

25 April 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Opening of the Thematic Debate on the Peaceful Resolution of
Conflicts in Africa**

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon
President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea,
Mr. High Representative of the African Union for Mali and the Sahel,
Respected Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege to welcome you to the Great Hall of the General Assembly for the thematic debate on the Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts in Africa.

Let me begin by thanking President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea for honoring us with his presence this morning, as well as several Ministers who have travelled from way afar to join us on this occasion.

Allow me also to express my appreciation to President Pierre Buyoya, High Representative of the African Union on Mali and the Sahel, for participating in the debate. I believe the General Assembly can greatly benefit from his wealth knowledge and experience.

Last but certainly not least, let me convey my most sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General for his leadership in ensuring that Africa remains a key priority for the United Nations.

Excellencies,

Fifty years ago, the precursor to today's African Union the Organization of African Unity was established in Addis Ababa.

Today, we gather to celebrate the progress that a proud Continent has made since it broke off the chains of colonial subjugation.

Together with the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade two years earlier, the founding of the Organization of African Unity in 1963 proclaimed the coming dawn of a new era. At the time, President Nkrumah of Ghana stated in the General Assembly that the "cardinal fact of our [age] is the momentous impact of Africa's awakening upon the modern world," urging Member States to "look at the blazing African sun now traveling across the sky of Africa's redemption."

Five decades later, we can assert with confidence that it has never shone as brightly.

Today, a new Africa is rising. The quest to unite the Continent, and transform it into a region of economic prosperity and social justice, has never been closer to fulfillment.

Growth rates in many parts of Africa have been resilient, even though a number of countries have been amongst the hardest-hit victims of the global economic crisis. Despite this troubling reality, trade and investment has expanded, and the continental-wide internal market has been built up over the past several years. By any measure, this progress is remarkable and unprecedented.

Yet much more needs to be done before the gap between the promise of Africa and the reality on the ground is fully bridged.

Excellencies,

I hope that today's thematic debate will provide us with an opportunity to address one of the most strategic challenges of our era of global transformation and empowerment that is, how to establish an everlasting peace across the Continent.

I believe the world must engage much more resolutely to help bring to an end the conflicts that continue to tragically claim the lives of so many Africans.

The situations in Mali, the eastern DRC and the Central African Republic, remain sources of great concern. Notwithstanding recent progress in Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan, the fragility of the entire Sahel-Sahara region needs to be addressed in a much more concerted fashion.

With all due respect to the existing efforts to ameliorate these and other crises, I do not think the international community is devoting enough attention to the complex security issues faced by the Continent from terrorism, secessionist threats and trans-national organized crime, to the proliferation of arms, effective peacebuilding, and mass migration.

I firmly believe that we need to support African-led solutions to all African challenges. The General Assembly should seek the Continent's guidance, and I respectfully urge the distinguished participants from Africa in today's debate to provide us with direction on how we can best join in their efforts to solve them.

We should place ourselves at your disposal, informed by a deep conviction that consolidating the peace in Africa is the most important prerequisite to meeting its singular development needs the key to unlocking its full potential.

Excellencies,

I take this opportunity to strongly encourage Member States to adopt the Political Declaration on the Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts in Africa that will be put before the plenary tomorrow.

I am humbled that the Africa Group has accepted this initiative. The draft has been composed and submitted by the 54 delegations that belong to it.

This progressive, forward-looking vision lays out Africa's own priorities. It therefore deserves, in my view, an unequivocal support of the General Assembly.

The Declaration reaffirms the indispensability of deepening the partnership between the United Nations and the African Union, advocates the full operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture, and acknowledges the valuable roles played by sub-regional organizations. It also underscores the importance of providing adequate resources and training for peacekeeping missions, strengthening recovery and reconstruction capacities, encouraging inclusive political solutions and national reconciliation programs, and supporting preventative diplomacy initiatives.

These include African-led mediation and arbitration efforts, which will help bring about the adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means the overarching theme I have chosen for the 67th Session of the General Assembly.

Excellencies,

One of the strategic conflict prevention tools at our disposal is poverty eradication the cornerstone of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

Its framing principles were endorsed last June by world leaders in Rio de Janeiro, in the landmark 'Future We Want' conclusions. This document pledges extensive support to addressing the special challenges facing the "most vulnerable countries," in particular African nations and those in "conflict situations." It clearly indicates that their voices must not only be heard loud and clear, but that their concerns will have to be met "as a matter of urgency."

I believe the international community must take every conceivable step to ensure those and all other Rio+20 provisions are fulfilled in earnest. These solemn commitments must be honored in their entirety.

I would like to underline the fact that African states collectively represent the largest coherent voting bloc in the General Assembly. Therefore, they have an unprecedented opportunity to stand at the forefront of efforts to craft a new global partnership in which economic, social and environmental dimensions are incorporated into a single, fully coherent whole, ensuring that no country is left behind.

By coming together, Africa can crucially influence the outcome of the three most important workstreams agreed at the Rio+20 Conference: defining the Sustainable Development Goals, putting forth options for financing them, and laying out a workable intergovernmental arrangement for monitoring their implementation.

Each of these falls under the purview of the General Assembly, and will undoubtedly frame much of the UN's work for decades to come.

Excellencies,

Fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals must also remain at the core of our shared vision for the peaceful and prosperous future of the Continent.

Few chances remain for Member States to decide on how to complete the MDGs, and for them to provide guidance to the Secretariat and other stakeholders as the deadline approaches.

Heads of State and Government have been invited to take part in the Special Event to Follow-up on Efforts towards Achieving the MDGs. To facilitate their participation, it has been scheduled for September 25th during the High-level Segment of the General Debate of the 68th Session.

I believe its outcome should be as substantive as possible. In my opinion, it must not only feed directly into the General Assembly's three post-2015 workstreams, but also address how to effectuate a smooth transition from the MDGs to the SDGs a critical issue that was not addressed in the Rio document.

I will closely follow the preparations for the Special Event, and work with all stakeholders to make sure we maximize the opportunity to establish the parameters of the global pivot towards universal sustainability.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This thematic debate was conceived with three main aims in mind. First, to provide an occasion for Member States to present concrete proposals for how the UN can help consolidate Africa's considerable gains. Second, to encourage the international community to deepen its support for the Continent's admirable efforts to promote durable peace and sustainable development. And third, to celebrate, in the General Assembly, the African Union's fiftieth anniversary, as it looks to the future with renewed confidence in its ability to address the hopes and aspirations of its people and so help lay forever to rest attempts to marginalize Africa in global affairs.

When the African leaders of tomorrow gather at the centenary of their Union in 2063, let them look back on the five decades that will start in a month from now as a Golden Age, in which the Continent was able to freely choose its own destiny a time when poverty was completely eradicated, schools and hospitals in every country became a source of pride, and African universities began to lead the world in learning and technological innovation.

Let them also see a fully empowered Union in which peace and justice reign unopposed, and a period of economic plenty is sustained by a robust single market, de-carbonized energy systems, across-the-board agricultural security, and state-of-the-art infrastructure.

Finally, let them speak of the promise of Africa fulfilled in every hamlet and village just as much as in every city and metropolis and express appreciation for the successful consolidation of the rule of law, good governance, and human rights throughout the Continent.

Thank you very much for your attention.