

**JOINT STATEMENT BY PARTICIPANTS IN BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
AFRICAN PRESIDENTIAL ROUNDTABLE 2005**

*(Boston, Mass.) — Eleven African former heads of state Wednesday (13 April 2005) concluded the African Presidential Roundtable 2005, sponsored by Boston University's African Presidential Archives and Research Center (APARC), with the following joint statement:*

This has been an enormously productive transcontinental initiative. We started in Johannesburg, where the focus for our deliberations was the Commission for Africa Report and discussions about Africa's image in the American media. Both are matters of critical importance to Africa's continued growth and development. In Boston, we have been looking at the compatibility of initiatives like the UN Millennium Development Goals and the Commission for Africa Report with NEPAD, which is Africa's own plan for its aspirations.

If our deliberations were to be summarized in a word, that word would be accountability.

We acknowledge the need for African leadership to be accountable relative to matters like good governance, peace and stability, and transparency in our economies. The good news, according to the briefing we received on NEPAD: Africa is making significant and important strides in the area of good governance, peace and stability and transparency in our economies. African leadership is being more accountable.

If initiatives like the UN Millennium Development Goals, the Commission for Africa Report, and the Millennium Challenge Account are going to be worth more than the paper they are written on, then the West is also going to need to be accountable relative to its commitments to partner with Africa.

Accountability by the West, in the partnership to improve Africa's condition, means a couple of things. Beyond the right words and mix of policies, the urgent question, at the end of the day is: Where does the money come from? To advance the recommendations like those contained in the various reports, the nations of the G-8 must step up to the plate. It is the responsible and right thing to do. It is the responsible thing to do because Africa continues to lag behind the rest of the world in terms of development. It is the right thing to do because Africa has driven the growth and development of the rest of the world for centuries.

Historically, Africa has been central to the global economy — from providing the slave labor that developed the new world and enriched the old world to providing col-tan, the essential mineral in making the computer chips necessary to drive this 21st century high-tech global economy. Africa's importance to global commerce and development is unquestionable. The issue is, will Africa ever benefit from its contribution to the global economy as much as the world benefits? Africa's turn is long overdue.

The other focus of our deliberations was Africa's image in the American media. This has profound relevance to everything — including the world considering Africa as a worthy investment venue and viewing Africa as a valuable trading partner. Today, we call on the media to be more fair and balanced in its coverage of Africa.

We spent a good part of the day examining the record of coverage of some America's most distinguished publications — The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, and U.S. News & World Report. We reviewed their coverage of the continent over a 10-year period — from 1994 to 2004. We found their coverage of

the continent to be anything but fair and balanced.

For example, in South Africa (under the leadership of the present government and that led by Nelson Mandela) the country has had the longest period of sustained economic growth in its history. That story has yet to be told in the detail in which South Africa's problems are covered.

The record of coverage of other parts of the continent is equally abysmal. One of the more notable areas of progress on the continent over the last 10 years has been in education. Yet, it was the smallest category covered with only 20 articles.

APARC's [Boston University's African Presidential Archives and Research Center] State of Africa Report 2003 highlighted some of the noteworthy achievements in education: A literacy rate in Botswana of 90 percent, the enrollment of an additional 1.7 million children in primary education in Kenya, the rise of persons in teaching training colleges in Ghana to 8,500 from a low of 6,000 in the year 2000, and the construction of more than 600 new classrooms over that past year in Malawi.

These, or similar gains from 1994 to 2004, were not reported in the more than 2,700 articles surveyed from The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, or U.S. News & World Report.

The findings of this (and other) surveys indicate that coverage of Africa, by the leading sources of American media is, at best, dismissive of the continent's progress and potential, and thus leading to continued "exotification" and marginalization of the African continent. At worst, coverage disregards recent trends toward democratization, thus betraying an almost contemptuous lack of interest in the potential and progress being achieved on the continent.

Underneath the present major American media coverage are buried stories of untold and unpublished growth, reform and sustainability. While this survey was not intended to establish a causal relationship between perceptions about Africa and the preponderance of negative coverage of the continent's democracies, it is logical and reasonable to conclude that there is such a correlation between negative coverage and negative perceptions. Furthermore, it is reasonable to posit that negative perceptions lead to negative outcomes, namely, lower levels of aid and lower levels of investment. This area is so important.

**We would like to highlight three recommendations coming out of our deliberations:**

**Recommendation 1** — African countries, and institutions like the African Union, need to develop a set of strategies to counter the negative media portrayal of Africa. Included among the initiatives that should be considered are: Developing alternative mediums through which to tell Africa's story; developing a multimedia campaign to counter Africa's negative image in the western press; and developing a strategy for engaging major media outlets, like those identified in the survey we reviewed, in order to encourage more fair and balanced coverage of the continent.

**Recommendation 2** — A plan should be devised to encourage more American NGOs and non-commercial media forums to create new paradigms for training Western and African journalists covering emerging African democracies.

**Recommendation 3** — A strategy must be developed to encourage leading American schools of journalism and journalism organizations to develop specific tracks for covering emerging economies and developing democracies, particularly in Africa.

We raise this concern about how Africa is covered not because we don't appreciate the need for a critical and sceptical press as a guarantor of democracy. Our complaint is the sceptical and critical coverage does not have to be cynical. Our point is simple: Tell Africa's whole story. The problems in African countries deserve to be brought under the light of public scrutiny; but the continent's progress and potential also deserve to see the light of day.

**Note: more details on this initiative can be found at <http://www.bu.edu/aparc/>**