

XII Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement

Durban, South Africa

2 - 3 September 1998

Address of the President of the Republic of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, at the Inaugural Session

Chairperson,
Your Majesties and Your royal Highnesses,
Distinguished Secretaries General of the OAU and the United Nations
Honourable Ministers and Ambassadors,
Distinguished delegates, guests and observers,
Ladies and gentlemen:

It is an honour and a profound privilege for us, who have only lately become full members of the Non-Aligned Movement, to host the Twelfth Summit of Heads of State and Government.

We warmly welcome you all to our newly democratic country, still in the infancy of its freedom.

We are especially proud to do so because of the critical role of the Movement and its members in the liberation of all the people of our country from the system of apartheid. For your selfless support, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

In as much as the achievement of democracy in South Africa and our return to the community of free nations was your victory too, we say in all humility and gratitude - welcome home!

Steadily but surely, we are realising the vision of what you envisaged when you sacrificed so much to lend us your support. But like all developing countries, we are doing so within the constraints and difficulties produced by an international environment that neither we nor the visionaries of Bandung foresaw.

This situation is compounded by the terrible legacy of apartheid which defiles every aspect of South African life, sometimes in ways which even we, the natives of this land, could not conceive of.

However, let us recall too that this is the Fifth Summit of the Movement to be hosted by Africa itself - a further source of joy for us as hosts.

Free at last from colonial and white minority rule, Africa has the possibility now to focus all her energies on improving the lives of her children.

In this new phase of Africa's redemption, of a Renaissance whose time has come, we will count much on the principles of collective self-reliance and relations of mutual co-operation which are embodied by the Non-Aligned Movement.

It is therefore with a deep sense of history that South Africa hosts this Summit. We are greatly honoured to be entrusted with the responsibility of chairing the Non-Aligned Movement at this challenging and momentous time for the developing world.

During its tenure, South Africa will seek further to strengthen the Movement as well as contribute to its renewal, so that the Movement can discharge its historic mandate into the next century.

We say this, knowing that the achievement of our goals depends critically on the collective interests of the developing countries being effectively addressed.

Our task in this regard is made easier by the leadership and co-ordination that has been provided by Colombia over the past three years as the Chair of the Movement and, not least, by Indonesia as the previous captain of our collective.

We pay tribute to them for the work they have done towards equipping us with the wherewithal to achieve our common goals in the new global environment.

Your Majesties,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen;

We have to remake our common world anew. The violence we see all around us, against people who are as human as we who sit in privileged positions, must surely be addressed in a decisive and sustained manner.

I speak here of the violence of hunger which kills, of the violence of homelessness which kills, of the violence of joblessness which kills, of the violence of malaria and HIV/AIDS which kills and of the trade in narcotics which kills.

I speak of the destruction of human lives which attends underdevelopment, of societies over which we preside in which the very poor prey on one another with knives and guns, in which we have to contend with the crimes of the abuse of children and the rape of and other violence against women and in which those who murder and rob seem to thrive.

The violence against which I speak is also the violence of war, whether in the Democratic Republic of Congo or in Kosovo, and whether in Afghanistan or in Sri Lanka, and of the frightening threat which hangs over all humanity that is posed by the huge arsenals of weapons of mass destruction, and especially nuclear weapons, which remain in the stockpiles of a few countries in the world.

You will, of course, have recognised the fact that what I am speaking of are the twin issues of development and peace which have been the central objectives of our Movement from its foundation and remain its principal challenges.

Today, one of the most immediate challenges that faces the developed countries is the need to remove the burden of the unbearable debt. Much has been said about this; what is

needed is action by the developed countries and their partners in the South.

From this, it would be correct to conclude that the problem of Japan is a problem of an excess of wealth.

Thus in our modern world we have to grapple with such conundrums as an excess of wealth in one area of the world which contributes to the creation of poverty in another.

The question arises naturally as to whether wealth in one corner of the globe can be preserved where deprivation thrives in another, as to whether the time has not come for us to take such steps as would assure that the development agenda of the Non-Aligned Movement informs the development agenda of the whole international community.

In this regard, let me say a few things which I trust that especially those who live in the developed North will hear and respond to.

As our Deputy President, Thabo Mbeki, said earlier this week, and as is reflected by the problem of the Japanese economy to which we have just referred, given the will, there are resources within the world economy which could and should be mobilised to address the development needs of the poor of the world.

The process of globalisation has imposed on all of us a fashionable orthodox uniformity according to which we must all address such questions as budget deficits, rates of inflation, interest and exchange rates, capital movements, the flexibility of labour markets, the affordability of social welfare systems and so on.

Might the situation not arise that these, and other phrases, occupy so prominent a place in our daily political vocabulary, that inadvertently, we end up deifying the means to an end, such that we forget that the purpose of it all is the continued and sustained improvement of the material and spiritual life of each and every citizen!

Might it not be that such concepts as "the end of ideology" and observation that have been made about the apathy and indifference of the masses towards politics in the countries of the North are, in fact, an expression of disillusionment.

The disillusionment we speak of is with a seemingly universal brand of politics, in which human values only assume prominence during election time. Otherwise these values, whose honouring in the practice should be the purpose of all politics, normally swirl around as unwanted debris in the wake of the turbulent march of a macho world of economic growth and intensely fought power games.

We speak of a world of the politicians that is without a sustained and hope giving vision about the human condition, without passion, without the capacity to inspire the people, as the peoples of the world, including the developed North, were inspired to act against the apartheid crime against humanity.

We hear the message repeatedly that the voter of the countries of the developed North have developed fatigue towards development aid to the countries of the South. We do not doubt the honesty of those who convey this report.

At the same time, we continue to see these same voters respond with great compassion whenever they see those terrible pictures with which we are all familiar, of victims of famine and civil strife, of refugees and of those who inhabit the ordinary world of the ordinary poverty of underdevelopment.

And so we come back to where we were earlier.

Accordingly, we ask whether the compassion of the ordinary people of our countries does not convey the message to us, who are their leaders, and particularly the leaders of the rich North, that a central challenge of leadership in our world of enormous economic possibilities is fully to grasp the significance of these possibilities.

Is there no requirement that our counterparts in the North recognise the door these possibilities open towards the achievement of the vision of a shared prosperity!

If such a determination were to be made, assuming that the will to do so exists, the question we must ask is whether the leaders in the developed world would have the vision and the courage to defy the inertia of orthodox prescriptions, and draw on the impulse which made it possible to have a Marshall Plan and inspired the more recent effort by the Western part of Germany to rebuild the Eastern lander.

Or will these leaders rather tell us that the values of the market are supreme and its instruments and mechanisms an ineluctable force, in the face of whose power all who aspire towards human dignity must bow in respectful obeisance!

In the twilight of our years, towards the concluding end of a route of march which was defined by the challenge to contend with an inhumane world of a sustained offensive against the very concept of human dignity, I believe we have a right to expect a quality of political leadership among those who are well-off, which rejects the concept of each for himself and the devil take the hindmost!

Surely it cannot be held to be a fault, that the elderly of our human society dream a dream, which leaves them in awe of the possibility of the emergence of a new political leadership which would represent the politics of a new era in human society.

That leadership must, indeed, comprehend the realities of our world and, having understood, nurture the boldness of vision which will enable us to act in furtherance of what is good for our common humanity and in a manner which has, up to now, neither been imaginable nor possible.

But if we make a demand on the peoples of the North that they produce a leadership of a new type, we cannot set different standards for ourselves. Indeed, the challenge we face is that we too should strive to lead by the example we ourselves set of leadership truly dedicated to serve the interests of our peoples.

I am confident that we will be able to give that leadership because of what we will do to give practical expression to the vision which includes respect for democracy and human rights, peace and stability in our own countries and regions, good governance and a principled opposition to corruption and the abuse of power, people-centred processes of development and the provision of a better life for all our peoples, the genuine independence of all countries and genuinely mutually beneficial co-operation among the nations of the world.

In this regard, and as a African speaking at this summit taking place on African soil, I would like to salute the Head of State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria who is with us today, General Abdusalam Abubakar, together with his colleagues, who have opened the way towards the restoration of democracy in and the regeneration of this important African country.

We continue to be concerned about the grave situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In this regard, it is important for the Summit to understand that all the Governments of Southern, Central and East Africa, as well as the OAU, are acting together and will continue to act together, to address the common agenda of peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the entire region of Central Africa and the Great Lakes.

Let me also salute the Government and the political leaders of the Kingdom of Lesotho who have co-operated to ensure that a political crisis which has emerged in the country is solved peacefully, with the assistance of the Southern African Development Community, of which Lesotho is a valued member.

All of us continue to do what we can to ensure the full implementation of the Lusaka Protocol so that the people of the sister Republic of Angola can enjoy the peace, stability and development which are their due.

In the presence of the Secretary General of the United Nations. H.E. Mr Kofi Annan, whom we welcome to our country and the Summit, we would like to urge that the United Nations should continue to discharge its responsibility to the people of Angola to ensure that the expectations represented by the Lusaka Protocol are realised.

The conflict in the Sudan remains unresolved, despite sustained mediation efforts led by President Arap-Moi of Kenya. Once more, we appeal to all concerned to bring this long-standing civil war to a just end which addresses the interests of all the people of Sudan as well as her neighbours.

We are also convinced that the possibility exists to the so-called Lockerbie affair which has dragged on for too long and hope that all those directly concerned will co-operate with one another to remove this point of tension, enable the Libyan Jamahirriya to enjoy normal relations with all nations of the world as well as address the concerns of those who lost their relatives as a result of this incident.

We further urge that the process remain on course leading to the holding of a referendum over the question of Western Sahara and the final resolution of this matter.

We remain gravely concerned about the situation in the Middle East, especially the positions taken by the Netanyahu administration in Israel, which has blocked progress towards a just and peaceful solution, including the formation of a sovereign state of Palestine.

The international community, and the United States in particular, has a responsibility to ensure that this matter is addressed expeditiously. We should not allow that the narrow, chauvinistic interests of the current administration in Israel should succeed to block the prospect of a permanent and just peace throughout the Middle East.

The people of Cuba have an inalienable right to determine their destiny. All of us share an obligation to move beyond the difficult relationships of the Cold War period and should seek to establish new relations characterised by our vision of the New World Order.

Similarly, we must be interested that the continuing tensions in Korea come to an end and would therefore encourage all steps that might be taken to resolve this issue.

Equally, the long-festering problem of Cyprus has to be solved.

All of us remain concerned that the issue of Jammu and Kashmir should be solved through peaceful negotiations and should be willing to lend all the strength we have to the resolution of this matter.

The critical question of nuclear disarmament must remain high on our list of priorities. Therefore, as a Movement, we will have to continue to engage this issue to ensure that we achieve actual movement on this issue.

Correctly, we remain seized of the important question of the restructuring of the United Nations and will have to do everything we can to speed up the resolution of this question, ensuring that the restructured organisation becomes reflective of and responsive to the interests of the larger world which this Movement represents.

Our documentation deals appropriately, with other, similarly important matters such as the emancipation of women, terrorism, the environment and sustainable development, good governance, the multilateral organisations, including the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions and science and technology.

We will also have to take decisions on these with a view to the pursuit of practicable programmes directed at translating our common vision into reality.

Through the work that it actually does, the Non-Aligned Movement must defeat the hostile offensive which seeks to present this glorious Movement representing billions of people as a mere talk shop and an anachronism in world politics.

To achieve this, we must decide firmly that those of our countries which are charged with the leadership of the Movement until we meet again should, in an accountable and transparent way, ensure the implementation of the important decisions we will take during the course of our work.

This must, however, also entail a commitment by all member states themselves fully to co-operate in all processes intended to achieve this objective.

It may also be necessary that the leadership we elect should further elaborate the mechanisms we may need so that the decisions we take at this Summit find expression in the things that actually happen between this and the next Summit, which I believe must also address any bureaucratic inertia which might kill any possibility of timely and effective action.

The peoples of our countries expect that out of high level meetings such as this August Summit which opens this morning, there will emerge practical results which will actually make a difference to their lives.

This is a legitimate expectation we must live up to.

As for my own Continent of Africa, our peoples dream of an African Renaissance, as a consequence of which we will overcome a devastating past and ensure that ours also becomes a continent of democracy and peace, respect for human rights, development, prosperity and the restoration of the dignity of all Africans.

These masses would like to see the same outcome for their brothers and sisters in Asia and Latin America and would need no urging to do what they could to ensure that all the peoples this Summit represents achieve the same objectives as they seek for themselves.

But this we must say, which I am certain you will understand, that the greatest challenge we face which will say that we are serious about the remarking of our world, is the obligation to ensure that the objective of the rebirth of the Continent of Africa should and must succeed.

Without this, all declarations of the emergence of a new world will be without meaning.

Out of this Summit must come the message to which all who adhere to the vision of a humane world should subscribe, that our entire universe has to respond to the challenge to ensure that Africa, recognised as the weakest link in the development chain, itself becomes an example of the new world whose time has come.

Inspired by that vision, informed by the obstacles and opportunities that arise from the realities of the world and driven by the cries of the orphans of an alterable fate, let us dare to take up the challenge of creating our world anew.

If the answers we give today are proved wrong and are therefore corrected by time it will not matter. To have erred because we tried will be no great fault.

But if we do not try, we will have committed a grave error which neither time nor the people will forgive.

My hope is that we who have the capacity to contribute to the making of a better world have dreamt that we were dreaming of the success of our common mission.

And as somebody wiser than I said - when we dream that we are dreaming, the moment of awaking is at hand!

We look forward to the outcome of our Summit with confidence.

Thank you

2 September 1998