insisting with the G20 countries to create a global vaccination plan to reach everybody everywhere and to create a taskforce, an emergency taskforce to make sure that all the countries that produce or can produce vaccines and simultaneously the international organizations like WHO or GAVI and also the international financial institutions allowing to have a direct dialogue with the pharmaceutical industry in order to make sure that we are able to double the production of vaccines and at the same time to have a network of distribution of those vaccines. But of course, vaccination is very important but not enough.

I am worried to see in the projections of the IMF and the World Bank that there is an expected growth of the international economy of 6% this year but only 3.2% if I remember well in the African continent. It is absolutely essential that African countries receive the financial support they need at the present moment to protect their citizens and to be able to relaunch their economies.

And this means that the Special Drawing Rights have to be issued should be put at the disposal of the African continent and that means that effective debt relief not only for least developed countries but for all developing countries and middle-income countries that need it – that effective debt relief be put at the disposal of African countries.

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