

## United Nations General Assembly High Level Event on Africa 's Development Needs

**Presentation by Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, United Nations Under Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa**

at

**Roundtable 2:** Africa's Development Needs: State of Implementation of various commitments, challenges, and the way forward

**Venue:** ECOSOC Chamber

**Date:** September 22, 2008

Your Excellency Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda , Your Excellency Tarja Halonen, President of Finland , Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen.

My purpose in this brief presentation is to share with you my thoughts on the state of implementation of the various commitments to advance the African development agenda and propose a way forward. As you know, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), which I am very privileged to lead at this time, has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the various commitments at the regional level.

The Secretary General's report on Africa 's Development Needs prepared for this High Level Event provides a very comprehensive overview of the development challenges facing the continent. The report of the MDG Gap Task Force recently launched by the SG shows very clearly that there are significant gaps between commitments and action, a finding which is consistent with the findings of many other studies. It is thus without risk to assert that many of the development commitments are yet to be fulfilled.



**Africa has turned the page on its development.** Unlike in the last two decades of the last century, the story out of Africa today is more hopeful. And the basis for hope and optimism is based on a firm foundation. As reports by practically every organization that works in Africa shows, the continent has been growing. According to ECA's ERA, this is about the 6 th consecutive year that the continent has grown at more than 5.5% per annum on average. This growth has been accompanied by some improvements in social conditions. For example, primary education enrolment has risen and there has been a significant decrease in the prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS. The number of conflicts has fallen and in many more countries even the most intractable problems are being resolved through negotiations. Transfer of power from one individual to another or one party to another has become commonplace and the overall quality of governance is improving. In most countries, the fight against corruption and for enthroneing ethics in government has become part of the policy fabric. Indeed, the improvement in governance can be seen from the large number of African countries that have voluntarily agreed to be reviewed under the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).

**These improvements in economic, social and political conditions are in part driven by a strong effort by Africa and its partners to meet internationally agreed development commitments** , commitments which express the noble, collective desire of all to improve the human conditions in all parts of our shared planet.

**There has been some progress in meeting these commitments.** On the financing side, Many African countries have benefitted from debt relief both under the enhanced heavily indebted poor countries initiative and the multilateral debt relief initiative (MDRI). Aid flows to some countries have risen in nominal terms. Nonetheless, as the recent report of the MDG Gap Task Force amply demonstrates, there is a significant shortfall in fulfilling these commitments. Aid flows are yet to reach the \$50 billion estimated in 2005 as required if Africa is to meet the MDGs. (Recent estimates put it at about \$75 billion). Similarly the commitments on health and education (Education for All <EFA>) remain unmet.

There are many **factors constraining efforts to implement these various commitments** . A number of these factors have

been mentioned by previous speakers, so for purposes of saving on time, I will focus on a few.

- First, **many partner countries are yet to meet the 0.7% of GNI agreed to be allocated to development aid** . We applaud the Nordic countries who have set an example in this area. The failure in meeting this commitment has made it extremely difficult for countries to scale up needed public sector investments to reach the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs;
- Second, there is **inadequate political** will in many of the partner countries. This was recently amply demonstrated by the collapse of the Doha Round of international trade negotiations and the difficulties around the on-going Economic Partnership Agreements between the EU and Africa ;
- Third, **aid effectiveness remains low** . As the Accra High Level Forum shows, there is still a lot of work to be done to meet the goals of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

The constraints are not only on the partners' side however. They also exist on the African side. Among these are **weak human and institutional capacity** (although progress is being made on this score); **inadequate accountability** ; **weak subordination to the rule of law** , and **fragile institutions** for mobilizing domestic resources.

#### **Way Forward:**

How can we overcome these constraints and accelerate progress towards the implementation of these commitments in order to achieve the agreed development goals? A number of very good recommendations have been made by those who have spoken before me. So let me concentrate on a few: First, it is compellingly important to **re-start and successfully conclude the Doha Round of International trade negotiations** . This is very critical. Trade is very important as a factor of growth and ensuring that the Doha Round is completed – completion in this regard means that its essentially development character is not diluted – on time. The cost of delay is too high for Africa .

Second, we have to do our best to **secure the improvements in governance** . In this regard, it is important to make resources available for implementing the outcomes of APRM reviews. Without implementation, it is unclear whether the APRM will achieve its purpose. In this regard, it is also essential to build and reinforce capacity in all areas in most countries of the continent.

Third, African countries must **continue with economic, social and political reforms** . The economic and institutional reform stream appears to be slowing in many countries. Reform is a continuous process of improvement in search of efficiency gains. African countries should not let up on reforms. An important element of this reform effort should be the preparation, adoption and implementation of MDGs-based poverty reduction strategies/national development plans that reflects new challenges such as climate change are imperative.

Fourth, it is important to **scale up financing for critical public sector investments** as this is the most visible way of demonstrating commitment. Partners have to meet their pledges. It is important for them to provide multi-year disbursement schedules to improve predictability and to enable African countries plan. African countries should increase domestic resource mobilization. This would require them to improve and strengthen their financial systems and improve regulatory oversight of the system.

#### **Conclusion**

The challenges are many. The needs are enormous. The commitments have been partially fulfilled. But together, recognizing our common destiny and shared responsibility to improve the human condition for all, the development commitments in Africa will be achieved. The challenges can be overcome – there is evidence for that. But the continent's development needs must be met by fulfilling the commitments.

Thank you,