

## ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF SOUTH AFRICA, MR THABO MBEKI, AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OSLO, NORWAY, 13 May 2002

President and Vice Chancellor,  
Friends of Africa,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen.

It is an honour and pleasure for me to address this august gathering today. I bring you warm greetings from the government and the people of South Africa.

In June 1988, Oliver Tambo, the past President of the African National Congress and one of the foremost leaders of our continent, a fearless leader of our people whose sacrifices have ensured the liberation of our country, addressed a conference on 'War on Want', in London, organised by the British-based charity organisation with the same name.

He said:

"Those of us who come from southern Africa know the true meaning of mass abject poverty. We have seen with our own eyes, and perhaps experienced personally, what it means to go without food and to wake up from sleep that has been tormented by nightmares deriving both from hunger and the knowledge that the new day was as much without hope as the last. We have seen the frightened and pleading eyes of both the young and old, reduced to an animal condition by want and deprivation. We are familiar with the tragic spectacle of children, mothers and fathers rummaging through refuse heaps in search of morsels of food that have been thrown away because they are no longer wanted.

"Stomachs distended to the point of bursting; eyes protruding sightless from deep sockets; legs so thin you wonder how they ever managed to support a body that is itself covered by scabs and festering sores; all this is the result of man-made conditions that condemn millions to a life of hunger, homelessness, disease, ignorance and absence of protection from cold, heat, rain and the parching winds of the winter's end."

*(Oliver Tambo's unpublished Speeches, Interviews and Papers, pp607-608).*

When Oliver Tambo made these remarks, Namibia and South Africa were still fighting for freedom. Clearly, one of the challenges for our people in this war against want in 1988, was to ensure that our countries achieve freedom so that the foundation could be laid to address the 'man-made conditions that condemn millions to a life of hunger, homelessness, disease, ignorance and absence of protection from cold, heat, rain and the parching winds of the winter's end'.

In that struggle for freedom, the people of Norway have occupied the front-line with our people and stood side by side with us until we attained freedom. We say thank you once more because we will not tire to express our profound gratitude for your selfless solidarity with our cause.

Many of our people joined the struggle for freedom because it was not possible to continue with a life that was tormented by nightmares deriving both from hunger and the knowledge that the new day was as much without hope as the last.

As we achieved freedom, many people on the African continent, from different stations in life; workers, business people, the intelligentsia, women, youth, politicians and ordinary people, were also speaking with a unified voice that we no longer want to see our stomachs distended to the point of bursting; our eyes cannot continue to protrude sightlessly from deep sockets; and we need stronger legs so that no one can wonder how these legs manage to support our bodies.

Accordingly, we began to speak about the need for the renaissance of Africa, because the mass of our people, across the length and breadth of our continent, were themselves saying: Now is the Time!

To achieve the required sustainable and integrated development and the eradication of poverty, the leadership of the African continent pledged to be at the forefront of this new struggle.

This new struggle is against underdevelopment, poverty as well as the social exclusion and economic marginalisation of Africa and Africans from the globalising world.

When Oliver Tambo spoke so passionately about the need to bring to an end the tragic spectacle of children, mothers and fathers rummaging through refuse heaps in search of morsels of food, he was referring to the hundreds of millions of Africans who live on less than US\$1 per day.

As we know, the conditions that gave rise to the tragic spectacle that Tambo spoke about include the systematic impoverishment of the African continent that derived from the legacy of slavery, colonialism, cold war, the workings of the international economic system and the inadequacies and shortcomings of the policies of many countries after independence.

Because Africa has been the supplier of cheap labour and raw materials to the industrialised nations, she was not able to develop because, of necessity, the skewed relationship that she had with countries in Europe and the Americas was draining the much-needed resources of many African countries.

Whereas the available resources could have been used to build and develop manufacturing industries as well as training a skilled labour force, the opposite happened.

In many countries, the colonial power had a deliberate and conscious policy of discouraging, retarding and frustrating the emergence of a middle class with skills and managerial capacity as well as an entrepreneurial class.

Consequently, at independence most countries did not have the necessary skilled leadership to steer the national economies in the right direction.

Concomitantly, almost all the peoples inherited countries with weak state institutions, which in some instances were further destroyed by poor, corrupt and inefficient political leadership.

The cold war and the subjective and selfish interests of the superpowers discouraged democracy and accountable governments.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development seeks to address these and many other conditions that have contributed to the abject poverty and underdevelopment that define the lives of many Africans.

In July this year, we will launch the African Union (AU), which must replace the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The African Union has been structured in such a manner that it must ensure that the objectives contained in the New Partnership for Africa's Development are achieved. I will return to the AU later.

Although a fair share of our problems have been imposed on us by people other than Africans, we believe that we will adequately address our challenges if we all draw the necessary conclusions from our past experiences, while being forward-looking, drawing on all the resources at our disposal, forging strategic and mutually-beneficial partnerships and refusing to be conditioned by circumstance.

Through the New Partnership, we are not merely expressing a grand vision whose possible realisation lies in a dim and distant future. Instead, by agreeing collectively that, first and foremost, the political leadership should make a clear and unequivocal commitment to a set of fundamental requirements for the growth and development of our countries, individually and collectively, we will ensure that we do not postpone the regeneration of our continent.

These requirements include amongst others:

- The promotion and entrenchment of democracy, accountable government, a culture of human rights and popular participation in the system of governance;
- The strengthening of mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution at the sub-regional and continental levels, and ensuring that these mechanisms are used to restore and maintain peace;
- Restoring and maintaining macroeconomic stability, especially by developing appropriate standards and targets for fiscal and monetary policies and introducing appropriate institutional frameworks to achieve these standards;
- Instituting transparent legal and regulatory frameworks for financial markets and the auditing of private companies and the public sector;
- Revitalising and extending the provision of education, technical training, ensuring food security and adequate health services, with high priority given to addressing the problems of Malaria, AIDS, TB and other communicable diseases;
- Promoting the role of women in social and economic development by reinforcing their capacity in the domains of education and training; ensuring that they have access to credit and ensuring their full participation in the political and economic life of our countries;

- Building the capacity of the states in Africa so that they are able to discharge their development functions and ensure good governance;
- Promoting the development of infrastructure, agriculture and its diversification into agro-industries and manufacturing to serve both domestic and export markets;
- Promoting access to the benefits of modern science, including information and communication technology and biotechnology; and,
- Protecting the environment.

Although the headlines about Africa are mainly about negative developments, in reality, the New Partnership emerges in an era of profound proliferation of democracy on the African continent. The number of multi-party elections that have taken place and the increased volumes of people participating in these democratic processes since the 1990s, is an unprecedented phenomenon in the recent history of Africa.

Of course, there are still imperfections and instances where countries should improve on their democratic processes. However, anyone with a knowledge of Africa will agree that democracy is spreading and has been consolidated in many countries.

At the same time, we are committed to ensure that we strengthen the new democratic systems of governance that have emerged. In this regard, we will, through this New Partnership, undertake a process of targeted capacity-building initiatives that deepen democracy and accountability. These institutional reforms will focus on:

- Conflict prevention, management and resolution mechanisms;
- Administrative and civil services;
- Strengthening parliamentary oversight;
- Promoting participatory decision-making;
- Adopting effective measures to combat corruption; and
- Undertaking judicial reforms.

Further, the commitment of African leaders to democracy is evident in the decision of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) not to recognise leaders who come to power through military means.

Together with the spread of democracy, there has emerged a new leadership that refuses to accept the conditions plaguing our people and accordingly has resolved to ensure that poverty, lack of human rights, absence of democracy, conflicts and wars will no longer be the defining features of our continent.

These Africans have chosen to act together to change the lot of their continent, and have come to a correct determination that they should take the destiny of their continent into their own hands. To this end, commitments are being made to a set of political governance and democracy standards.

Furthermore, there is a need to provide the political space for civil society to speak strongly and to become active agents of change in the development and reconstruction process of our continent.

As we move forward, the New Partnership must in reality make us to work differently and ensure that we build enduring partnerships between the different sections of our societies: between the public and private sectors, between workers and business people.

Some may ask: what is the difference between this plan and the previous ones?

Indeed this is not the first development plan for Africa. At the same time, however, NEPAD is new in the sense that for the first time, African leaders have taken the initiative and have themselves conceptualised the programme for the reconstruction of our continent and have assumed responsibility for its implementation.

Of importance, is the fact that these leaders have agreed on the need for an African Peer Review Mechanism to ensure that together we are able to reflect on the manner in which each one of us works, in accordance with the agreements that are important for the development of our countries.

In other words, Africa has moved beyond words to concrete action plans that are being articulated for implementation by the African leaders. This has indeed introduced a new approach to issues and a new way of doing things.

Without any doubt, this is one of the most important characteristics distinguishing NEPAD from previous development plans. It is critical that the initiative also be popularised among the masses of Africa's peoples to ensure its sustainability.

We are also seized of the important matters of peace and stability on the continent, because, as we have already indicated, this is one of the central and fundamental requirements for the success of the New Partnership.

Accordingly, as a practical demonstration of this commitment, South Africa has been deeply involved in the search for peace in Burundi. In support of the peace process, we have dispatched soldiers to the Republic of Burundi and have worked closely with the leadership of the countries of east and central Africa as well as the leaders of the different political formations in Burundi, to ensure that we banish, forever, the indecency of war and conflict from the lives of the Burundi. I am confident that we are on course to achieve lasting peace in that country.

Again, before we came here we held on-going negotiations with representatives of political organisations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as we continue to seek a solution that will bring democracy and an end to war and ensure that our brothers and sisters in that country also live in peace and harmony. In support of this process, South Africa has deployed its forces as part of the United Nations peacekeeping efforts in the DRC.

We are also encouraged by the steps and progress towards peace in Angola, and we will do whatever is possible to strengthen this important process towards the normalisation and stabilisation of this sister country. It is our fervent wish that the people of Angola - millions of whom have never known life without war - will now have a chance to rebuild their lives.

As in the past, we will continue to assist the people of Zimbabwe to achieve reconciliation, and hope that we will all do whatever is necessary to ensure that Zimbabwe returns to stability, as together we address, in earnest, the problems that have contributed to the conflict and instability in that country.

Shortly, Lesotho will be holding new general elections at the end of a period of adjustment to overcome a conflict that engulfed the country after the last elections.

As we engage the various antagonists in these conflict situations, we are guided by our resolve to promote long-term stability for development and security, as well as building the capacity of our institutions for early warning, and ensuring that they are able to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts.

In addition, we are strengthening regional and sub-regional institutions, so as to be more effective in the above-mentioned challenges and also succeed in areas of:

- Peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peace enforcement;
- Post-conflict reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction; and
- Combating the illicit proliferation of small arms, light weapons and land-mines.

Chairperson,

Good economic governance is an important aspect of our programme for the economic growth and development of our countries. Necessarily, this means that the different states must put in place the appropriate mechanisms to realise this objective.

Institutional capacity building is crucial in this regard, as many states lack the capacity to achieve sound economic governance. Through the New Partnership, a set of codes and standards based on best practice are being developed to guide states in their macro-economic policy-making and management of public revenues and expenditure.

Resources will be mobilised for capacity building to enable countries to be in a better position to comply with the mutually agreed actions.

Chairperson,

The overwhelming majority of the people of Africa live in rural areas. Sadly, the agrarian systems are mainly weak, unproductive or even non-existent. Add the often hostile and harsh climatic conditions and lack of infrastructure, and we then have a basket of conditions that perpetuate poverty and underdevelopment.

Even in instances where African farmers have a comparative and competitive advantage, the biases in economic policy, instabilities in world commodity prices and the huge subsidies that the developed countries give to their farmers militate against any possible progress for African farmers.

Yet, there are a number of challenges that we have to address urgently, including:

- The urgent need to achieve food security by addressing the deficiencies in agricultural systems, so that food production can be increased and nutritional standards raised;
- To improve the agricultural performance and increase the purchasing power of rural people;

- To embark on a comprehensive programme of developing arable land and availing irrigation equipment to rural people so as to address the main constraint of climatic uncertainty;
- To work on a programme of improving the rural infrastructure, roads, electrification, etc.
- To ensure institutional support in the form of research centres and institutions and provide and extend support services; and
- To encourage the bilateral and multilateral donors to pay the necessary attention to agriculture as part of a comprehensive programme of rural development.

In this regard, it is important that the imbalances in international trade are addressed. It remains an inexcusable shame that \$1 billion a day is used to subsidise the farmers of developed countries and that a \$300 billion annual subsidy is given to European farmers. This is four times the money spent on development assistance to all developing countries. Such a situation cannot be allowed to continue.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to reform the global political, economic, financial and trade environment to ensure a more equitable voice for Africa in global decision-making institutions and to make the global institutions more responsive to Africa's needs. There is a vital need to address issues of market access, agricultural subsidies and non-tariff barriers, as well as issues of intra-African trade.

Financing issues will also have to be addressed, including the need to reform and streamline the donor-recipient relationship and delivery systems, to meet the internationally agreed targets for development assistance, to address the unsustainable debt burden facing many African states, and to promote Africa as a destination for private sector investment.

Another important area being addressed under NEPAD is the issue of using Information and Communication Technology to leapfrog the development of the continent forward. In order for Africa to benefit from the globalisation process and the information age, ICT infrastructure development on the continent is vital.

Lastly, central to the New Partnership is the empowerment of women in all programmes. The question of gender equality is at the heart of everything we do. More than half the population in Africa is made up of women. It therefore remains critical that these women, who till the land, who are responsible for the well being of their families, who constitute a critical mass in Africa, should be involved in the programme of political, economic, social and cultural renewal of the African continent.

As I have indicated earlier, we are transforming the OAU into the African Union so that we have a continental organisation that has structures, processes and programmes that are relevant to the challenges imposed by the new global conditions.

The Organisation of African Unity, which has served the continent well, particularly in fostering unity and solidarity, in assisting in the struggle for freedom and independence and ensuring the decolonisation of Africa, will in July 2002 cease to exist.

The African Union will in a practical way deal with issues such as:

- Greater unity, solidarity and the socio-economic integration of the continent;
- Promotion of peace, security and stability on the continent;
- Promotion of democratic principles and institutions of popular participation and good governance;
- Promotion, protection and prevention of the violation of human and peoples' rights in accordance with the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights and other human rights instruments; and
- The promotion of co-operation in all fields of human activity to raise the living standards of the African people.

To ensure that the African Union succeeds in its work and realises its mandate, a number of critical structures will be put in place, and will deal with a variety of critical issues that will ensure that the continent moves forward with regard to accountable governance, the promotion and protection of human rights, the maintenance of peace and stability and the facilitation of economic growth and development.

Clearly, the time has never been more opportune to move forward and implement the vision and dream of a prosperous Africa and eradicate the terrible legacy of our past and the burden of poverty and underdevelopment. I am sure that we all agree that it is time to move from grand statements to concrete action, to help give re-birth to Africa with hope, peace and development.

Norway and the other Nordic states have traditionally been reliable partners in support of Africa, particularly during the period of struggle against colonialism, apartheid and white minority domination. You are amongst the foremost donor states currently supporting development efforts on the continent. I have just attended the second South Africa - Nordic Summit with your Prime Minister and the Heads of Government of the other Nordic countries. This is a follow-up to the last Summit held in June 2000 in Skagen, Denmark.

The Skagen Declaration was an important step at the time and assisted substantially to develop general consensus around the international development goals ahead of the UN Millennium Summit and around the need to address Africa's particular needs and challenges. The Declaration correctly called for a sustained involvement by the international community in a partnership with Africa to address poverty and marginalisation. The issues addressed in the Declaration continue to be our priorities as enunciated in our New Partnership. The Molde Declaration takes this process further in support of the goals of NEPAD and contains a commitment to working together to address Africa's pressing needs on a basis of mutual accountability, predictable, concrete and measurable actions.

This poses a challenge to you, the new generation of leaders and students, to build on the proud traditions of Norway as a force for progressive change. You must address the challenges posed by this new age, as others in this country faced the challenges of ending colonialism and racism. Together we must battle against the new scourge of poverty and ensure that the benefits of globalisation also reach the developing world.

In a few months' time, in August/September this year, South Africa will have the honour of hosting the World Summit on Sustainable Development. I am confident that together with the people of Norway, we will collaborate with other like-minded citizens of the world, to ensure that the outcomes of that conference take us further on our road to a world where we will not, like Oliver Tambo, see millions of people who are condemned to a life of hunger, homelessness, disease, ignorance, and absence of protection from cold, heat, rain, and the parching winds of the winter's end.