

Opening remarks at the inaugural session of the African Development Forum by the Deputy Secretary-General of the UN, Louise Fréchette, 24 October 1999

Addis Ababa, 24 October 1999

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi,
Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking His Excellency Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and the people of Ethiopia for welcoming us all into their midst. I am pleased to join you, Mr. Prime Minister in launching the first African Development Forum. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to all the participants in the Forum.

Let me also congratulate the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, Mr. K. Y. Amoako his staff and their many partners for planning and launching this initiative which holds great promise for the people of Africa and their quest for peace and development.

We shall speak in the next few days about globalization and the information era -- about their impact on Africa, and the opportunities they create for Africa. I shall have the honour to address this meeting at length tomorrow but let me take a few moments this evening to situate the Africa Development Forum process in a larger picture.

The world's population has just passed six billion, and we are about to enter a new millennium. It is shocking to think that almost half of the world's people -- nearly 3 billion people -- are entering the new era in abject poverty, with two dollars a day, or less, to live on. It is appalling that people in so many places are exposed to violence, brutality and discrimination. And it is deeply distressing that the world's climate seems to be changing in a way which could destroy the homes and livelihoods of millions. Our challenge, in Africa and around the world, is to make the next century more secure, more equitable and more humane, and to continue strengthening the United Nations so that it can respond when that task seems too big for nations or regions to handle alone and when people need protection and hope.

Next year, leaders from all over the world will come to New York for the Millennium Summit. They will consider the challenges ahead, and what the United Nations can do to face them. This Forum can feed important ideas and information into that process, and in so doing ensure that Africa's needs and views are taken into account.

As most of you may be aware, today is United Nations day. The UN is not only about governments: it is about people. It is, therefore, a great pleasure to welcome representatives of civil society, academic institutions and the private sector who join key African policy-makers at this Forum. This is indeed the image of the United Nations of the future, capable of meeting the challenges of globalization and information era as we enter the next millennium. The United Nations is for all of us. So let us all make a firm commitment to advance the use of information and communication technology for Africa's development.

Happy UN Day!
