

26 February 2004

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Roundtable Policy Conference on Africa's Security, Stability
and Development**

Mr. Moderator, President Gregory H. Williams, General Abubakar, distinguished participants in this Policy Roundtable: Good morning.

For reasons of history, culture, heritage and solidarity, I believe it important for a strong, mutually beneficial relationship to be maintained between the countries of the African continent and the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean.

I wish, therefore, to recognize the African Strategic and Peace Research Group (AFSTRAG) and The Institute for Research on the African Diasporas in the Americas and the Caribbean (IRADAC) for organizing this policy roundtable conference on "Africa's Security, Stability and Development", focused on the role and contribution that the African Diaspora and people of African descent can make. I thank them for their invitation to participate in the Conference.

Africa is a continent blessed with an abundance of human and natural resources. Yet, for many countries on the continent, the past decade has been one of exceptional challenge. I believe that it is fair to say that every broad struggle the United Nations is currently waging, whether to make and keep the peace or to promote better standards of living or to promote democracy and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms is Africa's struggle. It is a struggle that has left many African countries hard pressed to keep step in a rapidly changing global economic environment. An overwhelming debt burden, lack of access on fair terms to markets for exports, a desperate need for the technology required to compete, drought and desertification are, as you know, some of the myriad challenges which Africa faces.

The media - crisis driven as it tends to be - has focused our attention on yet other challenges. It has, for example, reported on the number of governments that have been besieged and even overthrown and the violent conflict and strife that has flared up in virtually all areas of Africa. These have left in their wake child soldiers, mercenaries, refugees and displaced persons. In many instances, the conflicts have shattered the economies of affected countries, exacting enormous economic and social costs. A cloud of deadly diseases, including HIV/AIDS hang, in particular, over Sub-Saharan Africa. Even as Africa's needs grow more pressing, levels of official development assistance keep falling.

Notwithstanding, I believe that there is cause for optimism. As I presided over the General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly in September/October last year, I was struck by the consistent listing of Africa's development as a high priority both bilaterally and multilaterally,

and particularly through the United Nations system, by Heads of State and Government and other high-level government representatives from around the globe. Global leaders continued to express strong support for decisive action taken by the African Union (AU) as the foremost regional organization for managing integration and other processes in Africa.

The New Partnership for African Development, NEPAD, launched in 2001, received high praise as a framework designed by Africa, for Africa's development. NEPAD's systematic approach to mobilizing international assistance for Africa, and harmonizing efforts in this area, gives clear indication that Africa now owns its development strategies and priorities. The initiatives of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa, headed by Ambassador Ibrahim Gambari, to spearhead efforts to promote international support for NEPAD, and for Africa's development generally, is strongly supported by the international community; it certainly has my support.

It seems clear that development holds the key to Africa's security and stability, but that security and stability are essential to Africa's development. Africa has, itself, spurred United Nations action in these critical areas. For example, a number of United Nations initiatives in the area of peace and security on the continent have been in response to Africa's call for action. Consolidating democracy and improving standards of living have also been priority issues for the African continent.

I believe that we must all respond to Africa's call for solidarity in its initiatives for socio-economic advances, even as it adjusts to the new international economic realities, and take action to restore the countries of the continent to economic health. While overcoming debt and debt-servicing commitments remain a challenge for many, and fair prices for their commodities have not been forthcoming, economically, some countries are growing. In many troubled areas, peace - however fragile - is being maintained. And countries in Africa are cooperating in a meaningful way.

This conference is convened to meet the critical need for dialogue on Africa's security, stability and development. If, as it has mandated itself to do, it is to determine the most appropriate role for the diaspora, all issues must be addressed with candor. This means that we in the diaspora, must ask ourselves a most important question, "What does Africa mean to us?" If we look at the facts, and determine that we can, and will make a difference, the answer to the question becomes self-evident. The action we take requires us not only to build bridges, but also to take down barriers.

I believe, in that regard, that the diaspora must strengthen links with the countries of Africa at every level - social, economic, political and cultural. Exchanges across these areas will greatly assist our understanding of what each needs to do to support the other.

I believe that there is room for closer collaboration between regional and other organizations in the Americas and the Caribbean and those of Africa, in matters of mutual interest. The diaspora can play a role here, particularly in respect of contacts between organizations of civil society.

I believe that the diaspora has a role to play in translating general proposals for Africa's development, stability and security into action, and in contributing to the implementing of that action. This would include support for NEPAD and other African development plans. The sector has a particular role to play, in promoting business and foreign direct investment.

In short, Africa has guardianship over its own future. The diaspora must be a willing partner with Africa in crafting relationships that are mutually beneficial and that would contribute to Africa initiatives for its security, stability and development.

I thank you.