



RAILA AMOLO ODINGA

Prime Minister of the Republic of Kenya

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here to participate in this conference, whose concept so precisely embodies the inescapable interdependencies of the world today.

For me personally, it is most pertinent that the questions at the core of the conference proceedings – about the state of our world, about where it is going, and about what can be done to ensure a better future for all – are questions precisely similar to those with which we in Africa grapple in microcosm every day.

Africa has long lain a sleeping giant in the community of nations, but it has never been immune from the momentous upheavals happening elsewhere. Shifts and changes in global power structures have always affected our continent, and we have felt the aftershocks keenly.

The current global financial crisis, for example, has exposed the vulnerability of virtually all financial markets to global trends. Africa has not escaped, and the fact that this crisis is being felt in developing countries is a stark demonstration of the interconnectedness of global challenges.

Africa began to be more than just a staging-post for the world's bigger players with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. That event heralded nearly two decades of tremendous, life-altering events across the African continent.

Most of the remaining single-party dictatorships and one-man military regimes have crumbled and given way to emergent multi-party systems.

There is an intense focus on replacing bad governance with good, and on the reform of political, economic, social and legal structures. We started off in a very low place, but there has been significant progress.

Democracy is a universal aspiration. Ninety per cent of Africans say they want to live in a democracy. This year, we have shown in Kenya, and Zimbabweans have also demonstrated, that Africans are now more determined than ever before to have their say in governance.

The international community has an obligation to support people fighting for democracy because democracies are also more likely to respect human rights and to support open trade, and are less likely to go to war.

We in Kenya faced mortal problems earlier in the year, but managed, through a selfless approach and grown-up thinking, to bring our country back from the brink.

We have seen, or expect shortly, credible elections in Botswana, Ghana, South Africa and Zambia. The Zimbabwe peace deal will give the country its first legitimate government in a decade. Last year, Nigeria realised its first civilian-to-civilian democratic transition.

None of these events would have happened two decades ago. But African leaders came together, in July 2001, to form themselves into a serious lobby group that would grapple with the world's changed priorities and assert Africa's post-Cold War relevance.

The idea, endorsed by G8 leaders the same year, was to halt the marginalisation of Africa in the globalisation process and to accelerate its integration into the world economy, through the promotion of growth and sustainable development, and with the specific aim of eradicating widespread and severe poverty. The New Partnership for Africa's Development, Nepad, was born.



Nepad is a vision and programme of action for the redevelopment of the African continent, addressing key social, economic and political priorities in a coherent manner.

It was part of an African solution to African problems, and it was an expression of a commitment made by the continent's leaders to the people of Africa, as well as to the international community. It was designed to be the framework for a new partnership between our continent and the rest of the world.

There are still battles being fought on several African fronts, largely between the forces for retaining the status quo and the opposing forces for change. But most countries have introduced far-reaching reforms in governance structures and the liberalisation of economies, and in addressing such crucial issues as improvements in infrastructure, creating a favourable environment for investment, the eradication of corruption, the alleviation of poverty, the development of manpower, and the provision of adequate health services and education.

In planning our own future in Kenya, we know that we have a deeply vested interest in global efforts to combat climate change. Much of Africa's agriculture is rain-fed and, while we need to move away from this with investment in irrigation systems, there is no denying that drought and famine are major scourges on our continent. They contribute to poverty, and poverty in turn underlies much of Africa's disease and death.

In Malawi, the government has shown that, by subsidising fertilisers and agricultural inputs, it is possible to double agricultural productivity in just 12 months.

At present, some 30,000 children die every day in Africa as a direct consequence of insufficient food. Add to those the deaths caused by some of the other diseases exacerbated by poverty – Aids, which kills 6,500 Africans a day; malaria, 2,500 a day; tuberculosis, 1,500 a day – and we have a conservative estimate of 40,500 people dying every day in Africa from preventable causes.

That is nearly 15 million people a year, equal to three-quarters the population of Australia, more than ten times the population of Estonia. It represents an unthinkable magnitude of human pain and grief.

To help combat some of these problems, the Millennium Development Goals were established by the international community.

But we in Kenya do not view the MDGs as ends in themselves. To us, they are benchmarks that encourage efforts towards achievement of a greater national vision – for MDGs alone will not eliminate poverty or ensure equity in resource allocation. Our aim is not just expansion of the national cake, but ensuring that the cake is distributed equitably in society. A social protection programme for the poorest households is also necessary.

The old order of patronage and aid dependency has only perpetuated under-development in Africa, resulting in a huge debt portfolio without much to show for it. It is because of past failures that we have decided to move away from aid dependency towards attracting more trade and investment, both locally and regionally, as well as from our overseas partners.

That is why we support the Aid for Trade policy, including a new global trade deal that will give all developing countries access to global markets. We want our partners to open up their markets to us. We need reductions in the tariffs and farm subsidies imposed by the rich nations.

It is a sobering thought that the subsidies paid in the rich countries in 2002 equalled the entire income of the African continent. We need to change that. We need significant private investment. It is in the global interest. A strong and prosperous Africa would be a good and dependable partner in the international trade community.

And as these measures help to check extreme poverty and the often-resulting social unrest, the need for costly intervention by foreign partners would also diminish, while conditions at home would deter the economic migration that often poses concerns for the west. Africa would become a net 'brain gain', instead of a haemorrhaging 'brain drain', able to retain the skills it needs and no longer offloading its problems on to the developed world. It is a paradox that the continent richest in resources is also the poorest. It is a paradox that must be reversed, for the good of all.



As our gracious host, His Excellency the President of France, M. Nicholas Sarkozy, has said, a developed Africa is a global asset. It is an investment in our common future.

What happens within Africa's shores, and how well the continent is respected as a full member of a multi-faceted partnership for positive global change, can be taken as a pointer to the state of our world. Likewise, the global level of devotion to ensuring better prospects for all will be a serious determinant of where our world is going.

A bold determination to unite the world in long-term commitment to humanitarian and development-oriented solutions, building on shared responsibility and aiming for realisation of the UN's "global partnership of equals", is a vital step for us all, no matter where in the world we come from.

Thank you.