

# Unity of purpose for Africa

By **BAN KI-MOON**

SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS



**BAN KI-MOON** is a South Korean diplomat and the current Secretary-General of the United Nations since January 1, 2007. He previously addressed the General Assembly in his capacity as the Foreign Minister of Korea during its annual general debate each year since 2004. After completing University in Korea, he earned a Master in Public Administration from the John F Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in 1985 and was posted twice to the Republic of Korea (ROK) Embassy in Washington DC. He was appointed National Security Advisor to the President in 1996, and assumed the office of Vice Minister in 2000. His most recent post was as Foreign Policy Advisor to the President, Roh Moo-hyun.

The African Union is a vivid illustration of the unity of purpose that characterises the African continent when it is at its best. It was that unity of purpose that drove its countries' quest for independence. It was that unity of purpose that laid the foundations of the Union. It is that unity of purpose that is the key to Africa's progress in the years ahead.

Unity of purpose is also the foundation of Africa's partnership with the United Nations, as we take on the broad range of challenges we share. We can see concrete examples of that unity of purpose in so many of our joint efforts, as expressed in the cooperation agreement between our two institutions, signed by my predecessor in Addis Ababa, last November. Unity of purpose guides our collaboration for democracy, human rights and good governance, including through the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

It drives our collective efforts for peace and security – including the UN's commitment to developing the African Union capacity to plan, launch and manage peacekeeping operations.

The same applies to our efforts to build enduring peace in countries recovering from conflict. Two outstanding examples are Burundi and Sierra Leone, where, after the successful conclusion of peacekeeping mandates, the UN is working closely with these countries to help shape a better future, through the efforts of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission.

Two thirds of the blue helmets deployed in UN peacekeeping operations are in Africa. Last year, the UN worked with the AU and other partners to support the Congolese people in holding the first free elections in more than 40 years. This endeavour was a remarkable peacekeeping achievement, and the largest electoral support engagement in UN history; but above all, it was testimony to the steadfast courage and determination of the Congolese people, as 70 per cent of the electorate turned out to cast their vote in a calm and peaceful ballot.

The story of Liberia, too, shines as an example of what can be achieved through our collective will for peace and security in Africa. Let us bring the same unity of purpose to bear on those intractable crises that bleed like open wounds on the face of the Continent. Let us bring it to bear on our efforts to bring peace to

Somalia and Côte d'Ivoire.

Above all, let us bring it to bear on the tragedy of Darfur. We must open a new and different chapter in this story of broken hope. I pay tribute to the valiant job the AU force has done in Darfur. But the toll of the crisis remains unacceptable; it is also holding back the potential of Sudan as a whole to develop as a peaceful, prosperous and democratic nation – and that, in turn, could hold back the future of the entire sub-region.

Since taking office as Secretary-General, I have made Darfur my top priority. The partnership between the AU and the UN is of central importance to how we fare on this, the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. Together, we must work to end the violence and scorched-earth policies adopted by various parties, including militias, as well as the bombings which are still a terrifying feature of life in Darfur.

We must address the regional dimensions of the crisis. Lifesaving humanitarian work must be allowed to resume, and civil society in Darfur must have a voice in the peace process. And we must persuade non-signatories to join, while building on the consensus for the urgent deployment of a UN-AU force on the ground. I sincerely hope we can reach agreement on this vital issue during our discussions in the margins of this Summit.

In many other parts of the continent, Africa has made remarkable progress in ending armed conflict. This is not only a matter of survival and security for those whose lives have been directly affected. It is also a condition for building better lives in the longer term for all people throughout Africa, and setting them firmly on the path of development. I know, from my own childhood in Korea, how war robs individuals of the chance of a building a decent life, and whole societies of the chance to prosper – long beyond the boundaries of the war zone, long after the gunfire has been silenced.

I have seen the hardship and hunger, the degradation and disease, that come with prolonged warfare. Elderly women scavenging for scraps, toddlers weak from malnutrition and unsafe drinking water, buildings dilapidated, corn fields rotting, an infrastructure on its knees. This I witnessed as a young boy, and the images haunt me to this day.

But I also witnessed how, through unity of purpose, my country was able to transform itself from a traumatised nation with a non-existent economy, into a vibrant, productive society and a regional economic

power. That unity of purpose brought together an unbeatable combination: the concerted and enduring assistance of the international community, and the courage and determination of the Korean people.

Let us bring the same unity of purpose to bear on development in Africa. When I presented my candidacy for Secretary-General, I said that the success or failure of the United Nations in the coming years will be determined largely on this continent. I pledged to do my best to mobilise political will – among world leaders, international financial institutions and other stakeholders – and work with African Governments to reach the Millennium Development Goals. The Goals represent our common vision – a partnership between rich and poor countries for building a better future. I intend to keep to that promise.

Many of your countries have made remarkable progress towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals. Since the late 1990s, more than a dozen African nations have achieved average growth rates of above 5 per cent. Many low-income countries have lifted sizeable proportions of their citizens above the poverty line.

Several are on course to meet the target of halving poverty by 2015. Around 15 African countries have already achieved universal primary education, or are on track to do so. And most Southern African countries are on course to attain gender parity at the primary school level.

These advances are precious, and we must ensure we replicate and build on them. That means ensuring a true partnership for sharing science and technology, which is rightly one of the themes of this Summit. And it means empowering women and girls, through education and through creative tools such as microfinance, which has proved its value, many times over, as a weapon to break the vicious circle of poverty.

UN figures show that 30 per cent of Africa's coastal infrastructure could be inundated by rising sea levels linked to global warming. The livelihoods of tens of millions of people could be in jeopardy. One of the main themes of the last African Union Summit was what climate change will do to Africa. You can be sure that the challenge of climate change – including in Africa – is one of my priorities as Secretary-General.

The time has come for the rest of the world to assist African countries in adapting to the effects of a warming planet, while strengthening efforts to mitigate climate change.

At the same time, the UN is pursuing joint initiatives with a number of African Governments to factor climate change into national development plans. I promise to work with donor Governments to ensure that all such initiatives get the full backing they need.

I will push for ambitious emission reduction commitments by industrialised countries, since their

leadership in this fight will be crucial, as well as generous, well-targeted assistance to African countries on the front line of extreme droughts and floods.


An equal challenge is the pandemics that continue to ravage Africa. They take their worst social and economic toll on countries that can least afford it. They also pose threats to peace and stability, in the devastation they wreak on capacity and governance.

AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria are responsible for nearly 4 million African deaths every year.

But at the same time, there is hope. On AIDS, we have seen advances in treatment. We have seen a steady increase in political commitment. We have seen new resources. And we have seen a range of promising new initiatives, such as AIDS Watch Africa – set up by the African Union, in collaboration with UNAIDS, to help chart a direction for AIDS policy and define universal access targets until 2010. Let us keep pushing for both treatment and prevention for all.

Let us also seize the opportunity of a breakthrough in the comprehensive control of malaria by 2010. I pledge to work with African leaders for that success.

How Africa fares in reaching the Millennium Development Goals is a matter of life and death for millions of Africans. It is also a test of the ability of the United Nations to carry out the mandate our membership has given us. It will be one of my priorities to ensure that we meet that test – and I will take steps to strengthen the Organisation accordingly.

Through unity of purpose, I believe there is no limit to what we can achieve. The partnership between the African Union and the United Nations is strong, broad and deep. Let us work together in the years ahead to make it even stronger, broader and deeper. 

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Eamonn Daly, Chief Operating Officer, FIRST with the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon

