

## Speech by the Hon. Geoffrey Samukonga, MP, Deputy Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry

### On the Blair Commission for Africa (CfA)

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Your Excellency – the British High Commissioner to Zambia, Representatives from the Donor Community, Government Representatives, Distinguished delegates from various Civil Society Organizations – I am very glad that you have joined us here today to discuss issues surrounding the Blair Commission for Africa. Let me begin by extending a warm Zambian welcome to all of you delegates who have joined us from the Southern African region.

As you may be aware, the Commission for Africa was launched by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair to stimulate additional dialogue on Africa's development challenges. The timing of this initiative by the UK government is very appropriate. You may be aware that the UK will lead the Group of Eight Industrialized Countries (the G8) in 2005; and also assume Presidency of the European Union for the second half of next year. Moreover the year 2005, also serves as an important year as it marks the mid-term review point on implementation of the UN Millennium Development Goals. Therefore, the Blair Commission must be welcome today for stimulation additional debate on international development issues.

Current economic research suggests that Africa is the only continent to have gotten poorer in the past 25 years. Recent trends also indicate that several LDCs will not meet any of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the 2015 deadline. **A lot of action is therefore needed. And urgently.**

The Blair Commission Secretariat in London is open to dialogue, and willing to receive constructive suggestions from various developing countries. I am therefore very glad that we have convened a forum today for various civil society institutions in the SADC region.

Distinguished guests – let me stress 2 main points which I hope will guide you during your discussions on the Blair Commission agenda.

**First:** It is my sincere hope, that the outcome of this report will be a truly an African position paper. We seriously want this to reflect a broad African perspective on questions raised by the Commission.

For example, Prime Minister Blair, as well as many in the donor community have repeatedly stressed the importance of good governance for national development. This is a very valid concern. Providing democratic institutions and fair legal systems must be central to any good national development policies. In the background research paper from the Blair Commission, they provide a number of interesting observations:

- That democratization and political participation in Africa is increasing;
- But, however, democracy tended to be undermined by corruption in a number of countries.

I think these observations raise a number of interesting questions which the Commission rightly recognizes. For example, what steps can be taken to connect people to politics and government at local, national and regional levels? I hope you will have a coherent and transparent discussion which represents the voice of all sectors of society in your individual countries.

**The Second suggestion:** I want to share with you is that you focus on new ideas. Focus on new and constructive suggestions which will improve international development policies.

For example, the Blair Commission background paper indicates that despite significant aid flows to most sub-Saharan African countries, there has been very little improvement in various development indicators. Moreover, Africa's share of international trade has declined in the past 3 decades. In 2000, the entire sub-Saharan African accounted for only 1.5% of total world exports.

These are facts. And they are facts which we must confront. But I sincerely hope we will move beyond statistics and rhetoric, and actually find ways of improving Africa's economic performance.

So – if Africa's share of world exports have declined, what constructive steps are needed by donors and African policy – makers to reverse this trend? Again, if many LDCs are unlikely to meet the UN MDGs, then what urgent measures are needed to promote development. I strongly urge you to focus on such questions- and to provide valuable answers and suggestions.

In the next two days, you will be discussing a very heated agenda comprised of a number of important topics: on Africa's development path as well as National development strategies. These are all crucial topics – and I hope you have very fruitful discussions.

Distinguished guests, in Zambia my President remains committed to ensuring the social and economic development of our country, and indeed, seeing progress in the entire SADC region. Therefore, we welcome new collaboration and dialogue from the international donor community. The Blair Commission provides an opportunity for us all to commit to action on international development. And I hope we will all seize this opportunity.

Thank you very much.