

Ghana @ 50

GOLDEN JUBILEE LECTURES

INAUGURAL SPEECH

BY

KOFI A. ANNAN

CHAMPIONING AFRICA'S RENAISSANCE: PEACE, DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

My fellow Ghanaians,

It is good to be home again. Let me start by saying how deeply moved and gratified I am to be giving the inaugural Golden Jubilee Lecture. I could have expected no better homecoming, and I certainly could desire no greater honour than to speak to you, my fellow citizens, on this historic occasion.

As some of you know, this is my first speaking engagement since I stepped down as UN Secretary-General at the end of December. Indeed, until President Kufuor asked me to deliver this lecture, I had every intention of enjoying a quiet few months of civilian life before making any public appearances.

But when it is your President who calls, and your own country that beckons, "I would be honoured" is the only proper answer.

Let me take this opportunity to thank you, my fellow Ghanaians, for your solid, consistent support and encouragement. Your support and that of millions of people around the world gave me the strength and courage I needed.

Today, I speak as a private Ghanaian citizen after a long, long time. I joined the United Nations in 1962, barely five years after our country's independence. In those days, Kwame Nkrumah was President. My alma mater, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, was then the Kumasi College of Science and Technology. But what I remember most of that era was that – led by Ghana's own example – African hopes for self-determination were brimming over.

It was a time of change and excitement. Africa's wave of decolonization was cresting. Our continent seemed on the cusp of a promising new future. Finally, we Africans were to be masters of our own destiny. Long ruled by foreign crowns, we were to lead ourselves not only to freedom, but to progress and prosperity as well.

Yet, it did not quite unfold that way. Newly independent African states inherited artificial borders, often with social groupings rent asunder by straight lines penciled on a map. Suddenly, African ethnic groups and communities with shared histories often found themselves on opposite sides of new and arbitrary borders.

In response, post-colonial Governments sought national unity through the centralization of political and economic power, employing vestigial colonial laws and institutions to stifle and suppress pluralism.

And all too quickly, much of the unifying strength of the independence movement was transformed into one-party rule.

Independent Africa stumbled in other ways as well. Its development policy emphasized the production of primary commodities for export, often at the expense of adequate support for subsistence agriculture. We became subject to the whims of the market without having any say in its functioning.

Over succeeding decade, our continent devolved into a land of big men and broken dreams. Some African liberators became oppressors and/or looters. Many conflicts festered and economies stagnated.

Thus, by 1997, when I became the second Secretary-General from Africa, I felt my continent was the place least equipped to tackle the three overarching challenges of our age – the need for more security, the demand for better development, and the rising cry for human rights and rule of law.

Africa stood sidelined in the world economy.

Africa was also the scene of some of the most protracted and brutal conflicts.

And many of the continent's people felt they were unjustly condemned to be exploited and oppressed, generation after generation, since colonial rule had been replaced by an inequitable economic world order, and sometimes by bad governance.

Yet at the same time, I also felt the winds of change - a feeling similar to, if more circumspect than, those heady early days of Ghana's independence.

I believed that a new era was in prospect – Africa's third wave, to succeed earlier swells of decolonization and the ensuing years of wars and conflicts.

I called on Africa to make this third wave one of enduring development, peace and respect for human rights.

Over the ensuing decade, I have been privileged to see this third wave unfold. Not always as forcefully as we might have wished, nor so consistently. But, inexorably and unstoppably, it has continued to flow across this rich, vast and varied continent.

The bedrock of this wave - of our African renaissance – is real and measurable progress on peace and security.

About half the world's armed conflicts, and some three quarters of the UN's peacekeepers, are in Africa. But, compared to a decade ago, there are fewer inter-State conflicts that there used to be, and many civil wars have ended.

In Burundi, the peaceful and democratic conclusion of the transitional process was a milestone for that country and, hopefully, for the Great Lakes region. Wars have stopped in Angola, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and southern Sudan.

Let me also urge the political leaders of Cote d'Ivoire to put the nation first, settle their differences and bring peace to the country. That is what the people demand, that is what they deserve.

Lesotho, Guinea-Bissau, Togo, Madagascar and Mauritania have all been through peaceful restoration of constitutional order. The deadly conflict in Northern Uganda has entered a negotiating stage. And the Democratic Republic of Congo has successfully concluded democratic elections for the first time in 40 years.

I am proud that the United Nations was an important actor in these events, And I am proud of what my fellow Africans have achieved in ending many of the conflicts that disfigured our continent.

But we should be under no illusion.

In far too many reaches of the continent, people are still exposed to brutal conflicts, fought with small, but deadly, weapons.

Every day, in Darfur, more men, women and children are being driven from their homes by murder, rape and the burning of their villages. And Somalia is once again engulfed in war. Beyond Sudan and Somalia, less visible but no less deadly conflicts cry out for African resolve and international attention.

Peace may be spreading on the continent, but a continent at peace – which is what we all want - remains an idea in search of realization. Most Africans realize today that they need to work together to pacify the continent, and I often say that no one invests in a bad neighborhood. And, when a continent is seen by many as a continent at war, we do scare away foreign partners and investors.

Fortunately, we seem to have understood the high cost of persistent conflict: the years of squandered development, the enormous loss life and displacement of people, - the untold suffering.

Thus, we are doing whatever we can to settle these conflicts, and to take ownership of the peace and security agenda. Through the African Union we are learning to better manage and resolve conflicts and, most important, to prevent new ones from breaking out.

As conflicts subside, Governments across Africa have also turned to the essential tasks of economic and social development. Because, ultimately, peace requires more than the mere absence of war. It is sustainable only if accompanied by real progress in development, the second pillar of an African renaissance.

Here, again, there is reason for cautious optimism. Today, most African economies are better run: inflation, averaging 8 percent a year, is at historic lows in many countries, while 27 African countries are projected to grow more than 5 per cent in terms of GDP this year. Direct investment inflows to African economies have increased by more than 200 per cent in the past five years. Exports are also rising: with some countries experiencing double digit export growth.

There have been spectacular advances on debt relief, as well as encouraging initiatives on aid and investment. The largest debtor on the continent - Nigeria - has bought back all its foreign debt.

And Africa has also recorded encouraging progress on some of the individual Millennium Development Goals.

Take the goal of achieving universal primary education. Over the past five years, more than 10 African countries have increased enrolment rations by over 15 percentage points. And, in several such countries, this improvement came about mainly because of a rise in the enrolment of girls.

Or take the goal of fighting AIDS. Today, the world has recognized HIV/AIDS as a major challenge and a brake on development, and begun to confront it. Prevalence is dropping in several African countries, because more young people are using condoms, reducing the number of sexual partners and waiting longer before they start having sex.

In reducing maternal mortality, several African countries are on target. And most are making progress.

In providing safe drinking water, six African countries have already reached the goal while more than half are on track.

And not all progress is equally difficult. Fighting malaria with bed nets, or empowering farmers with improved seed varieties, can bring dramatic change relative to the cost.

Today, one thing is clear to all of us here: Africa's development disproves the distorted and widespread image of our continent as a sea of undifferentiated poverty.

Yet the magnitude of African needs leaves little room for complacency.

Despite the fact that our continent has the largest growth rate of mobile phone subscribers in the world - 5000 percent between 1998 and 2003, about 50 percent of all Africans have yet to make or receive a phone call. A small proportion have ever logged on to the internet. And the global green revolution has bypassed African farmers. Ours is the only continent that cannot feed itself today, much less ensure food security for its people.

Nowhere is it more important, therefore, to ensure lasting peace and continuous development. Only then, can we make up for lost years, and bring prosperity to all.

To realize this vision, we must embrace human rights and the rule of law, as the third leg of African progress.

Ten years ago, I said some African leaders viewed human rights as a rich country's luxury, for which Africa was not ready; that others treated it as an imposition, if not a plot. I said I found these thoughts demeaning of the yearning for human dignity that resides in every African heart. And I called Africa to ostracize and isolate those who seize power through coups against elected governments.

Since then, I believe Africans have demonstrated that human rights are African rights. Most African states, more than ever, now have democratically elected governments. And these governments, through New Partnership for Africa's Development, have explicitly agreed to uphold human rights and democracy, to fight corruption and promote good governance.

Today, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the Presidents of Liberia, is the first woman ever to be elected President of an African State. And that speaks more eloquently than words ever could about advances in the rights of women. So does the fact that, in Sub-Saharan African countries, the share of women in single or lower houses of parliament is higher than in the developing countries of Southern or Western Asia.

Throughout Africa, ordinary citizens also are engaged as never before. A vibrant growing civil society movement has helped energize the African agenda. Africans are standing up for their rights and Governments are beginning to listen. Indeed, by demanding honest and accountable leadership, civil society actors are providing a critical check on our continent's sad history of misrule.

Civil society is also highlighting the need for creative responses to Africa's rapidly changing realities. For 21st century, Africa differs in very fundamental ways from the continent of old. For instance, half of the population of sub-Saharan Africa is between ages 5 and 24; urbanization is changing the very face of our demography, and technological change is slowly putting essential information in the hands of everyone, from farmers to slum dwellers.

These conditions demand that we all think faster and act quicker to serve the needs of our people. They demand more inclusive, more accountable and more responsive Governments, and leaders who are in tune with this new Africa and its myriad.

As a Ghanaian, I am proud that 50 years after my country led a wave of African independence; Ghana is at the forefront of Africa's promising third wave as well.

What we need now is to keep building on the progress we have achieved so far. To do so, we must build a comprehensive strategy for the future, one which gives equal weight and attention to the three pillars of security, development and human rights.

They all reinforce each other; they all depend on each other.

These three pillars must prove the basis of our African renaissance, so that all Africans may enjoy the prosperity that seemed so palpable 50 years ago.

That year, 1957, was when I graduated from Mfantsepim, full of hope for the future and for my country. This year, I have graduated again, this time from the leadership of the United Nations. And once again, I find myself full of hope for Ghana and for Africa.

So let me reiterate that it is good to be back home. This is an exciting, if not a challenging time to be an African. We all have much work to do, and I look forward to joining hands with all my fellow citizens to lift our nation, and our great continent, towards the bright future that can and must be ours.

Thank you.