

**OPENING REMARKS BY HE MR TIM DAVID, BRITISH HIGH  
COMMISSIONER TO ZAMBIA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE SOUTHERN  
AFRICA REGIONAL CONSULTATION ON  
THE COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

**Intercontinental Hotel  
13 December, 2004**

Hon. Geoffrey Samukonga, Deputy Minister for Commerce, Trade and Industry

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for inviting me here this morning to the opening of the Southern Africa Regional Consultation for the Commission for Africa. I am delighted to have this opportunity to listen to the voices of the Southern Africa civil society. I feel strongly that, though the initiative that led to the establishment of the Commission was that of Prime Minister Tony Blair, this is principally a regional occasion. You are gathered here to contribute your ideas to the Commission's work. Your opinions will help shape my government's efforts to make 2005 the year for Africa.

NGO's and civil society groups have a pivotal role to play on applying moral and political pressure on donor governments to take the necessary steps towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Campaigning by civil society has been tremendously important in shifting international opinion on issues such as debt relief. Civil society's international networks play an increasing role in this globalising world. Your discussions today will be one way

of influencing the debates that the Commission for Africa will promote. Such advocacy will feed into the major international events in 2005, including the G8 Summit, and the UN's Millennium Review. And of course, you will want to use your own networks and participation in such events to promote your views further.

Africa has seen remarkable progress in recent years. In 2001, 23 African countries enjoyed real growth of more than 5%. In 1973, Africa had only three democratically elected leaders: this year there are 32. More African people than ever before are accessing services such as health and education. More countries than ever are benefiting from debt relief, leaving, continent wide, an extra US\$2 billion a year to spend in education and health.

Yet, of course, the African continent remains home to major problems and enormous challenges. Half your people live in extreme poverty. Half are under 15 years old. 23 of your states are not meeting Millennium Development Goals. Africa is marginalised from the world's economy at precisely the time that economy is becoming more global. The last five years have seen a marked drop in aid flows. 70% of those living with HIV/AIDS are here in Sub Saharan Africa. Exactly five years ago in New York and in a historic declaration every world leader, every international body, almost every single country signed up to a shared commitment to right the greatest wrongs of our time.

The promise, that by 2015 every child would be at school. The promise that by 2015 avoidable infant deaths would be prevented. The promise that by 2015 poverty would be halved.

The commitment has a bond of trust, perhaps the greatest bond of trust pledged between rich and poor.

But already, so close to the start of our journey – and 20 years after the problems were first exposed to this generation through Live Aid – we can see that our destination risks becoming out of reach, receding into the distance.

And at best, on present progress in Sub Saharan Africa:

- primary education for all will be delivered not in 2015 but in 2130 – that is 115 years too late;
- the halving of poverty, not by 2015 but by 2150 – and that is 135 years too late;
- and the elimination of avoidable infant deaths, not by 2015 but by 2165 – that is 150 years too late.

So when people ask how long, the whole world must reply:

150 years is too long to wait for justice. 150 years is too long to wait when infants are dying in Africa while the rest of the world has the medicines to heal

them. 150 years is too long for people to wait for the redemption of a promise. The bond of trust should be honored, now in this decade.

We must not let the Millennium Goals – a commitment backed by a timetable – be downgraded from a pledge, to just a possibility, to just words.

2005 presents is all with unique opportunity to make a difference to all of this. A renewed and stronger African voice is emerging through the leadership of organisations such as the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). At the same time, the world's attention will be refocused on Africa through the United Nations' review of the Millennium Development Goals. It is clear that despite the many significant achievements in the areas of conflict resolution and economic growth, major barriers remain in Africa to achieving the internationally agreed targets by 2015.

Lack of political will has often held back previous initiatives. But along with the UN-led Millennium Summit, the UK intends to use its presidencies next year of the G8 and EU to ensure Africa reaches and remains at the centre of the agenda.

The Commission for Africa was established in spring 2004:

- to generate new ideas and action;

- to support and lobby for the best of existing work on Africa, in particular the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), the African Union and the G8 Africa Action Plan and help ensure such work achieves its goals;
- to help deliver the implementation of existing commitments towards Africa;
- to offer a fresh and positive perspective for Africa and your diverse culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, one which challenges unfair perceptions and helps deliver change;
- to understand and help fulfill African aspirations for the future by listening to Africans; and
- to create much greater awareness in rich countries like my own (where there is often a surprising ignorance of the Continent) of Africa's immense potential and the challenges that this Continent faces.

The commission is an independent body of 17 commissioners, nine of whom are from Africa and all of whom serve in personal capacity. They include, Bank of Botswana Governor Linah Mohohlo and South Africa Minister Trevor Manuel. Since its inception, the Commission has consulted widely with governments, civil society, the African Diaspora, international institutions and the private sector in Africa as well as internationally. It has held two plenary meetings, in London

and Addis Ababa. A third is planned for early 2005 and the Commissioners aims to report around March.

The consultation process developed further at the second most recent meeting of the Commissioners, in Addis Ababa early last month. The generated Consultation Document. And this Document, which is before you, identifies a number of possible key priorities for action. These include: governance (including transparency and measures to fight corruption); peace and security (with a focus on conflict prevention); human development; culture and inclusion; opportunity and growth; and aid and debt relief. I hope you will discuss these and other issues over the next two days.

Each one has its strong justification. Human development, for example is essential; if Africa can overcome the source of HIV/AIDS and lay down a firm foundation for investment in education and health, it will have the capacity to drive its own development agenda.

Faster growth can be best achieved by an improvement on the investment climates within each African country and by the reduction of trade barriers both within and outside Africa. We are all acutely aware of how a fairer global trading system would be of enormous benefit to the lives of millions of Africans.

It is significant that culture and inclusion too are targeted in the Consultation Document. External initiatives have rarely recognised the diversity and significance of Africa's own cultural, linguistic, communal and religious factors in development, and inclusion of these elements is vital to any long-term change for the better.

When the Commission first appeared, some in Africa and elsewhere were cynical. How, it was asked, would this initiative succeed when so many others had either failed completely or failed to generate the gains that had been anticipated? For a range of reasons, much of that cynicism has gone. Perhaps we have come to realise that whether from the North, the South, the developed or the developing world, we share a common interest here. Africa, and your deep and continuing poverty, constitute the strongest of moral arguments in favor of outside help. But of course, what happens here in Africa, affects the rest of the world too and the more successful you are, the more successful we all are. There is no doubt, that the coming years will demand a new accountability from both rich and poor countries.

The UK, driven by the personal commitment of Prime Minister Tony Blair, our Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, and our Secretary of State for International Development, Hilary Benn, is committed to ensure that, over the next year, the richest countries should take three vital steps:

- first, agreeing a comprehensive financing programme – that is we achieve a breakthrough to complete 100 percent debt relief; find a way to persuade others to join us in declaring their timetables on increasing development aid to 0.7 percent of national income; and immediately raise an additional \$50 billion dollars a year, doubling aid to halve poverty, through the creation of a new International Finance Facility;
  
- second, with this new finance, that we advance to meet the Millennium Development Goals on health, education and the halving of poverty; use this unique opportunity to drive forward the internationalisation of AIDS research and the advance purchase of HIV/AIDS and malaria vaccines; build the capacity of health and education systems; and deliver to the 105 million children who do not go to school today, two thirds of them girls, our promise of primary education for all;
  
- and third, that we deliver the Doha development round on trade, and make it the first ever world trade agreement to be in the interests of the poorest countries.



Indeed, because progress on each of these is dependent on progress on all of these, we must during 2005 advance all of these causes together. The challenge is great. Our will must be greater.

I am delighted and honored to have been invited to give this short address. It is now for me to sit back and to listen to your voices on whether the Commission for Africa can make a difference and, if so, how and what civil society's contribution will be. For my part, I believe it will make a difference and I have confidence that your contribution will be significant. Thank you.

British High Commission

13 December 2004