

NEPAD: A NEW ERA FOR AFRICA IN A GLOBALISING WORLD

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, HIS EXCELLENCY, MR THABO MBEKI TO UNESCO, Paris, France, 19 November 2003

Commenting on remarks made by Picasso to distance himself from African art, Henry Louis Gates Jr, has written that:

"It is impossible to separate (Picasso's) anxiety about (African) influence (on his art)...from Europe's larger anxiety about the mask of blackness itself, about an aesthetic relation to virtually an entire continent that is represented as a prime site of all that Europe was not and did not wish to be, at least from the late Renaissance and the Enlightenment."

(Henry Louis Gates Jr, in "Africa: The Art of a Continent": ed Tom Phillips, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1998)

For centuries, the Western world has treated Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, as a source of cheap labour and raw materials.

Necessarily, this has meant the export of wealth from Africa rather than its expansion within the continent. Where there has been an infusion of wealth - in the form of investment - this was to generate larger volumes of wealth for export.

The period of slavery constituted a massive export of cheap labour itself, for use as a virtually cost-free factor of production. For Africa, this represented a very big loss of human capital and therefore the severe undermining of the capacity of the African communities to generate wealth.

In a very real sense, the enrichment of the West was predicated on the impoverishment of Africa.

Colonialism sought to achieve the same objective by:

- * obtaining mineral and agricultural raw materials at as low a cost as possible:
- * using cheap local labour to produce these commodities
- * preserving the African markets as exclusively as possible for products from the colonising country.

Again, this did not strengthen the capacity of the African countries to expand their economies, with a lot of economic activity in these countries being enclaves that are mere extensions of the economies of the metropolitan countries.

The destruction of productive capacity in the African colonies is clearly illustrated by the decline in domestic agricultural production except for cash crops. Accordingly, many African countries suffer from food deficits and have become net food importers.

The post-colonial period has not changed this situation fundamentally.

Indeed, diversion of resources away from wealth creation, to some extent, accelerates in the post-colonial period, as more resources are needed to finance the new state machinery and to meet the pressing social needs of the people.

Employment in the public sector serves as an incentive for people to move away especially from agricultural activities, seeking public sector, urban service jobs.

The net effect of all this has been the entrenchment of a downward vicious cycle, confirming Africa's peripheral and diminishing role in the world economy.

The more the African countries acted as a source of raw materials and cheap labour, the less capable they became of breaking out of this mould.

This has also confirmed a frame of mind about Africa that:

- * the Continent has no place in the world economy except as a supplier of raw materials
- * there is no requirement that the Continent should have access to modern technology and contemporary human skills
- * such socio-economic problems as the Continent faces should be contained within Africa and addressed as welfare problems
- * no contribution to human civilisation can be expected from Africa except in the fields of the performing and plastic arts; and the natural habitat
- * the Continent has no major role to play in the global system of governance.

The reality that has accumulated over many centuries is that Africa is defined as, of necessity, the marginalized Continent. This determination leads to actions that result in the further marginalisation of the Continent.

The more this succeeds, the more difficult it becomes to reverse that process of marginalisation. This difficulty includes the generation of significant resources from the Continent itself to reverse this process.

Necessarily, in this situation, the hopes of Africa's peoples for a better future begin to rest on the magnanimity of others. This transforms the objective disempowerment of the African people into a subjective acceptance by these people of the view that they are incapable of empowerment.

Thus they become less and less capable of acting as conscious and purposeful actors for their own emancipation from dependence, poverty and underdevelopment

To bring this human tragedy to its end, it is necessary that the peoples of Africa gain the conviction that they are not, and must not be, wards of benevolent guardians but instruments of their own destiny and sustained upliftment.

Critical to this is the knowledge by these peoples (Africans) that they have made and still have a unique and valuable contribution to make to the advancement of human civilisation.

Despite this negative past, it is both possible and necessary to ensure that Africa enjoys a positive and optimistic future.

The starting point is the same material base that resulted in Africa becoming a marginalized Continent.

Africa's strategic place in the global community is, in part, defined by the fact that the Continent is an indispensable resource base that serves all humanity, as it has done for many centuries.

That resource base can be broken down into three components. The first is the rich complex of minerals and plants that can be found throughout the continent, facts with which the world is most familiar.

The second is the ecological lung provided by the Continent's rain forests and the virtual absence of emissions and effluents that harm the global environment. The significance of these has come to the fore only recently, as humanity came to understand the critical importance of the issue of the environment.

And, the third is the palaeontological and archaeological sites containing evidence of the evolution of the earth, life and the human species; the natural habitats containing a wide variety of flora and fauna; and the open uninhabited spaces that are a feature of the Continent. The value of Africa's natural wealth is only now coming into its own, emerging from its being of relevance merely to a narrow field of science and a matter of interest to museums and their curators.

Another challenge of the African people is what was presented as the subjective transformation of Africans into a subhuman species of humanity, which constitutes a complex process that covered many centuries.

All of us face the critical challenge to accept that, historically, this ideological transformation of the Africans did happen, without seeking to attach value-laden blame or judgment against anybody.

The dogma, consigning the Africans to a lower plateau in the human hierarchy, understood as self-evident truth, created the possibility for those who considered themselves to be superior to the Africans to treat the Africans as natural inferiors.

When superior technology, better organisation and anti-human convictions enabled the Europeans to defeat the Africans and seize them as slaves, the objective success of that process confirmed the correctness of their subjective conviction of the inferiority of the Africans.

Further, the apparent submission of the Africans to the domination of the victors proved the point to the Europeans, for instance, that they had the natural right to exercise authority over the Africans.

All African rebellions in these circumstances, historically destined to fail, served as an affirmation of the self-evident truth that the black could never vanquish the white. Each failed uprising confirmed that, even with the resort to force by the black, the predestined and fixed relationship between superior and inferior, between dominant and dominated, between master and servant, could not be altered.

Thus, for some time, history inherited a powerful motive force of a self-fulfilling prophecy. The only thing that could deny or disprove the prophecy was practical proof of the falsity of the prophecy - a human demonstration, specifically for the master, that the servant becomes as human as the master when he or she ceases to be a servant.

To achieve this result, the Africans had to rise against European colonisation, and succeed.

The sustained success of the rebellion, and not the fact of the rebellion, however heroic, was the critical factor that would destroy the superstition that there was a natural order of things that dictated that white should be superior and black inferior.

The possibility of the Africans governing themselves and the independent countries that became their political homes as a result of the rebellion, created the capacity to use the resources of the Continent not as an incentive to others to colonise the Continent.

It made possible the use of these resources as the means to benefit the native population.

With political power having passed from the colonial countries to the formerly colonised, a heavy burden fell on the shoulders of the formerly colonised. They had to prove that they could discharge their functions in a manner that would address the interests of the formerly oppressed African masses.

This had to be done in a situation in which the foreign powers saw the defence of their continuing interests in the now independent states as an essential part of their 'national interest'. This national interest was also defined by the reality of the cold war generated by East-West competition and conflict. It was therefore in the interest of the former colonizers and other dominant players in the global community that the newly independent states should not be so strong that they became truly independent players.

Rather, it was desired that they should not have the ability to act in a manner that would threaten the residual 'national interest' of the metropolitan powers, as well as fall into a 'wrong ideological bloc', in the context of the East-West conflict.

This created the situation in which the dominant powers were prepared to live with malpractice in the former colonies, provided that this guaranteed the protection of their interests, widely defined.

It also obliged these powers consciously to strive to entrench the continuing dependence on themselves of the independent African states, to ensure that the strategic objective of securing this guarantee was achieved.

Given their relative weakness, many of these independent states had very limited possibilities to be anything but dependent. The more dependent they became, the more secure the interests of the dominant powers and the more entrenched the historical view that the Africans belonged to a lower order of humanity.

Accordingly, the pursuit of their interests by the dominant powers led to a situation in which the fact of the independence of the former African colonies meant that these now independent countries would not have the possibility to harness African resources for Africa's development.

This enhanced the necessity for the metropolitan countries to provide aid for the former dependencies, further entrenching the dependence of the African people on the erstwhile colonial powers.

For the peoples of Africa the absence of sustained indigenous development meant continuing suffering, including the persistence of state measures focused on ensuring that these suffering masses do not rise up against their new rulers.

Ironically, for the developed countries, this meant that the seemingly endemic instability of the African countries threatened the achievement of their strategic objectives of securing their economic interests in Africa and guaranteeing the political allegiance of the African countries.

This leads us to the identification of a strategic objective that is of crucial importance both for Africa and the rest of the world. This is that Africa needs a political order and system of governance that would:

- * be legitimate and enjoy the support and loyalty of the African masses
- * be strong enough to defend and advance the sovereign interests of these masses
- * help to address the fundamental development interests of these masses
- * have the capacity to ensure the achievement of these objectives, including interacting with the various global processes that characterise the world economy.

The benefit of this to Africa is self-evident. But it is also important to the rest of the global community because it would ensure that stable and predictable conditions exist in Africa, rationally to order the sustained interaction of the rest of the world with the globally strategic African resource base.

This is, furthermore, critical for the rest of the world because it would constitute a major blow against both the global grey economy and global organised crime, bearing in mind the fact of the globalisation of both these phenomena.

In this regard, and to address the challenges of poverty, underdevelopment and marginalisation, Africa and the rest of the international community need to ensure that Africa takes the next step in her political evolution beyond slavery, colonial subjugation and neo-colonial dependence to genuine independence and democracy.

It is only under the conditions of the latter that Africa and the world will succeed in the efforts to defeat African underdevelopment.

Having come to this determination on the historic and current causes of Africa's position in the world, African leaders committed themselves to the project of the renewal of the African Continent at the dawn of the new century and the new millennium.

Charged with the honour of leading our continent by popular mandate, African leaders have declared this to be the African century. We have resolved that, whatever the costs, it is both possible and necessary to ensure that Africa has a positive and optimistic future.

The ultimate objective of this African initiative is to change the nature and architecture of the

international governance system and perceptions about Africa, which are based on a self-fulfilling prophecy we referred to earlier.

We draw strength from African achievements in the arts, culture, natural sciences, philosophico-religious, and architectural grandeur produced by the African mind over the centuries.

We recall, in this regard, the advanced civilisations of Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe in southern Africa. We recall, too, the thriving universities across Northern Africa that for centuries were at the forefront of knowledge production and teaching. We recall, too, the Timbuktu Manuscripts, ancient documents that hold the key to some of the secrets of the continent's history and cultural heritage; manuscripts which provide a written testimony to the skill of African scholars and scientists, in subjects such as astronomy, mathematics, chemistry, medicine and climatology in the Middle Ages, and give the lie to the conventional historical view of Africa as a continent possessing only an oral tradition.

To African leaders it seems clear that the continent needs to re-position itself in response to the international economic system that has for a long time frozen the African continent out of the global economic life except as a supplier of cheap labour and raw materials.

When the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was formed in 1963, its primary objective was to rid the continent of colonial tyranny. The liberation of South Africa from apartheid in 1994 represented the completion of this historic mandate. But this momentous closure also threw up its shortcomings in relation to the new challenges facing the continent.

What was required was a new continental post-colonial, post-liberation response in a globalised world, to the national, continental and international challenges that faced Africa as a whole, but also the specificities of individual countries and regions.

And so in 2002 the African Union was formed as a new continental vehicle, driven by new African leaders, whose mandate was distinct from that of its predecessor. The African Union has, through the Constitutive Act, been set up in terms of statutory law in African countries. The Pan African Parliament empowers the AU to set standards which can be enforced.

The African Court of Justice enforces provisions of the Constitutive Act. National sovereignty can no longer be used as a cover for gross abuses such as genocide. There will now be a sound basis to stop those violations from happening.

Our effort as Africans thoughtfully to wrestle Africa out of its present conditions of stagnation has found its ultimate expression in Africa's socio-economic blueprint, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, NEPAD.

This comprehensive development plan deals with both tangible and intangible requirements aimed at putting Africa firmly on a developmental trajectory.

African leadership have conceptualised NEPAD, in part, as a subjective response to the ideological internalisation of conditions of inferiority among ourselves, thus signalling a metaphorical break with Africa's own complicity in its oppression, thus ending the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Prescriptions, donations, aid and assistance, previously accepted unquestioningly and without much thought, from international friends and agencies with gratefulness and required deference, have given way to Africa's investment of its own meagre resources in its own development in areas purposely identified for its potential impact on human development with the aim of surmounting the challenges facing its people. Africa has taken responsibility for defining its ills, finding solutions, and addressing them through its own strategies.

The increasing success of the NEPAD project, and the development momentum gathering steam on the continent, should, among other things, result in a situation whereby Africa becomes a contributor in the process of building a modern world.

Such affirmations would evoke Lord Alfred Tennyson's thoughts that:

...the old order changeth, yielding place to new, and God fulfills himself in many ways, lest one good custom should corrupt the world'. (The Passing of Arthur, Alfred Lord Tennyson).