

AFRICAN RENAISSANCE AND THE MILLENNIUM ACTION PLAN

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More than 350 years ago, Dutch sailing ships set off to find new markets in the East to create a new era of international trade. It was to be a great era during which the bounties of trade with far-off lands were brought back to Europe to enrich the lives of the many peoples of Europe.

The Dutch ships of the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (V.O.C.) and those of the other great European trading nations of the time, Spain, Portugal, France and Britain docked at numerous ports along the vast African coast. The sailors came across rich cultures of people, of which many were themselves, great trading nations.

The Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese met up with a continent which held cultures that had developed great sophistication in Art, Mathematics and especially in the medical sciences. Some of the greatest and oldest Universities of the world were on the African continent at that time. Unfortunately things then started to go very wrong.

Hundreds of years of the systematic exploitation of Africa's most precious resource of that time, its PEOPLE, followed. This dark era saw the great scholars and physicians of Africa exported like its other products, timber, ivory and gold to Europe and the Americas to become the physicians and scholars in the courts of European and American noblemen. Like Europe before it, Africa was plunged into a Dark Age from which it still has to recover.

Today, almost 350 years after that first contact between our two nations, I stand here before you to tell you of the dawning of a NEW era, a NEW Renaissance: THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE.

The then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, after the formation of the Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU) in 1963, said: "Perhaps the most exciting thing happening in the 20th Century is the awakening of Africa". The rebirth, revival and renewal of Africa are encapsulated in the vision of an African Renaissance and in the belief that this will truly be the African Century.

The African Renaissance vision is an all-embracing concept that draws its inspiration from the rich and diverse history and cultures of Africa. It acknowledges Africa as the cradle of humanity, whilst providing a framework for the modern Africa to re-emerge as a significant partner in the New World order. This framework touches on all areas of human endeavour; political, economic, social, technological, environmental and cultural.

We in Africa are currently in a critical phase of the development of our Continent. It is a very exciting period as, for the first time, Africa is taking the lead in determining the agenda and the direction for the advancement of Africa's needs and interests. As a Continent, we are endeavouring to work out solutions to the challenges facing Africa. Our efforts are aimed at ensuring that the African Renaissance becomes a reality and that this indeed is the African Century. To realise this vision, we are confronted by various challenges. Essentially these challenges arise from three paradigms. Firstly, the North-South divide, which is a result of the historical legacy of the colonial and cold war eras. Secondly, the New World order, characterised by globalisation and the knowledge economy, underpinned by rapid advancements in information technology. Lastly, the repositioning of Africa into the global mainstream, which entails a comprehensive and honest appraisal of the weaknesses inherent on the continent.

In order to achieve the social and economic regeneration of the Continent, the pre-eminent issue of poverty alleviation, through sustained people-centred development, must be vigorously pursued. The engine for poverty alleviation and people-centred development is the economy. However, there are a number of priorities that serve to support the social and economic regeneration agenda, as well as the further two pre-conditions for an African Renaissance, i.e. stability and security. These are the co-operation priorities.

It is important that Africa and the South develop a common agenda and then, in a co-ordinated fashion, present this agenda to the wider international community and the developed world, in order to secure support for the achievement of the goals of the agenda. This agenda and programme of action is encapsulated in the Millennium Africa Recovery Programme (MAP), which represents the leading edge of our continental interaction with particularly the developed countries and organisations of the North.

This Compact for African Renewal arises from the mandate given to Presidents Obasanjo, Bouteflika and Mbeki at the Extraordinary Summit in Sirte in 1999 and at the South Summit in April 2000. The mandate was extended at the OAU Summit

held in Togo in July 2000, where the Presidents were charged with engaging the developed North with a view to developing a constructive partnership for the regeneration of the continent.

Much work has since taken place, both in developing the Programme and in discussing the Programme with our partners in the North. The three Presidents attended the G8 meeting in Okinawa during 2000 and the framework for the Programme was presented at the World Economic Forum in Davos. The MAP framework was again discussed at the Extraordinary OAU Summit held in Libya at the beginning of March 2001. The Summit endorsed the Programme and mandated the Presidents to continue with the development of the detailed Programme of Action.

The MAP is a pledge by African leaders based on a firm and shared conviction that they have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development. It is anchored on the determination of Africans to extricate themselves and the continent from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a rapidly globalising world. The MAP seeks to build on and celebrate the achievements of the past, it also reflects the lessons learned through painful experience, in order to establish a partnership that is both credible and capable of implementation. Africa's place in the global community is defined, in addition to its growing market and potential size, by the fact that the continent is an indispensable resource base that serves all humanity, as it has done for many centuries.

Africa's strategic resource base can be broken down into the following components:

- Africa's rich complex of mineral and material resources, which are critical to global production processes.
- Africa's bio-diversity, crucial to combating environmental degradation, as well as contributing to world science and technology.
- Africa is the cradle of humanity, as affirmed by the paleontological and archaeological sites containing evidence of the evolution of the earth, life and the human species.
- Africa's rich cultural legacy, its philosophies, art and music, all of which continue to impact increasingly on world culture.

In the new globalising era, it is critical that we bring to bear the combination of the above attributes, on a platform of equal partnership with the developed North for the advancement of humanity as a whole.

The MAP recognises that there have been attempts in the past to set out continent-wide development programmes. For a variety of reasons, these have not been very successful. However, today there are new sets of circumstances that lend themselves to integrated practical implementation. These include the new resolve to deal with conflicts and bring about peace on the continent; accountable government; a growing culture of human rights; a new core of African Leadership committed to good governance and democracy; and progressive economic co-operation and integration (both regional and continental).

The key priorities, which the MAP seeks to implement simultaneously and in interaction with one another, are:

- Peace, security and governance
- Investing in Africa's people
- Harnessing Africa's strategic advantages
- Investing in ICT and other basic infrastructure
- Developing financing mechanisms.

The Programme of Action that derives from these priorities entails:

- Creating peace, security and stability, and democratic governance without which it would be impossible to engage in meaningful economic activity;
- Investing in Africa's people through a comprehensive human resource strategy;
- Harnessing and developing Africa's strategic and comparative advantages in the resource based sectors to lead the development of an industrial strategy;
- Increasing investments in the Information and Communication Technology sector without which we would not be able to bridge the digital divide;
- Development of infrastructure including transport and energy;
- Developing financing mechanism.

The African leaders participating in the MAP realise the keen interest of both industrialised countries and the multilateral institutions to participate in the renewal of Africa's development. They also equally recognise the advantages for themselves of such participation. The leaders of industrialised countries and the multilateral institutions are therefore invited to join this initiative as partners, under African Leadership.

I am sure you are all asking yourselves by now how this ambitious programme will be managed. Well, it is envisaged that a Forum of African Leaders participating in the process will direct the MAP. The functions of the Forum will be to:

- Make decisions about sub-programmes and initiatives within the framework of the programme of action, including sequencing of initiatives and identification of implementing agencies. These decisions will be binding on participating countries;
- Review progress on implementation of past decisions and take steps to address problems and delays;
- Make decisions about additional participants in the Forum.

The MAP offers a historical opportunity for the advanced countries of the world, such as The Netherlands, to enter into a genuine partnership with Africa, based on mutual interest, shared commitment and binding agreement. In proposing the partnership, Africa recognises that it holds the key to its own development. The adoption of a development strategy, as set out in the broad approach which I shortly outlined for you today, together with a detailed programme of action, will mark the beginning of a new phase in the partnership and co-operation relationship between Africa and the developed world. As you are aware, the process is still evolving and once finalised, will need to be taken back to the OAU for adoption before being made public. This process is expected to be finalised shortly.

I thank you for this opportunity to share with you the vision we Africans have of the new African era, THE AFRICAN CENTURY. I challenge you all, as young and energetic scholars to again look towards Africa as your forefathers did, and join us in partnership in making the African Renaissance a reality.