

22 September 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the opening of the High-level meeting on Africa's Development Needs**

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

It is a privilege for me to welcome you to this first substantive meeting of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly. I am particularly pleased that we are beginning our collective work with an issue as urgent as “Africa’s development needs: status of implementation of various commitments, challenges and the way forward”.

At the Millennium Summit, we decided to devote special attention to Africa’s development needs because throughout history, the African continent has endured sacrifice, plunder, slaughter and, finally, oblivion. Considering the irreparable injustices of history and the inherent ravages of colonization, in September 2000 we made a collective commitment to our African sisters and brothers.

Almost a decade later, it is time to assess the progress made towards the goals we set in the Millennium Declaration. In this regard, Africa has undeniably made considerable democratic advances, with the holding of elections and the establishment of elected Governments all across that fair continent.

I would especially like to welcome the establishment of the African Union in 2000 and the launching of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development, which were undoubtedly milestones in Africa’s history and in the empowerment of its own political, economic and social development process.

Without listing Africa’s many achievements in good governance, which are described in detail in the Secretary-General’s report, I would like to highlight the African Peer Review Mechanism, a self-monitoring instrument in which African leaders are reviewed by their peers on all aspects of good governance, human rights, macroeconomic policies and so forth.

I also want to stress that Africa, in addition to ratifying the United Nations Convention against Corruption, has adopted the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, which has now been ratified by all African Union members.

Distinguished dignitaries and friends,

Africa has amply fulfilled its own political, economic and social commitments. To consolidate the progress made and reach our goal of empowering Africa to meet the development challenges it faces, all of us in the international community, especially donor countries and the Bretton Woods institutions, must fully honour our commitments and substantially complement the efforts of the African nations.

Africa's challenges are still enormous. Brave as its nations may be – and we know that they are brave indeed – Africa cannot move ahead on its own. The African countries' gains in terms of economic growth are real, but they must be decisively strengthened through concrete actions such as more substantial external debt relief. The relative progress made in this area cannot obscure the unfair conditionalities that the Bretton Woods institutions and creditor countries continue to impose. These conditionalities have the perverse effect of not only preventing the effective implementation of poverty reduction programmes, but also eroding the living conditions of tens of millions of people, driving them deeper into the poverty from which these institutions were supposed to save them.

Africa's integration into the global economy also requires that it be guaranteed access to the international market. Beyond modest aid-for-trade efforts, the key to providing full access to trade lies in eliminating the developed countries' practice of subsidizing their industries, especially their agricultural producers.

The failure of the Doha trade talks clearly illustrates the limits of the free-market doctrine to which a few players have subjected the rest of the world. These same proponents of extreme liberalism change their tune at the first sign that their economic might could be at risk and that their citizens could suffer the pain they inflict on others.

I therefore call on you once again to work together in fraternal solidarity to eliminate the market distortions generated by developed-country subsidies, since they have played a key role in worsening the global food crisis we are witnessing today. We must join forces to remove this and other structural factors that are endangering the lives of millions of people.

Of course, this crisis has had a terrible impact on African populations and has extinguished what little hope there was of halving, by 2015, the proportion of people in Africa who suffer from hunger.

It is therefore imperative to transfer the necessary technology to give the African countries new instruments to guarantee food for life, food security and food sovereignty. Technology transfers are equally urgent for ensuring that the African countries' adaptation to the devastating consequences of climate change is not just a dream but a reality.

I would also like to recall that the principle of shared but differentiated responsibility is a cornerstone of the international commitments concerning sustainable development. This principle places the developed countries under a moral and legal obligation to honour their many sustainable development commitments, including those relating to technology transfer.

From an ethical standpoint, this need is all the more pressing in that it is completely at odds with the massive and astonishing wealth that multinational extractive industries generate from African land,

flesh and blood, without producing, in return for the generation and at times the pillaging of these assets, diversified foreign direct investment.

Friends,

Helping Africa to boost its capacity to combat infectious diseases must begin with measures to give the entire population access to clean water. Water purification and universal access would curb the spread of many diseases and reduce the number of children and women who die each day for lack of clean water.

Given that there are nearly 25 million people living with AIDS in Africa, saying that Africa has made progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS is rather cold comfort, but it should nonetheless encourage us to continue to mobilize international efforts to step up prevention initiatives and extend universal access to antiretroviral treatment throughout Africa.

Preventing Africa's decimation by the AIDS pandemic is not only a sine qua non for its future development; it is a moral obligation towards Africa that is shared by humanity as a whole!

Friends,

In light of the remarks I have just made, I would like to remind you that the commitments you undertook in Monterrey in relation to financing for development, especially with regard to official development assistance, are still in force and are undeniably urgent.

I therefore call upon the world's rich countries to redouble their efforts to bring official development assistance, which went from 0.33 per cent of GDP in 2005 to 0.28 per cent in 2007, closer to the Monterrey commitment of 0.7 per cent. Remember that this goal was first proposed in this August Assembly as far back as 1970. In the same vein, and in light of current disbursement levels, I ask the members of the Group of Eight, with all the strength of my position as President of this General Assembly, to deliver on the pledge they made at Gleneagles in 2005 to double official development assistance for Africa by 2010.

Friends,

The cry of Africa's peoples, who yearn not only to survive but to live lives of dignity in decent conditions, does not require that we make new commitments, but only that we have the courage to live up to the words we have spoken many times over, at the Rio, Copenhagen, Beijing, Cairo, New York and Monterrey Summits.

It is time to move from promises to concrete action.

What we are witnessing is a state of emergency. Let us answer this challenge with the steadfastness and courage that the African peoples are asking of us.

Thank you.