

# Keynote address by Mr. Meles Zenawi

Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia  
03 September 2009

## **Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I am delighted to be here with you, at what I consider to be one of the most important meetings of the APF precisely because this meeting will discuss the issue that potentially poses an existential threat to all of us. I would like to thank the APF partners, the AU Commission, the ECA, and all those who have contributed to the meeting. In this regard I wish to highlight my gratitude to my good friend Lord Nicholas Stern for educating me on climate change issues and for providing his invaluable contribution towards the elaboration of a common African position on the matter. I understand Africa's positions on the matter will be discussed in the afternoon session. I would therefore wish to deal with the general and overarching issues.

For the first time in its history, Africa will field a single negotiating team empowered to negotiate on behalf of all the member states of the African Union. To that effect the Summit in Sirte has established a high level committee to steer the process on behalf of Africa and I am delighted to be in that committee and as of a few days ago to chair it. This unprecedented move on the part of Africa is bound to pause a series of organizational and managerial issues precisely because we have no precedent to learn from. But I believe more important than the challenges will be the opportunities opened up by this decision. Over fifty countries, more than ¼ of the member states of the United Nations will be speaking with one voice. That should make the negotiations much more manageable than would have been the case in the absence of such a decision. Africa's interest and position will not be muffled as has usually been the case when each African country speaks for itself or tries to do so on behalf of Africa without the necessary mandate. I think it is in the interests of our globe as a whole that this bold new experiment of fielding one negotiating team on behalf of the continent succeeds. I would therefore hope that you will bear with us as we overcome our teething problems and assist us to positively contribute to the success of the climate change negotiations.

As we discuss Africa's specific expectations from the climate change negotiations, we need to highlight what is often taken for granted and is thus often missed. Our interest is not to claim compensation for climate change and its damages. Our interest is to prevent that from happening in the first instance. That is our primary interest precisely because Africa's eco-systems are amongst the most fragile in the world and hence highly vulnerable to catastrophic changes due to small changes in temperature. It makes no sense to us for someone to make large parts of our continent unlivable and then pay some compensation for doing so. We understand that a certain degree of global warming is already happening and increase in global temperatures of about 20c are practically unavoidable. We will have to live with that because we do not seem to have any other option. We will live with the damage caused by the unavoidable levels of global warming and seek compensation and assistance to limit the damage. What we are not prepared to live with

is global warming above the minimum unavoidable level. We will therefore never accept any global deal that does not limit global warming to the minimum unavoidable level, no matter what levels of compensation and assistance are promised to us. Africa, Ladies and Gentlemen, will squarely and unequivocally side with those who are committed to limit global warming to the unavoidable minimum level.

I am sure you will agree with me that we Africans have contributed virtually nothing to global warming and there is precious little that we can do to curb it. But we have no intention to free ride. We want to keep our forests intact and re-afforest those that have over the years been degraded. We want to do so precisely because such an approach is economically more rewarding and sustainable. We want to quickly adopt green technologies among other things because we do not have the dead weight of massive investment in dirty technologies. Africa is a green field for investment because it is the least developed region in the world. By partnering with us on green development, the developed world could create a more robust market and overall environment for the mitigation efforts that it alone must shoulder. In other words Africa wants to be part of the solution even on matters of mitigation if it is enabled and assisted to do so.

### **Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Unlike the G-8 outreach programmes and the G-20 summits to which we are kindly invited by the organizers, programmes that I have had the honor, and to some extent the misfortune of representing African in, we will participate in the upcoming climate negotiations not as invitees but as full blooded negotiators. We will participate in the negotiations not as supplicants pleading for our case but as negotiators defending our views and interests and reaching out to others to achieve our common positions. The fact that Africa will be represented by one negotiating team reinforces our role as key stakeholders and negotiators.

We as the prime victims of climate change and among the primary beneficiaries of a meaningful agreement on the matter cannot but be responsible actors and negotiators. Even as we defend our corner we cannot but highlight our common humanity and destiny. We cannot but reach out to everyone to curb the insanity that is global warming. Africa's effective participation in the upcoming negotiations is thus bound to contribute to a more progressive and environmentally friendly outcome than would otherwise have been the case.

I do not want to be misunderstood. Africa will not be there to express its participation by merely warming the chairs or to make perfunctory speeches and statements. We want to be and deserve to be in the thick of it all. We will not participate to merely adorn the positions of this or that party but to protect our common interest and within that common interest that of the specific interest of Africa. While we will reason with everyone to achieve our objective we are not prepared to rubber stamp any agreement by the powers that be as the best we could get for the moment. We will use our numbers to deligitimize any agreement that is not consistent with our minimal position. If needs be we are prepared to walk out of any negotiations that threatens to be another rape of our continent. But with your support I know none of that will be necessary. I am confident that in the coming months we will be able to build the necessary consensus to prevent any such disruption. We wish and plan to engage you between now and December and I

hope we will have fruitful discussions to facilitate a successful outcome in Copenhagen. I wish you all successful deliberations and a happy brief stay in Addis.

**I thank you**