

Southern African Civil Society Regional Consultation
on the Commission for Africa Report

Presentation by
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I am delighted to have been asked to talk to you today and I am very grateful to SARPAN for inviting me – albeit at very short notice due to the High Commissioner’s unavoidable absence until later today.

I should start by explaining who I am and why I am here. I have worked in South Africa since June 2001 – yesterday was the fourth anniversary of my arrival – to work at the British High Commission as the British Government’s spokesperson. Since January I have been on attachment to the Commission for Africa as its Press Officer. But today I am putting my old hat back on again and will speak on behalf of the British Government.

The title I have been given for this presentation is “The role of the UK in the CFA”. I’d like to expand on that a little by speaking more widely about the UK’s policies towards Africa, and by explaining what the UK is doing to try to bring about a stronger and more prosperous continent – using as its agenda the recommendations made by the Commission for Africa.

But I’d like to kick off by going back to a word that was mentioned a lot in yesterday’s opening session – motive. A number of participants raised concerns yesterday about the British Prime Minister’s motive behind establishing the Commission for Africa and placing Africa at the top of the G8’s agenda.

No doubt some of these concerns were fuelled by media claims that Mr Blair has set himself up as Africa’s saviour. More recently some people have claimed that this is just a diversionary tactic aimed at improving Mr Blair’s international reputation after Iraq.

There have also been some claims that are, frankly, a bit loopy. Yesterday's Business Day carried a letter from someone claiming that the Commission for Africa is Mr Blair's version of Cecil Rhodes vision of creating a British colony from Cairo to the Cape.

Thankfully, the views expressed here yesterday were more genuinely held, were more articulately expressed and were based on understandable concerns.

But I believe these concerns about motive are misplaced. There is no hidden agenda or double-dealing. There is no secret conspiracy. There is no Machiavellian plan to re-colonise Africa.

Mr Blair said 4 years ago, in a speech quoted many times, that "The state of Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world. But if the world as a community focussed on it, we could heal it."

It could be argued, and this is my personal opinion, that pre-occupation with Iraq may have caused the Prime Minister to delay following up his words with action. But 2005, which brings about the coincidence of the UK holding both the chairmanship of the G8 and the presidency of the European Union, provided Mr Blair with a unique opportunity to focus world attention on Africa.

Hence he established the Commission for Africa and engaged 16 other active and influential people, all acting in an independent capacity, and tasked them with drawing up a plan of action to help to drive forward Africa's development and increase its prosperity.

However, this is no personal crusade. Mr Blair's views are shared by the Chancellor, Gordon Brown. And they have been British Government policy for some time. To quote the British Foreign Office's mission statement regarding its policy towards Africa, "We will promote good governance and economic development throughout Africa, and work to prevent conflict, with the goals of peace, stability and an improved quality of life for Africa's people."

When the Commission for Africa report was launched in March, Mr Blair said “There can be no excuse, no defence, no justification for the plight of millions of our fellow human beings in Africa today.” He went on to describe improving the situation in Africa as “The fundamental moral challenge of our generation. A moral challenge to do it and a common interest to get it done. To tackle the instability, conflict and despair which disfigures too much of Africa and which can fuel extremism and violence, is to help build our own long-term peace and prosperity.”

Having, I hope, clarified the question of the Prime Minister’s motives in establishing the Commission for Africa I’d now like to the British Government’s policy and what it is doing to push forward the CFA’s recommendations.

There are 4 key proposals that the British Government will carry forward to the G8, to the European Union, to the UN Millennium Review Summit in September and to the WTO ministerial-level talks in December. All are clearly aligned to the recommendations made by the Commission for Africa.

Mr Blair and the rest of the British Government know they are in a pivotal position. They know that the UK has to take a lead, which it has already done by publicly announcing that it plans to implement all of the CFA’s recommendations. They know that the UK, because it will set the agendas for the G8 and EU, can have enormous influence on other developed nations.

The first proposal is 100% debt relief.

Bilateral debt relief was agreed by many donors back in 1999 – writing off debts owed to the richest countries by the poorest countries. But, without matching multilateral debt relief, the poorest countries would be faced with paying more in principal and interest payments to international institutions over the next 10 years than they currently spend on education and health.

Unilaterally, the UK agreed just after the CFA report was released to take on its 10% share of the debts owed by the poorest countries to the World Bank, benefiting over 20 countries.

And as we now know, the British Government's proposal to G7 Finance Ministers that they should write off about \$40 billion worth of debt owed by 18 heavily indebted poor countries – 14 of them African – was agreed last weekend. Another 9 countries will qualify for debt relief worth a further \$10-15 billion within 12 to 18 months.

For those who would like to read the fine print and technical details of this agreement, I recommend you visit the British Treasury website, which has all the details – this is www.hm-treasury.gov.uk . But I'd like to quote a few lines from the statement issued by the G7, relating to how the debt written off would be used. "We ask the World Bank and IMF to report to us on improvements on transparency on all sides and on the drive against corruption so as to ensure that all resources are used for poverty reduction. We believe that good governance, accountability and transparency are crucial to releasing the benefits of the debt cancellation. We commit to ensure this is reaffirmed in future bilateral and multilateral assistance to these countries."

The second UK proposal is the launch of an International Finance Facility for Immunisation – to be followed by the launch of a larger IFF, front-loading aid to help meet the MDGs.

An IFF for immunisation will raise an extra \$4 billion for vaccinations, saving an extra 5 million lives by 2015. The UK, France and Sweden have already contributed to the Immunisation IFF, supported by the Gates Foundation, WHO, UNICEF and the World Bank. Other backers are expected to join soon.

The UK Government strongly believes that this trial run of an Immunisation IFF will demonstrate the feasibility of front-loading effective and predictable aid through a larger IFF that would use future commitments of aid to leverage resources from capital markets for immediate disbursement to the poorest countries. The money would be disbursed quickly to where it can make the most difference by delivering clean water, school facilities and health programmes.

The UK's third proposal is a large increase in direct development aid.

Last month, thanks directly to the work of the UK's International Development Minister, Hilary Benn, the European Union made an historic commitment to double aid to Africa by 2010. There were three key elements to the agreement:

- First, current EU donor countries will raise aid from 0.33 to 0.56 per cent of Gross National Income, or GNI, by 2010
- Second, EU accession countries – who do not currently provide development aid, will reach 0.17 per cent by 2010.
- Third, current EU donors committed themselves to achieve the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GNI by 2015 at the latest.

Taking account of the faster timetable set by some EU countries to achieve 0.7 per cent, including by the UK, the EU would raise aid from last year's levels of around \$40 billion to, by 2010, over \$80 billion – a doubling of aid from EU countries.

We estimate that the Sub-Saharan Africa share will be about half of the additional \$40 billion. That will be over two-thirds of the extra development aid recommended by the CFA. So in one fell swoop the EU has done two-thirds of the work. Will other countries complete the task? The UK will be pushing them hard to do so, at the G8 and beyond.

The fourth set of UK proposals focus on trade – to maintain momentum for multilateral progress towards an ambitious, pro-poor Doha Round, which delivers substantial increases in market access for goods from developing countries and makes real movement in dismantling developed country agricultural protectionism.

The UK will be arguing strongly for all countries to agree to remove export subsidies and all trade-distorting support to agriculture, which works against producers in the developing world.

Sub-Saharan Africa's share of world trade has dropped from 6 per cent in the 1980s to just 2 per cent today. At the same time, while the western world currently spends about \$50 billion a year on aid, it spends \$300 billion on trade subsidies.

However, in addition to improving trading arrangements, we need to equip African countries with the infrastructure and economic capacity they need to take advantage of trading opportunities. This would be financed through private sector investment and through development aid, specifically IFF-funded infrastructure projects.

If Sub-Saharan Africa could regain just an additional 1 per cent share of global trade, it would earn \$70 billion more in exports – over three times what the region currently receives in development aid.

By combining debt relief, increased aid, new financing facilities and proposals for trade justice what the British Government is proposing and pushing for is substantial.

We have deliberately set an ambitious agenda, for the G8 and beyond. Mr Blair firmly believes that future generations would not understand if we failed to take this opportunity for progress.

No-one in the G8 is disputing that Africa is a priority. The G8 is involved in real, detailed negotiations. We are making progress, as can be shown by the recent agreements on debt relief and aid. We are confident of fulfilling our ambitions, but we still have some way to go.

The Prime Minister and others are working tirelessly and intensely to make it work. As you may know, Mr Blair has just completed talks with Presidents Putin and Chirac and with Chancellor Schroeder. He also met President Bush a few days ago. He will speak to the other G8 heads of government too before Gleneagles. Each set of talks is aimed at securing the progress we need to see on Africa at the G8.

That is the UK's plan. That is the developed world's task. But this is a partnership. And that means Africa must show it can make best use of that money, and make best use of a fairer world trading system. It is for African countries, and specifically the AU, to demonstrate that strategies can be put in place.

The AU Summit just before the G8 Summit is well timed. There, and beforehand, and at Gleneagles itself, you need to put pressure on G8 members, all of us, to get the right result.

And the G8 and EU need to hear from YOU about the commitment of African governments to promoting growth and to ending poverty.

They need to hear from YOU about action being taken to:

- Improve governance
- Root out the corruption that still plagues a lot of central and local administration
- Improve Africa's capacity to absorb the aid received, and
- Reduce the barriers to Africa's regional trade

Some G8 and EU countries still need to be convinced. You need to leave all of us in absolutely no doubt that Africa is changing because African governments, African civil society and the private sector in Africa want it to change, and because you are making that change happen.

It is up to the UK and its international partners to leave Africa in no doubt that it is serious about getting behind your efforts. In turn, you must leave the developed world in no doubt that the money which we believe we can deliver at the G8 and from the EU is going to be well-managed and effective in reducing poverty and improving lives. With Gleneagles only 3 weeks away this really is a unique opportunity. There is real momentum gathering – a momentum behind YOUR plans and YOUR wishes for YOUR own continent.

I'd like to conclude by leaving you with these 5 key messages:

- Firstly, that the British Government is committed to Africa and is intensifying efforts to secure the progress we need to see on Africa at the G8 Summit.
- Secondly, that all G8 and EU countries accept Africa is a priority.
- Thirdly, that success is not just down to the UK and other G8 and EU countries. It will take commitment from African nations too. It is important, therefore, that everyone keeps up the pressure.
- Fourthly, that while the UK has set an ambitious agenda for Africa at the G8 Summit, we firmly believe it is achievable. We will not lower our ambitions or slow up the pace of our intense engagements.
- And, finally, if we all work together in a spirit of true partnership, the big prize of a strong and prosperous Africa IS winnable.