

22 September 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the closing of the High-level meeting on “Africa’s development needs: state of
implementation of various commitments, challenges and the way forward”**

Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Brothers and sisters,

I wish from the outset to express my gratitude to my facilitators, the Permanent Representatives from Angola and the Netherlands for conducting the intergovernmental consultations on the draft declaration we have just adopted.

We have come to the end of our day of dynamic deliberations on Africa’s special development needs. Now comes the hard part: keeping the promises. Let’s not repeat history by breaking them. Let us rise to the occasion and make poverty history instead.

The declaration we have just adopted with consensus contains an agenda for action. Urgent action: eradicating poverty, particularly in Africa, is the greatest global challenge facing the world today, our declaration says. A global challenge that must be addressed by and large by the only truly global institution, the United Nations. This is why the declaration states that a stronger Africa requires a stronger UN.

The declaration and our exchange today have strengthened my conviction that we have chosen the right priorities for this session of the General Assembly. Africa’s priorities are the Assembly’s priorities.

Apart from the great global challenge of poverty, the food crisis is prominently featured, along with its potentially ruinous impact on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Climate change: Africa’s vulnerability to its effects and the need for new and additional resources to deal with them.

And water – Africa’s own commitments to the water and sanitation goals are highlighted in the declaration as well as the need to place women empowerment at the heart of the development policies.

The democratization of the United Nations, the key objective of this GA, resonates in this document as well: we read about, and I quote, “the need to enhance the voice and participation of developing countries in policymaking in the areas of trade, money and finance.” While this high-level meeting

itself reinforces international democratization by raising the profile of the world's most representative organ: the General Assembly, we need to ensure that each single voice counts and that the GA can make the difference.

It is high time for the GA to take back from the G8 and the Bretton Woods Institutions the initiative in the development debate in general and Africa in particular. No barricades. No barb wire. No tear gas. We need to move the debate from seclusion to inclusion – that's what development is all about and that's what only this Assembly can offer.

The General Assembly is the body where the African continent constitutes the largest group, and where the African voice is heard at its loudest and clearest. But we are not listening to that voice nearly enough: According to the Organization for Economic Development Cooperation and Development (OECD), less than half of all aid is directed towards the national priorities of developing country governments. Many of you have denounced the fall in Official Development Assistance including the portion allocated to agriculture, a NEPAD priority from the start, now only at 7 percent of over all development assistance. This, coupled with the agricultural subsidies granted by developed countries, portrays a catastrophic scenario, if we are to defeat the ongoing food crisis.

Railroading African governments by ignoring NEPAD's priorities will not get the continent on track for the Millennium Development Goals. Rallying around African priorities instead will go a long way and this Assembly can lead the way. That is what we have seen today.

I will not try to summarize today's rich discussion. Let me briefly highlight some common threads. There is a sense of emergency and concrete actions must follow suit. Africa's future ultimately lies in the hands of Africans themselves – development starts at home – but it is clear that Africa's efforts must be complemented with a substantial change in international economic and trade policies. In this regard, the debt relief must be tackled more aggressively so as to free the necessary funds for social investment instead of paying what has become an *ad vitam eternam* debt. There is also a huge expectation that donor countries will ultimately abide by their pledges and fulfill their commitments to double the ODA by 2010.

The homegrown political and economic reforms, including those focused on strengthening democracy, human rights and creating a healthy private sector, need to be complemented with resources from the outside – Africa lacks the resources to pull itself out of the poverty trap alone.

International aid is not just a matter of the heart it is also a matter of the head, a matter of real and concrete political will. An African renaissance is in the common interest. If we are to bring about that renaissance, we need to look beyond aid alone: development, security and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing – they form a trinity. Hence, the imperious necessity to concentrate our efforts in the social development of Africa: the *sine qua non* condition for peace, security and respect of all human rights.

Many of you pointed out that today's meeting is the first in a series of three this fall. Today is about Africa, about the place we need to concentrate our development efforts. The second meeting, this

Thursday, is about the Millennium Development Goals and the themes that require more attention. And finally the upcoming Financing for Development Review Conference in Doha will be about how to muster the financial resources and the political resolve to keep our promises. We must closely monitor whether commitments are indeed being turned into concrete actions. I am pleased that the declaration sets the basis for such a monitoring mechanism.

Before I close, I want to pay tribute to President Thabo Mbeki. During his presidency of the rainbow nation, spanning nearly a decade, he, along other African leaders, championed the vision of NEPAD we still pursue today. When the affluent listen to Africa and partner with it, that vision is within reach. To quote NEPAD's founding document: "In fulfilling its promise, this agenda must give hope to the emaciated African child that the 21st century is indeed Africa's century." End of quote. As was highlighted in the morning, today's mantra should be implementation – implementation of all the commitments to our African brothers and sisters. After speeches of solemnity, comes the test of solidarity.

Thank you.