



**KEY NOTE ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR WISEMAN NKUHLU AT THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICA'S
DEVELOPMENT-AFRICA RECRUIT HUMAN RESOURCE SEMINAR**

**Engaging with the African Diaspora with the All African Parliamentary
Group, London, United Kingdom, 10 March 2005**

In 1999 the African Heads of State and Government embarked upon the process of transforming the Organisation of African Unity into the African Union. This created a unique opportunity for introspection and a thorough review of challenges facing the African continent at the dawn of the 21st Century.

The end result was the adoption of the Constitutive Act establishing the African Union two years later and the launch of the new continental body in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002.

This was a historic process that took place at a time when African countries were searching for a new path to extricate themselves from deepening poverty and increasing marginalisation from the globalising world.

At a time when the post cold war world order was beginning to take shape and a number of African countries were making tentative steps towards multi-party democracy. South Africa had finally dislodged itself from Apartheid and democracy had been restored in Nigeria.

The drafting of the Constitutive Act of the African Union proceeded under the conditions described above and the realisation that Africa had a window of opportunity brought about by a convergence of positive developments both in Africa and internationally.

It is therefore not surprising that the principles and values enshrined in the Constitutive Act reflect the progressive ideas of the latter half of the Twentieth Century which have now become almost universal. The principles in question include the promotion of democracy, protection of human rights and gender equality, commitment to good governance and transparency, people centred development and partnership with

key stakeholders in the country and with countries in the region and the international community.

The African Union is founded on these principles and is establishing a number of organs to ensure that it is effective in promoting them throughout the continent. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a socio economic development programme of the African Union. It elaborates the vision and principles of the Constitutive Act and also provides detailed policy guidelines and action plans for addressing the major challenges facing the continent, including resolution of conflicts, improving governance, eliminating major diseases including HIV and AIDS, malaria and Tuberculosis, resolving food insecurity, and providing infrastructure so as to meet the basic needs of the African people as well as reduce the cost of doing business in Africa.

The key message of NEPAD to the African people is that it is first and foremost our duty to extricate ourselves out of poverty and to place our countries both individually and collectively on a path of sustainable growth and development, while at the same time, enhancing our participation in the world economy and body politic.

Through NEPAD, the African leaders are strengthening political leadership to deal with the challenges highlighted above. They are also taking steps to strengthen the capacity of African institutions at national, regional and continental levels. This is where young African scientists and professionals, including Africans in the Diaspora have a pivotal role to play.

I came to this seminar straight from a successful capacity building workshop for regional economic communities (RECs) in Abuja, Nigeria, which took place on Monday and Tuesday, 7th and 8th March respectively. The lack of capacity in the RECs was identified during the pre-feasibility and feasibility study stages in all the regions.

The problem of weak capacity to implement NEPAD projects has become a major challenge. In Algiers in November 2004, President Obasanjo undertook to convene a workshop on capacity building in the RECs. As you can see, Ladies and Gentlemen, skilled person power is fundamental to development.

The call to our brothers and sisters in the Diaspora is clear and simple.... Join us in the reconstruction of the continent. Make your expertise available wherever you are.

African countries are embarking on an ambitious process of renewal. To sustain this however, they need skilled people across the board. In South Africa, we have a challenging programme of delivery of basic services including electricity, water, education, health, etc. The government makes increasing budgetary allocations every year but the pace of delivery is not satisfactory. To achieve the desired results, we need skilled personnel across the board. The challenges facing the South African Government are a symptom of a problem facing all African countries on a larger scale.

The NEPAD message to the international community especially the highly industrialized countries is a call for a new relationship of partnership to overcome the development chasm that has widened over the centuries, a partnership that is based on equality and shared responsibility and mutual interest. This is the message I am bringing today to the decision makers of this great country.

I have been a messenger of the NEPAD leaders for the last three years - a role I have enjoyed immensely. It has given me a unique opportunity to understand what is happening in Africa and a deeper understanding of the relationships with the highly industrialised countries.

I am convinced that today Africa has outstanding political leaders who are serious about fighting poverty and making Africa competitive. Leaders who are at the forefront of resolving conflicts and championing far reaching political, social and economic reforms in their countries. Some of these leaders operate primarily in their countries and are making great progress in consolidating democracy and sound economic management. Others are working both in their countries and at continental level to champion reforms and the African renaissance. Reforms at national and continental level are of course mutually reinforcing. Fundamental transformation has to be pursued at both levels.

As a result of this new leadership and convergence of developments mentioned earlier, Africa is making encouraging progress. Since the early 1990s, we have seen over 40 countries conducting multi party elections. Macroeconomic management has significantly improved. Budget deficits fell to an average of 3% in 2003. 18 African countries achieved economic growth of 5% and above all the continent is projected to achieve average growth rate of more than 5% in the current year.

Progress is being made with the resolution of conflicts and the implementation of NEPAD projects in infrastructure and agriculture, the African Peer Review Mechanism is making good progress. The war against the HIV and AIDS pandemic has been intensified and a foundation is being laid for a massive campaign.

The common thread linking these developments is the strengthening of political will and the determination of Africans to take responsibility for their own development. However Africa has enormous challenges including weak and poor governance, the disease burden, extreme poverty, the Science and Technology gap and the unequal and unfair trade and economic relationship with the highly industrialised countries.

Therefore to overcome the development chasm, the current reforms must be sustained not only for three to five years but for twenty to thirty years and the development partners must double their support.

From the above I hope it is clear that what I am saying is that Africa is well poised for a take-off. African leaders are taking courageous steps to speed up transformation and implementation of people centred development strategies but they do not have resources for scaling up.

Experience from Africa and the rest of the world shows that these improvements cannot be sustained unless they are accompanied by tangible improvements in the material conditions of the masses.

Progress that African countries are making has been confirmed by both the United Nations Millennium Development Project and the UK Commission for Africa reports. These reports have been prepared by world class researchers under the leadership of the United Nations Secretary General and Prime Minister Blair, the leader of a G8 country. They came to the same conclusion that Africa is making progress,

however to sustain the process, the developed countries must significantly increase their support by doubling development assistance in the short term and increasing it to reach 0, 7% of GDP by 2015. In addition they call for 100% debt write off for the poorest countries and for unrestricted access of African exports to the markets of the highly industrialised countries.

The challenge to the industrialised countries is to meet commitments made in 2000 when the Millennium Development Goals were adopted and further commitments made in other international fora including Monterrey and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The G8 countries should meet commitments made in the G8 Africa Action Plan in Kananaskis in 2002.

Both the UN Millennium Project and the Commission for Africa reports confirm that the international community is not meeting its commitments. As a result Africa is in danger of not meeting the MDGs in 2015. They call for a big push to support both national development and regional economic integration.

What is of concern to us is the response of the other G8 countries. At this stage there seems to be lack of clarity about this. However, what cannot be denied is that there is an urgent need for increased development flows especially to the countries that are trapped in poverty. There is also an urgent need to eliminate the burden of diseases and to write off the debt owed by the poorest countries. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that taking action on all these urgent matters is within the means of the highly industrialised countries.

What is possibly lacking is political will. To change political will there must be a push by key constituencies including members of parliament, professional organisations, NGOs, etc. We call on progressive forces all over the world to partner Africa on this important project of transformation and renewal. Yes you may think that you have little influence but by collaborating with other progressive forces you will be able to make a difference.

The Africa Recruit Human Resource Seminar is very important in this process not only for exposing young Africans in the Diaspora to opportunities in Africa but also for bringing to the attention of the larger public in the UK information about developments in Africa.

Experiences in East Asia and the former socialist countries clearly show the pivotal role of science and technology in development. To achieve all the things that African countries must achieve including universal primary education, elimination of food shortages and improving the health standards, high level skills are a prerequisite.

The key message is that the shortage of skills is the greatest threat to Africa's renewal. Africa will not achieve the MDGs and sustainable development unless the skills shortage is addressed, the brain drain reversed and Africa's ability to retain skilled personnel improved.

Through NEPAD Africa is promoting an African agricultural revolution, a war against HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, centres of excellence to rebuild Africa's capacity to produce new knowledge and high level skills. In addition, NEPAD is

promoting a rollout of an ambitious infrastructure development programme that would improve access to basic services and competitiveness.

All these initiatives require high level scientific technological and managerial skills. The question is where are the skills going to come from. Our answer is that from Africans in the Diaspora and the rest of the world. The training of new graduates will take at least a generation or longer but the skills are needed now if the further deepening of poverty and marginalisation is to be reversed.

This is the rationale for the Africa Recruit project. The objective is to use information technology and other modern communication techniques to provide information about opportunities in Africa to African professionals in the Diaspora and also to work together in promoting reforms to make it more attractive for young professionals to consider pursuing careers in Africa.

A good foundation has been built but there is still much to be done. The NEPAD Secretariat is very keen to strengthen its partnership with the Commonwealth Business Council and to extend the Africa Recruit project.

We look forward to gaining new friends, partners and sponsors during the two days.

President Obasanjo, Chairman of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee sends his best wishes. I have also the pleasure of extending the best wishes of the President of my own country, Mr T Mbeki.

I wish you a very successful seminar and great achievements in the coming year.

Thank you.